



Victorian Government
Aboriginal Affairs
Report 2024



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. 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	10
Victoria's approach to implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap	14
Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making	17
Priority Reform Two: Building the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector	21
Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations	23
Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional level	25
Domain 1: Children, Family & Home	27
Domain 2: Learning & Skills	60
Domain 3: Opportunity & Prosperity	93
Domain 4: Health & Wellbeing	115
Domain 5: Justice & Safety	147
Domain 6: Culture & Country	178
Glossary	200

Message from the Premier



The Allan Labor Government is committed to delivering on Truth, Treaty and self-determination – working for and with Victoria’s First Peoples.

We recognise that throughout the history of our state, First Peoples have been excluded from opportunity – and that the impact of those Government policies and practises continues to be felt to this day.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is investigating these failures, and helping us understand the history of our state from the perspective of First Peoples.

Because only by acknowledging our past can we reach for a better future.

After more than a decade of preparation, the Victorian Government and the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria have now begun negotiations for a Statewide Treaty.

At its heart, Treaty is based on a simple premise: that laws and policies work best when the people affected by them have a say in how they work.

Treaty is about making sure Aboriginal people get a say over their healthcare, their housing, their kids’ education, and the practice of their culture – now and into the future.

We know there’s a long way to go. At this important juncture, the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024* is a critical tool to help us understand where improvements have been made and what remains to be done.

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

Your work is helping to create a better, fairer state for all Victorians.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jacinta Allan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier

Message from the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples



The Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024 is delivered in the context of Victoria's nation-leading Treaty and Truth processes.

Treaty will help us build a shared future and shared pride in the Aboriginal heritage of this land we all love, that is our home. When First Peoples make decisions for Aboriginal families and communities, we see better results.

This guiding principle underpins the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018–2025 (VAAF), Victoria's overarching framework to improve outcomes for and with First Peoples.

This Report provides key data to track the implementation of the VAAF, the Self-Determination Reform Framework, and Victoria's obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

In 2023–24 we saw improved outcomes across a range of measures. Rates of perinatal mortality for Aboriginal babies continue to decline and Aboriginal children are receiving immunisations at historically high levels. In 2023, all eligible Aboriginal children in Victoria were enrolled in kindergarten.

Despite these positive changes, this Report highlights troubling areas where outcomes have stalled or worsened. First Peoples remain overrepresented in the criminal justice and child protection systems, are disproportionately impacted by family violence, and experience worsening rates of psychological distress and self-harm.

Government is working closely with First Peoples to deliver structural change to address the systemic injustices driving these outcomes. This includes implementing legislation to expand the role of Aboriginal agencies in delivering children and family services. It also includes launching Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024–2029 and Victoria's Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2024–2034.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is Australia's first and only Aboriginal-led truth-telling process on historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples across all areas of social, political and economic life. The Commission's recommendations will inform Treaty negotiations.

This report highlights the experiences of First Peoples. It is a powerful reminder of why we must continue to create a pathway, through Truth and Treaty, to change what isn't working.

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 (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 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 healthy, 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.

Under the SDRF, Victorian Government departments and agencies are continuing to reform internal processes, practices and policies to better enable Aboriginal self-determination. These reforms are in part informed by the Victorian Government’s journey towards Truth and Treaty, in partnership with the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria (First Peoples’ Assembly) and the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The Commission is the first truth-telling process into the historical and ongoing systemic injustices committed against First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation, and the recommendations of the Commission seek to reform government processes, practices and policies. 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 that impact their lives.

Victoria’s priorities under the VAAF and the SDRF are complemented by the commitments under the National Agreement. Victoria has more ambitious and comprehensive outcome-focused goals under the VAAF, over and above targets set under the National Agreement. The Victorian Government is developing Victoria’s new Implementation Plan in partnership with its formal implementation partner. The new Implementation Plan will outline the next phase of Victoria’s approach to achieving its commitments under the National Agreement and build on the actions progressed through the current Implementation Plan.

This is the sixth annual Report against the VAAF since its release in 2018 and for the fourth year, the Report embeds dedicated reporting on progress in Victoria to implement the National Agreement and 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 Partnership Forum on Closing the Gap, 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.'

Self-determination enablers: What we'll do

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

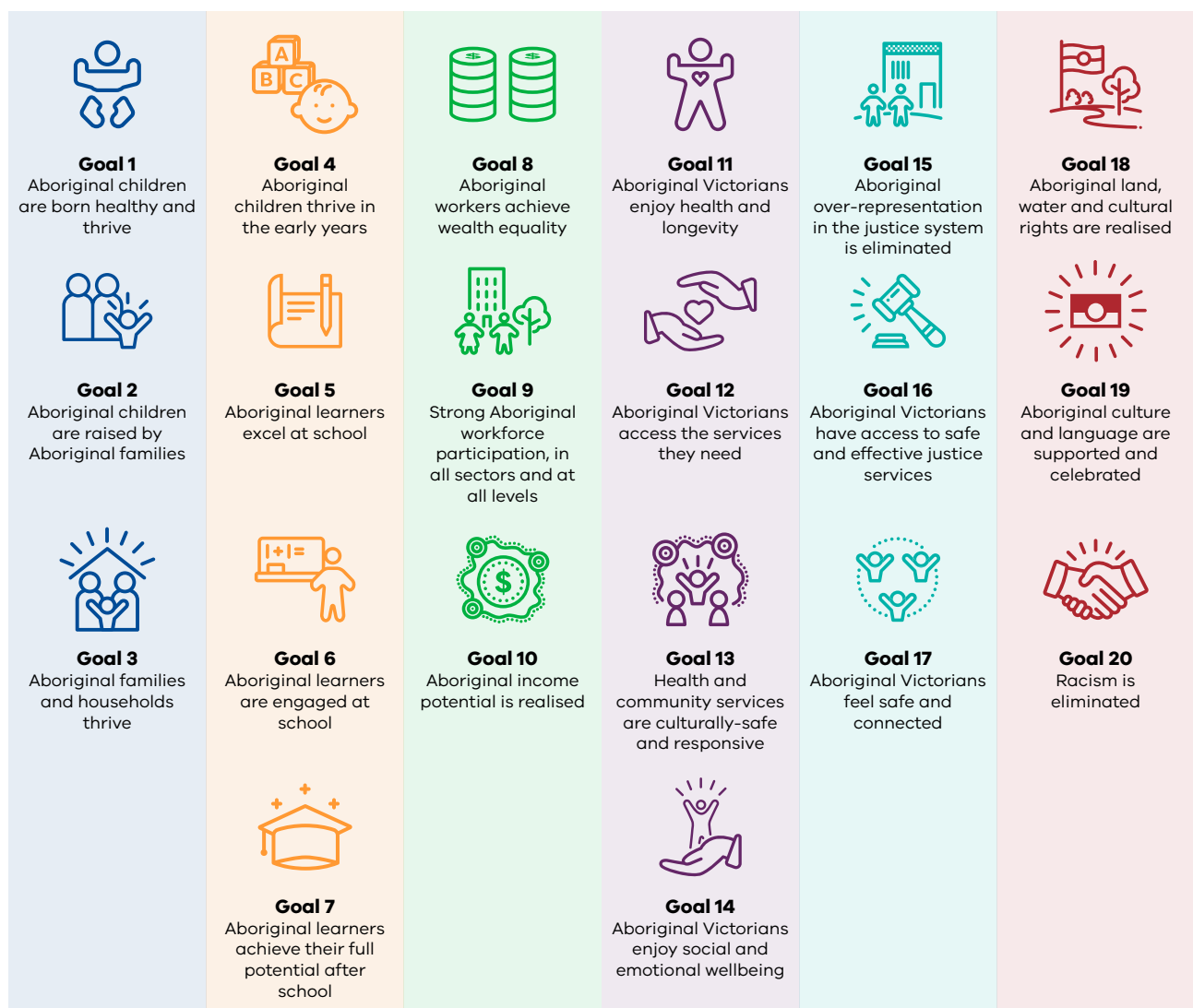
Self-determination guiding principles: How we'll do it

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

Domains



Goals



About Data

Changes to the Victorian Government Ministry

There was a Cabinet reshuffle in December 2024, including changes to some portfolios and one new member.

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

The National Agreement is underpinned by four Priority Reforms that have been directly informed by First Peoples. An overview of actions against the Priority Reforms are in the 'Victoria's approach to implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap' section below. For a comprehensive list of actions, please refer to [Closing the Gap Table A](#).

The National Agreement also includes 19 national socio-economic targets across 17 areas and requires a collaborative approach from all jurisdictions to achieve them. Assessments of progress against these 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 2025.

There are data gaps for some targets and many supporting indicators due to data collection processes and under-reporting. Over time, as more data becomes available, the monitoring of the targets will provide greater insight into what progress is being made.

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.

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 (Data Dashboard) has been developed. The 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>.

The Data Dashboard 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 Data Dashboard will be updated to report on measures when new data becomes 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. The Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap also highlights the importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a key enabler of self-determination and recognises Victoria as the only government to explicitly call for the National Agreement to address Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is listed as a possible subject matter for negotiation under the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

Victorian Aboriginal Population

This Report uses revised population estimates for the Victorian Aboriginal cohort. Revised population estimates were released in 2024 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), based on 2021 Australian Census data. Estimates and projections presented in this release supersede estimates and projections based on earlier censuses. This includes back cast estimates for First Peoples between 2011 to 2020. For this reason, historical data included in this Report and data tables may differ to previous reporting years. More information on revising population estimates can be found on the ABS website at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/understanding-change-counts-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians-census/latest-release>.

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

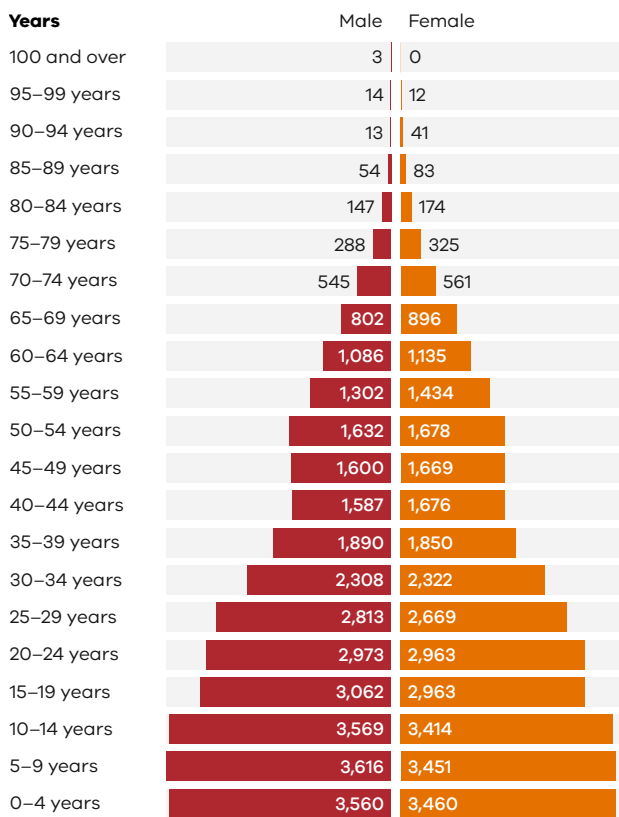
Indigenous Status	Victoria, 2021	%	Victoria, 2016	%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander total	65,646	1.0%	47,788	0.8%
Aboriginal	61,865	1.0%	44,590	0.8%
Torres Strait Islander	2,083	0.0%	2,027	0.0%
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1,692	0.0%	1,169	0.0%
Non-Indigenous	6,148,188	94.5%	5,532,275	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

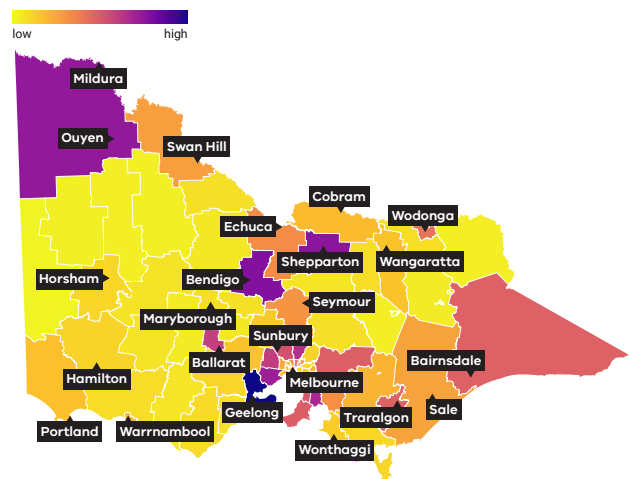


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

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 improving 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* (Vic). The SDRF was developed in 2019 to embed the Victorian 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.



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.

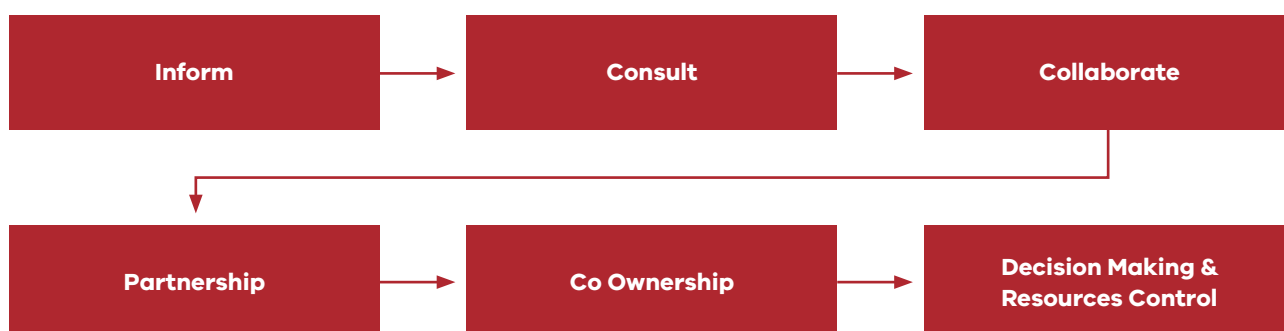
3 Address racism and promote cultural safety

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)



Some examples of government actions to enable self-determination reform can be found in this chapter and under the relevant VAAF domain in this Report (identified by the relevant enabler symbol illustrated in figure 3).

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

Advancing self-determination through the Budget

The Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) has continued to refine the business case template through the budget process to encourage further collaboration between departments and First Peoples in Victoria when developing business cases on initiatives that directly affect or involve First Peoples. The templates developed by DTF sought the following information from departments:

- Greater specificity on the First Peoples' involvement and engagement in developing proposals.
- Accompanying reports, advice and/or letters of endorsement from First Peoples in Victoria.

DTF provided budget process advice to departments to encourage increased community engagement and influence on policy development and service designs that directly affect First Peoples in Victoria.

DTF collected data regarding what level of engagement departments undertook with First Peoples when developing proposals. Through collection of this data, DTF informed decision-makers of the extent to which First Peoples' views had been taken into consideration while developing proposals. These changes provided a foundation to facilitate First Peoples engagement and enhance the level of self-determination in budget processes.



Transfer power and resources to communities

Embedding a greater degree of flexibility in funding agreements

DPC has worked to draft funding agreements (agreements) that embed a greater degree of flexibility for ACCOs.

An example of this approach is the funding agreements developed for the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum Sector Representatives, developed in partnership with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo. Recognising that standard government funding approaches often do not support First Peoples-led decision-making, these agreements have been deliberately designed to be more flexible, less prescriptive, and to provide greater financial autonomy to First Peoples' organisations.

Similarly, the approved approach for the first tranche of five sector strengthening projects reflects a self-determined model for strengthening the ACCO sector. By front-loading payments, these agreements enable ACCOs to begin key activities such as staff recruitment and project planning without having to cover costs upfront.

These approaches respond to evidence presented to the Yoorrook Justice Commission highlighting the systemic barriers within government funding processes, such as high compliance requirements that divert resources away from direct community work.



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 fundamentally transforming the way it works with First Peoples. The Coalition of Peaks, a representative body of over 80 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 set out four Priority Reforms that are the mutually reinforcing enablers for achieving better outcomes for First Peoples.

The four self-determination enablers in the VAAF broadly aligns with the Priority Reforms (see Figure 1), which have guided the Victorian Government's efforts to improve outcomes for and with First Peoples.

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.



Reviews of the National Agreement

On 7 February 2024, the Productivity Commission published its first, three-yearly review of progress under the National Agreement, Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Review).

On 5 July 2024, the Joint Council on Closing the Gap (Joint Council) agreed to the Review's four key recommendations and to 15 of the 16 recommended actions.

Victoria will address and implement the recommendations and actions approved by the Joint Council through Victoria's new Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. Victoria will ensure that the new Closing the Gap Implementation Plan complements the VAAF and its more ambitious goals compared to those enumerated in the National Agreement..

The Review highlights Victoria's Treaty process as an example of 'what rebalancing of power can look like'. It also shows clearly that more needs to be done to transform the way governments work and deliver true shared decision-making and accountability.

The National Agreement (clause 125–127) requires that an Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Review (Independent Review) be conducted following each Productivity Commission review.

Clause 125 highlights that an Independent Review is an opportunity to capture the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities of the implementation of the Agreement.

Joint Council has agreed on a revised Terms of Reference for the Independent Review and the Assembly – a formal mechanism for First Peoples to inform the implementation of the National Agreement.

The Assembly was held on Ngannawal and Ngambri Country in April 2025 and brought together the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector, other First Peoples-led organisations and experts who have experience implementing the National Agreement.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the Independent Review and to convene the Assembly, comprising Aboriginal Community Controlled sector leaders, a representative from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, one representative nominated by state and territory governments and one representative from the Australian Local Government Association.

The final report for the Independent Review will be delivered by the end of May 2025, for consideration by Joint Council in June 2025. Public release of the final report will follow Joint Council approval.

Victoria's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

Victoria's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) outlines the actions Victoria is taking to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) and driving progress on the Priority Reforms and socio-economic outcomes. Developed in 2021, the Implementation Plan is Victoria's first under the National Agreement and sets the groundwork for actions that will create lasting change. This includes providing greater resourcing to ACCOs, addressing cultural safety in government organisations and institutions, and investing in data and information sharing with First Peoples.

The Victorian Government is developing Victoria's new Implementation Plan in partnership with its formal implementation partner. The new Implementation Plan is set to be in place in 2026 and will supersede Victoria's current Implementation Plan. The new Implementation Plan will outline the next phase of Victoria's approach to achieving its commitments under the National Agreement and build on the actions progressed through the current Implementation Plan. It will be responsive to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's Review by focusing on strategic actions to progress the Priority Reforms and socio-economic targets.

Victoria's Closing the Gap Partnership Forum

Victoria's Closing the Gap Partnership Forum was established in May 2022 as the formal body for shared decision-making between the Victorian Government and First Peoples on matters under the National Agreement. The Partnership Forum comprises:

- Representatives of 14 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 from across the Victorian Government, including Secretaries of each department, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner and the Chief Executive Officer of Homes Victoria.

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, meaning "voice of and from the people" in Gunditjmara dialect, is comprised of community-elected representatives of 14 ACCO sectors and delegates of eight of Victoria's Aboriginal Governance Forums, as nominated by the Aboriginal Caucuses of the Victorian Aboriginal Governance Forums.

As the formal implementation and decision-making partner with the Victorian Government on 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, conducting community engagement and establishing expert working groups. It is supported by a policy team secretariat, auspiced by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

As a member of Coalition of Peaks and Joint Council, 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

Under clause 118 of the National Agreement, government parties are required to 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 2023 was embedded in the 2023 Report, which was tabled in Parliament in June 2024. This Report primarily relates to the calendar year 2024 with 2025 updates included where appropriate.

Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making



Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 it 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 on Closing the Gap

(Partnership Forum) continued its work in 2024, with the Victorian Government and Ngaweeyan Maar-oo working in formal partnership.

The Partnership Forum met three times and undertook three policy deep dives into the areas of housing and homelessness, economic development, and education policy. Each deep dive was conducted by a government department in partnership with sector experts from Ngaweeyan Maar-oo. The housing and homelessness deep dive led to the establishment of a working group to develop a homelessness target.

The Victorian Government has been on the Treaty pathway with First Peoples for nearly a decade. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria 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.

Treaty-making in Victoria will include the negotiation of both Statewide and local Traditional Owner Treaties. Treaty recognises that programs and services led by First Peoples are the best way to close the gap. When First Peoples make decisions for Aboriginal families and communities, we see better results.

As detailed under Domain 6 of this Report, the Treaty process has achieved significant milestones. Further information about the work of the Victorian Government in advancing the Treaty process is included in the Treaty Annual Report.¹

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

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

A combined Place-based Partnership and Community Data Project continues to be progressed. Place-based partnerships are partnerships based on a specific region, between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and others by agreement, from those specific areas. In June 2023, Joint Council endorsed Victoria's nomination of Gippsland as the location for a **Place-based Partnership**, to be combined with a **Community Data Project**, which will focus on reducing rates of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) is leading a scoping exercise for a business case for a future Place-based Partnership in partnership with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, local communities, key sector representatives and government. Community consultations in Morwell were held over July and August 2024, bringing together local community members and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) representatives to explore priorities and aspirations.

The scoping exercise will inform a 2026–27 State Budget submission.



The Victorian 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.

Aboriginal Governance Forum	Summary
Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)	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 Gapgapduir</i> : Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement
Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF), Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS)	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
Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum (ASGF), DFFH	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
Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Family Safety Victoria / DFFH	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
Marrung Central Governance Committee (MCGC), Department of Education (DE)	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
State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF), Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)	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
Yuma Yirramboi Council (Council), Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions: (DJSIR)	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
Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF), Department of Health (DH)	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
Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group (VAHWF IWG), Homes Victoria / DFFH	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

Some examples of shared decision-making with Aboriginal Governance Forums in 2024 are included below.

Korin Korin Balit-Djak Funding of Regional Priorities

Regional Aboriginal governance groups elevate Aboriginal voices from the community to high-level policy and decision-making forums such as the Department of Fairness, Families and Housing's Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum, Aboriginal Children's Forum and the Dhelk Dja Aboriginal Partnership Forum.

Regional governance also helps to support government policy and program directions by establishing a direct link between community need and departmental priorities. In 2024, just under \$1 million was invested to re-establish Aboriginal governance groups in the western, eastern and southern regions of the state.

Approximately \$5 million was allocated to ACCOs for projects and services which reflected communities' own priorities. Examples of funded projects include an Elders-led cultural revitalisation strategy, workshops for young people on conflict resolution, problem solving and leadership, exploring culturally appropriate models of support, and transforming electronic processes to enhance quality data management and heighten productivity.

National Partnership actions

Policy partnerships have been established between all governments in Australia and the Coalition of Peaks to identify opportunities to work more effectively, reduce gaps and duplication, and improve Closing the Gap outcomes on discrete policy areas. Under clause 38 of 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.

In 2024 Joint Council agreed to progress the establishment of a Data Policy Partnership to accelerate progress on data reform and achieve outcomes under Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement. The Productivity Commission's 2024 Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap recommended that Indigenous Data Sovereignty be recognised and supported, and recommended the establishment of a National Bureau of Indigenous Data to achieve this. However, in response to the recommendation Joint Council elected to establish a data policy partnership to accelerate progress on data and report back to Joint Council, and did not endorse proceeding with a centralised, national model.

Joint Council met twice in 2024. Key outcomes included agreement to the four key recommendations of the Productivity Commission's first Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement, discussion of a new approach to develop jurisdictional Inland Waters Targets, discussion of critical matters regarding youth justice and steps to progress the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-Led Review in 2025.

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 and Traditional Owner Corporations 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 and organisations in line with the strong sector elements in the National Agreement to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control is an act of self-determination, as noted in Clause 44 of the National Agreement. Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities. Local and international evidence shows us that self-determination is the policy approach that best delivers the most effective and sustainable outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Victorian actions

Victoria completed its Closing the Gap Expenditure Review in November 2023, in collaboration with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, acquitting Clause 113 of the National Agreement which required governments to review and identify current spending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services.

In partnership with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, DPC established a working group and commenced preliminary planning for Victoria's second Expenditure Review. In September 2024, the Partnership Forum agreed to pause work on the second Expenditure Review and instead consider options to progress that work as part of the development of Victoria's next Implementation Plan.

The Victorian Government committed \$3.3 million for sector strengthening funding to progress Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement: Building the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector. In 2024, the Partnership Forum endorsed the allocation of approximately \$2.2 million to seven ACCO-led sector strengthening projects across the priority sectors of health, housing, disability, children and families, and languages and culture. The project proposals

were developed by Ngaweeyan Maar-oo to support ACCOs to build their capacity and capability to provide high-quality services for First Peoples in Victoria. The projects are being led by ACCOs with relevant service delivery experience and community links.

In 2023, the Partnership Forum endorsed a proposal for sector strengthening funding to be used on an Early Years Summit (Summit). The Summit, which was co-led by Bubup Wilam and the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, was delivered in June 2024. Further sector strengthening proposals in the priority sectors of health, disability, and housing, were endorsed by the Partnership Forum in June, 2024, with two additional languages and culture proposals endorsed in December 2024.

The Department of Education, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health are working collectively in the context of the Victorian Government's Children's Portfolio, to develop proposals for more streamlined and flexible approaches to funding ACCOs that deliver integrated children's services.

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. In 2024, these plans progressed to the scoping stage.

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 of power and resources to communities and the improvement of outcomes.

Victorian actions

Yoorrook Justice Commission:

The Victorian Government publicly released its Implementation Progress Report: *Yoorrook for Justice* (Progress Report) on 18 October 2024. The Progress Report outlines government progress on implementation of child protection and criminal justice system recommendations from the Commission's 2023 *Yoorrook for Justice* report. Delivering the reforms envisaged by the Commission and achieving meaningful change will be complex and require a considered and flexible approach. The Victorian Government will consider mechanisms to accurately and transparently demonstrate progress over time on the implementation of each *Yoorrook for Justice* recommendation and recommendations from the Commission's remaining reports.

To support the Commission's Land Injustice and Social Injustice lines of inquiry, the Victorian Government responded to Notices to Produce and provided extensive materials to support the Commission's hearings between March and June 2024. The hearings included appearances by the Premier – the first time the leader of any jurisdiction in Australia has fronted a truth-telling inquiry of its kind – the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and a number of Government Ministers.

The Commission's final interim report is due by 27 June 2025. This report will be the Commission's most substantive reform-focused report and include findings and recommendations from its Land Injustice and Social Injustice lines of inquiry.

The Commission is required to deliver its final report, including an official public record based on First Peoples' experiences of Systemic Injustice since the start of Colonisation, by 30 June 2025.

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 should each identify, develop or strengthen an independent mechanism that will support, monitor and report on the transformation of mainstream agencies and institutions. No other Australian government 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.

Independent oversight of Closing the Gap implementation remains a core priority for the Coalition of Peaks and for First Peoples in Victoria. 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.

The Independent Mechanism is also consistent with recommendation 4(a) from the Commission's *Yoorrook for Justice report*, calling for the establishment of an independent and authoritative oversight and accountability commission.

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

- **Anti-racism strategy:** In late November 2024, the Victorian Government publicly released the Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024–2029. The strategy is a five-year plan for how the Victorian Government will tackle racism across Victoria. The 2024–25 State Budget committed \$4 million over two years for anti-discrimination measures, which will deliver key actions identified in the strategy. This includes the Local Anti-Racism Initiatives Grants Program, which assigned a dedicated stream for First Peoples-led projects. Other anti-discrimination measures include a new campaign to address racism in community sport, development of an anti-racism 'tick' accreditation scheme, and funding to reduce discrimination in policing. The strategy is supported by a suite of work underway across the Victorian Government, including the introduction of anti-vilification legislation.

- **Cultural safety and self-determination in the budget process:** The Government continues to apply cultural safety and self-determination principles to the budget process.
- **Cultural safety and the Barring Djinang Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Toolkit:** The Victorian Public Sector Commission has rolled out the toolkit to support public sector workplaces to attract, recruit, retain, support and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at all levels. The toolkit's aim is to strengthen the cultural capability of managers and staff, as well as the cultural safety of public sector workplaces.

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

National partnership actions

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. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a key enabler of self-determination. By having greater access to and control of data and information, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People can make informed decisions so that they can meet the needs of their communities.

Victorian actions

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 the socio-economic outcomes.

VACCA is leading the development of a detailed scoping exercise for a business case in partnership with local communities and for consideration by the Partnership Forum in 2025. This will inform a 2026–27 State Budget submission. The Community Data Project, alongside the Place-based Partnership, will focus on child protection and support partners to identify and use data to inform decision-making, identify data gaps, and design outcomes measurement that respond to local priorities.

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 and developing data packs and interactive data visualisations. It also includes facilitating meetings, agenda items or deep dives to discuss data.
- Data to support transparency and public accountability:** Through the Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report, Victorian Government departments and agencies have committed to publishing data that matters to First Peoples in Victoria. This includes data disaggregated by geography, age, gender and other demographic factors. This data is published annually on the VAAF data dashboard to help understand how policies and programs affect First Peoples all over Victoria.
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles:** Victorian Government departments and agencies are working with First Peoples to embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles across data systems. For example, the Victorian Government has progressed legislative change to uphold the choices of First Peoples providing evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission including about how their information will be stored, accessed and used in the future. The *Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Act 2025* received Royal Assent on 25 February 2025. This legislative reform upholds the Commission's commitment to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

National partnership actions

The quality and quantity of data to measure progress to improve socio-economic 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 socio-economic outcome has a richer array of high-quality data sources over the life of the National Agreement. For example, the Victorian Government has been working to improve Life Expectancy estimates for First Peoples in Victoria through improving identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths led by the Department of Health with the support of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

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**. To deliver this framework, the Productivity Commission commissioned the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research to undertake an external review of the methods for assessing progress on Closing the Gap in 2023/24. The Review made 12 recommendations to improve how progress is assessed and how government contributions can be evaluated. Victoria is supporting consideration of recommendations to finalise the approach for implementing the recommendations by June 2025.

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



Our shared commitment

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

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

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

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



Goal 1: Aboriginal children are born healthy and thrive



Overview

Measures under Goal 1 have varied in performance

Rates of perinatal mortality continue to decline in the short and long term for Aboriginal babies.

Rates of low birthweight, pre-term birth and smoking during pregnancy have slowed in their decline.

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

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 2: In 2022, 89.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies born were of a healthy birthweight across Australia, compared to 90.7 per cent in Victoria. This means that Victoria has met the national threshold.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on-track to be met.

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 to 91%.

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.

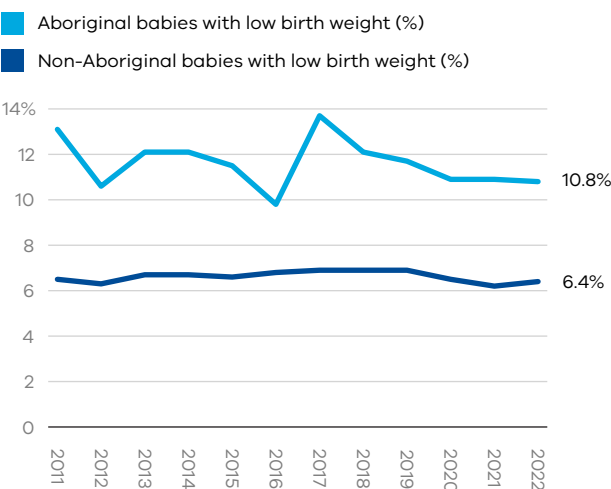
1.1 Improve maternal and infant health

Measure 1.1.1 Rate of low birth weight

In 2022, 10.8 per cent of babies born of Aboriginal mothers in Victoria were born with a low birth weight. For babies of non-Aboriginal mothers, 6.4 per cent were of low birthweight. Low birthweight is defined as births less than 2500 grams. The proportion of babies of Aboriginal mothers born with a low weight has been gradually decreasing since 2017 (13.7 per cent) and has remained consistent since 2020 (10.9 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. Aboriginal culture remains a strong protective factor for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians and must be prioritised within maternal and infant health services.

Aboriginal babies continue to be born at lower birth weight than non-Aboriginal babies

Measure 1.1.1 Rate of low birth weight



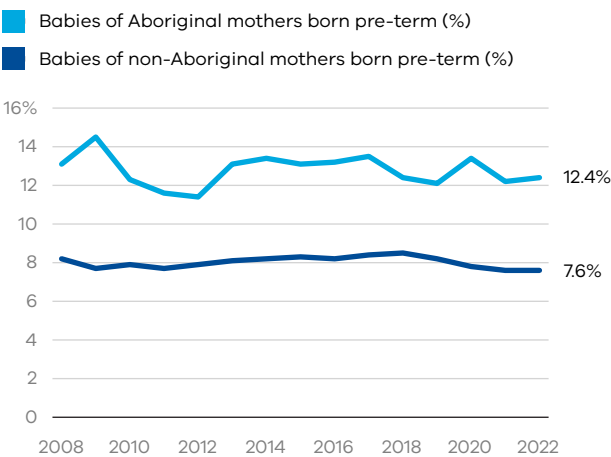
Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity.

Measure 1.1.2 Rate of pre-term birth

In 2022, 12.4 per cent of babies born to Aboriginal mothers in Victoria were pre-term. This was a decrease from 2020 where 13.4 per cent were pre-term. Over the long term (since recording started in 2008) pre-term births for babies born to Aboriginal mothers has remained relatively steady since 2013. Babies born pre-term to non-Aboriginal mothers decreased from 8.5 per cent to 7.6 per cent since 2018. 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. While work is underway to improve the health of Aboriginal mothers and babies and their experiences in healthcare settings, mainstream healthcare services do not adequately consider the cultural needs and cultural safety of Aboriginal Victorians. This has deterred Aboriginal mothers from accessing essential services. Culturally safe services, such as Koorie Maternity Services are meeting this need and are experiencing their highest service use since the VAAF started measuring it (measure 1.2.2).

Aboriginal babies continue to be born pre-term at higher rates than non-Aboriginal babies

Measure 1.1.2 Rate of pre-term birth



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

Measure 1.1.3 Rate for perinatal mortality

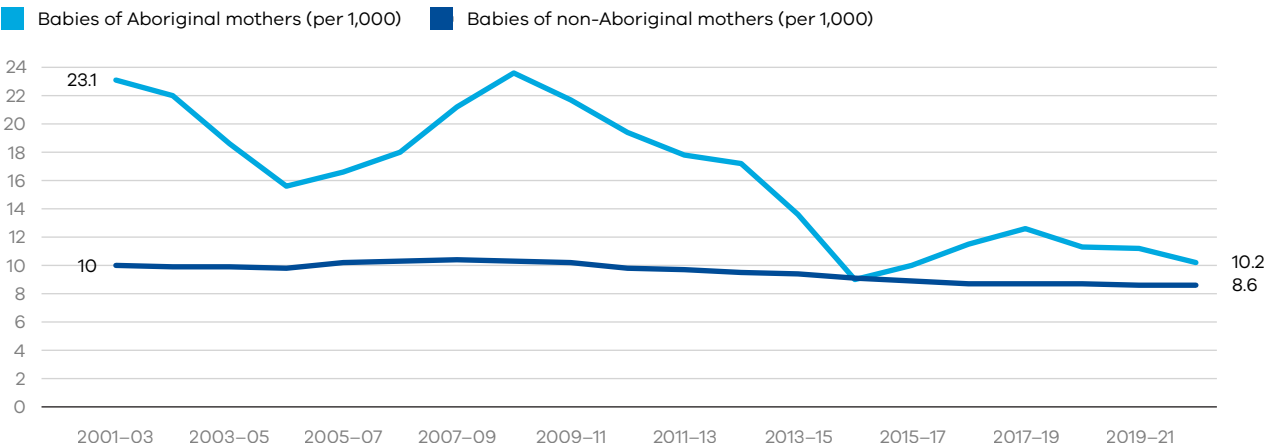
Over 2020–22, the rate of perinatal mortality for babies born to Aboriginal mothers in Victoria was 10.2 per 1,000 babies. This measure has been slowly improving since 2017–19. In the long term, perinatal mortality has significantly decreased since 2008–10 (23.6 per 1,000 babies). This is a continuing trend.

The rate of perinatal mortality for babies born to Aboriginal mothers is now near parity with babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers. The rate for babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers was 8.6 per 1,000

babies in 2020–2022. In 2008–10, babies born to Aboriginal mothers were 2.3 times more likely to suffer perinatal death than their non-Aboriginal peers. In 2020–22, this has dropped to 1.2 times more likely. 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. Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands is key to grounding perinatal services in culturally safe practices.

Rates of Aboriginal perinatal mortality continue to decrease in the short and long term

Measure 1.1.3 Rate of perinatal mortality



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



Measure 1.1.4 Smoking during pregnancy

In 2022, 37.7 per cent of Aboriginal women in Victoria smoked during their first 20 weeks of pregnancy. For non-Aboriginal women, 6.4 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 2.5 percentage point decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal women and a 4.7 percentage point decrease in the proportion of non-Aboriginal women smoking during pregnancy. While the number of Aboriginal women smoking during pregnancy has reduced over time, Aboriginal women remain more likely to smoke during their first 20 weeks of pregnancy than their non-Aboriginal peers. Underlying socio-economic determinants present challenges to decreasing rates further.

Tobacco prevention strategies need to consider the unique impact of colonisation on outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. Nationally, the First Peoples led Which Way? project aims to provide culturally safe and effective support. Research into the project has found that First Peoples health professionals are best placed to provide quit smoking plans but are often overburdened by demand within their roles.² Investment and resourcing to build a skilled workforce to support quitting and maintaining smokefree behaviour in a culturally safe way is necessary.

Aboriginal Early Parenting Centre

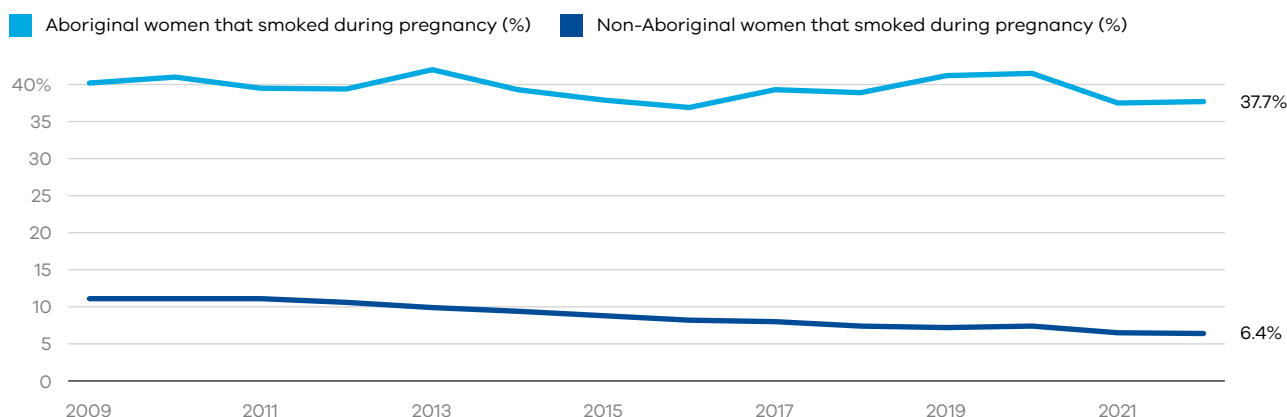
The Department of Health supported the establishment of Victoria's first Aboriginal-dedicated Early Parenting Centre (EPC), the *Baluk Balert Barring* EPC. The EPC's name has been gifted by the Bunurong people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation. The name translates to 'many strong footprints', conveying the hope that many babies, children and families will walk strongly together with the support of the EPC's care.

Operated by First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing, the EPC opened in Frankston in October 2024. The EPC's unique service model was designed by the Aboriginal health service to ensure culturally safe practices and holistic supports meet the needs of Aboriginal children, women and families. The service provides face to face and online supports from the antenatal stage to school commencement. Programs and service offerings include a Birthing on Country program, breastfeeding and lactation support, sleep and settling support, the Deadly Dads program and postnatal services. The model includes maternal child health services that extend to tailored playgroups, education and service navigation to help families access health and social services.

 Address racism and promote cultural safety

Smoking during pregnancy is declining slowly over the long term

Measure 1.1.4 Smoking during pregnancy



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

2. 'Which Way? Indigenous-led Smoking Cessation Care: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners - A National Cross-sectional Survey, Kennedy M, Longbottom H, Mersha A, Maddox R, Briscoe K, Hussein P, Bacon S and Bar-Zeev Y < <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36334273/> >

1.2 Children thrive in their first 1,000 days

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

Aboriginal children continue to attend Key Age consultations at a high rate in 2023–24. On average 80.1 per cent of Aboriginal children attended their Key Ages and Stages consultations in 2023–24. Most age groups went to Key Age consultations at the same rate in 2023–24 as in 2022–23. Participation rates for 2 years and 3.5 years consultation increased while participation rates for 4 months, 8 months, 12 months, 18 months all slightly decreased.

When comparing to all children, Aboriginal children attended Key Ages and Stages consultations at the same proportion or higher for home visit, 2-year and 3.5-year visits in 2023–24. While the 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 nevertheless 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.

The increasing participation of Aboriginal children in 3.5-year Key Age consultation is a very positive step. This is generally the Key Age consultation with the lowest participation rate for both Aboriginal children and all children year on year.

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. To ensure the delivery of ongoing Cultural Safety professional development, the Department of Health has continued to provide access to free cultural safety training for the Maternal and Child Health workforce. Currently, Key Age consultations are free of charge for all Victorian children.

Aboriginal children continue to access key age consultations at high rates

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

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
2014–15	96.1%	85.6%	84.4%	82.3%	78.8%	68.4%	66.4%	57.4%	55.5%	51.2%
2020–21	99.5%	94.0%	93.7%	90.7%	84.8%	75.0%	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%
2023–24	100.8%	94.5%	93.9%	93.3%	86.7%	75.4%	72.7%	64.6%	63.2%	55.9%

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
2014–15	100.0%	97.4%	97.2%	96.2%	94.4%	86.4%	83.4%	75.0%	72.8%	66.1%
2020–21	101.0%	97.5%	97.7%	96.0%	92.1%	82.6%	76.3%	67.0%	63.8%	52.6%
2022–23	100.9%	97.5%	97.8%	97.5%	93.6%	80.9%	77.0%	66.1%	61.2%	48.0%
2023–24	100.3%	97.3%	97.3%	96.5%	93.2%	83.0%	77.7%	67.7%	62.8%	46.0%

Source: Victorian Maternal and Child Health service provider annual report.

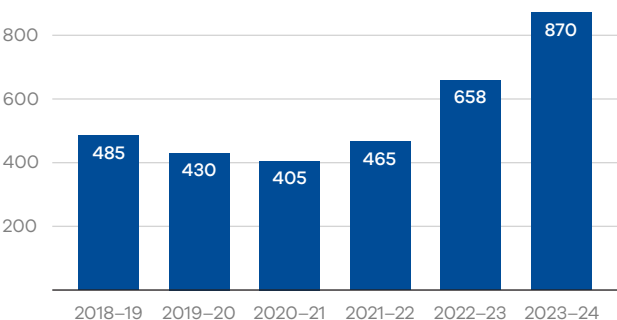
Measure 1.2.2 Attendance at Koori Maternal Health Service.

In 2023–24, 870 women attended Koori Maternity Services (KMS), more than double the attendance for 2020–21. Despite this sharp increase in demand for the service, KMS continue to provide culturally safe, holistic and responsive care and support to women having Aboriginal babies, and their families and carers.

KMS is delivered by multidisciplinary teams including Aboriginal Health Practitioners, Aboriginal Health Workers and midwives. DH continues to work with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (VACCHO) and KMS to review the program guidelines and ensure they align with the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and Action Plan.

Koorie Maternity Service use at all time high in 2023–24

Measure 1.2.2 Attendance at Koori Maternity Services



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

Koori Maternity Services

Mother X presented to Koori Maternity Services (KMS) after initially feeling reluctant to attend appointments for her antenatal care. Through the persistence of the Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) and supporting midwives, Mother X received culturally appropriate and high-quality care while benefiting from greater immersion in her community and culture. The KMS team supported Mother X to attend the preterm birth clinic at the hospital for monitoring. She received childbirth education in a safe space, had a belly cast made and used it to yarn and connect with other mothers. She gave birth to a healthy baby boy with the AHW beside her. She left hospital with her baby and her placenta so that she could give the placenta back to mother earth, a traditional cultural practice to let mother earth know the child has been born. Both Mother X and baby are doing extremely well, with Mother X completing her education, attending regular health visits and connecting with community through local events.

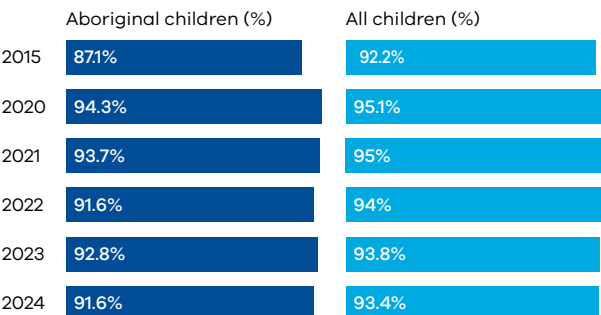
Measure 1.2.3 Immunisation rates at 12, 24, and 60 months

Over the long term, immunisation rates for all Aboriginal children are increasing. In 2024, health providers immunised Aboriginal one-, two- and five-year-olds at 91.6, 89.6, and 95.8 per cent respectively. Aboriginal children in Victoria aged five have a greater immunisation rate than non-Aboriginal children in Victoria by one percentage point. National targets for immunisations are still not being met for most 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.

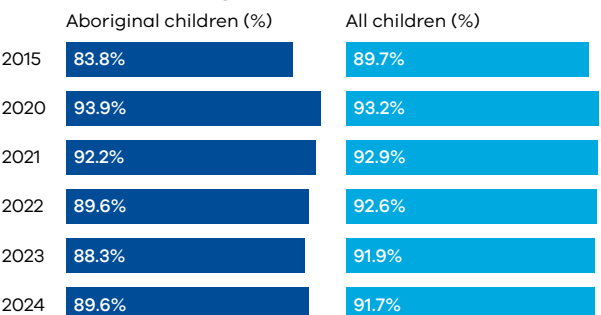
Aboriginal Children remain immunised at high levels

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

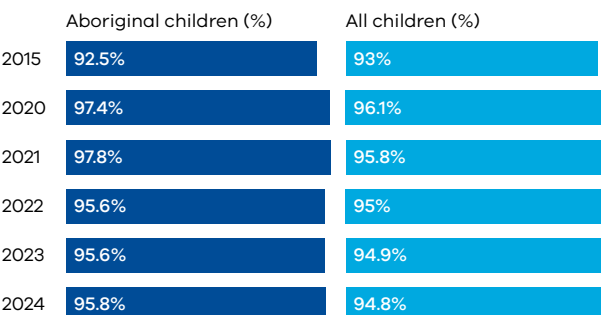
Immunisation rate for 1 year olds



Immunisation rate for 2 year olds



Immunisation rate for 5 year olds



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

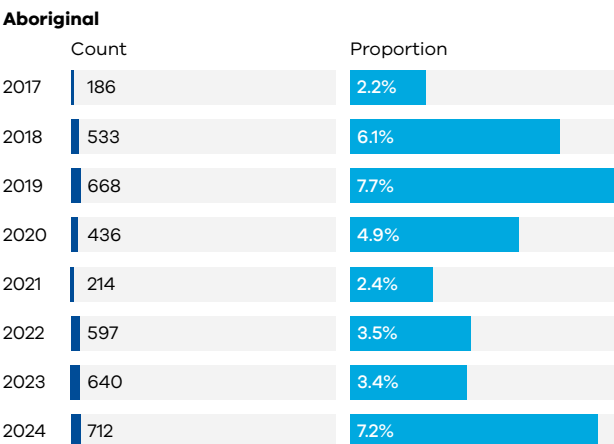
Measure 1.2.4 Participation in facilitated playgroups (0–5 years)

In 2023–24, 712 Aboriginal children (0–5 years old) were in supported playgroups, and 239 in Koorie supported playgroups. The 712 Aboriginal children in Supported Playgroups represent 7.2 per cent of all Aboriginal children. Supported playgroup participation has not been this high since 2019 with 7.7 per cent of Aboriginal children in supported playgroups. When considering all children, Aboriginal children are twice as likely to be in a supported playgroup.

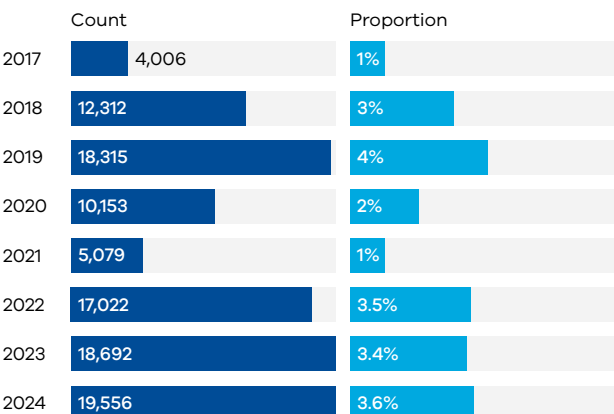
Five ACCOs were newly funded for Koorie supported playgroups in 2024. This brought the total number of ACCOs providing Koorie supported playgroups to 15.

More than double the proportion of Aboriginal children are in supported playgroups in 2024 than 2023

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



Non-Aboriginal



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

Goal 2: Aboriginal children are raised by Aboriginal families



Overview

Measures under Goal 2 are 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 2023–24, Aboriginal children were placed in out-of-home care at a rate 20.6 times that of non-Aboriginal children, reflecting ongoing structural inequality and systemic racism. This means that for every 1,000 Aboriginal children in Victoria, 90.5 are placed in out-of-home care

Legislation passed by Parliament expanded the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering child protection services, which should result in a decrease in this vastly disproportionate rate in coming years. To ensure that fewer Aboriginal children are removed from their families, significant efforts are required to reduce systemic racism and to improve outcomes in housing and homelessness, justice, education and poverty.

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.

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 2024, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care was 50.3 per 1,000 children across Australia, compared to 90.5 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.

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 2023–24, the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home increased to 2,867. For every 1,000 Aboriginal children in Victoria, 90.5 are in out-of-home care. This rate was 20.6 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 rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care has increased by 25.3 children per 1,000 since 2014–15. During this same period, the rate of non-Aboriginal children in out-of-home care has decreased. Ongoing structural inequality and systemic racism impact the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system. Due to an adjustment in population estimates, rates estimates have changed and are not comparable with previously reported rates.

On 1 July 2024, the *Statement of Recognition Act 2023* became law. The Statement of Recognition is a formal acknowledgement by the Victorian Government that Aboriginal people were harmed by laws, policies and practices of past child protection systems and the continuing impact of inequality and racism that has led to an over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection.

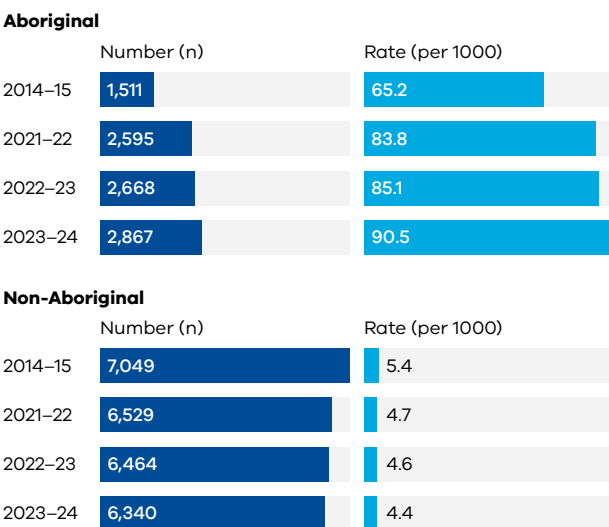
The legislation formally recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions and deliver services that best protect Aboriginal children and expands the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care.

Yoorrook for Justice made 20 recommendations on urgent reforms to the child protection system. As of October 2024, the Government has committed to supporting two recommendations, supporting 12 recommendations in-principle, and to further considering six recommendations.

Recommendations 9 and 14 are supported by Government. Recommendation 9 calls for annual reporting on funding for several services within the child protection and family services system, and specifically the amount and proportion of funding allocated to ACCOs. Recommendation 14 calls for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to ensure that all child protection staff and departmental executives receive regular, mandatory cultural safety and cultural awareness training, the completion of which is to be reported annually.

The number of Aboriginal children in out of home care continues to increase

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



Source: Report on Government Services 2024.

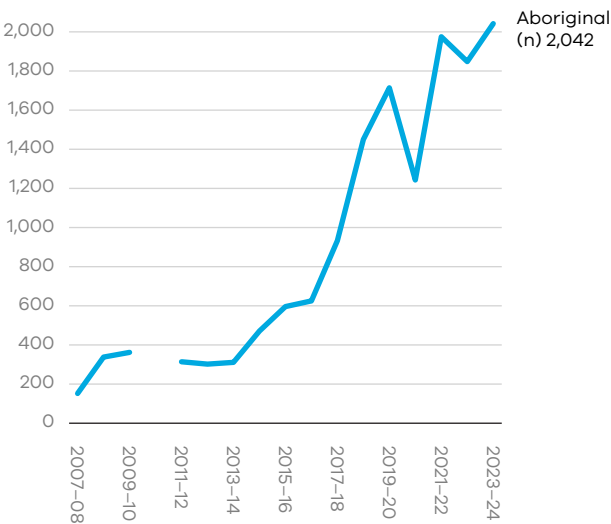
Measure 2.1.2 Number of families engaged with intensive family support services

In 2023–24, First Peoples engaging with intensive family support services in Victoria was at an all-time high. 2,042 Aboriginal children under a family preservation or family reunification order engaged with these services over this period. Since 2014–15 the number of children in intensive family support services has increased by 1,571. Since 2018–19 there has been a significant change in trend for this measure with year-on-year large changes in the number of children.

Intensive family support services play an important role in supporting vulnerable families and at-risk children by providing in-home support and interventions to build family functioning, family capability and promote child safety, stability, wellbeing and development. These outcomes are key to keeping families together (preservation) and support children in care to return home to their families (reunification).

The number of Aboriginal children engaged with intensive family support services at all time high

Measure 2.1.2 Number of families engaged with intensive family support services



Source: Report on Government Services 2024.



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

Measure 2.2.1 Rate and number of children and young people in care

In 2023–24, there was a small increase in the number and rate of Aboriginal children under the care of their Aboriginal relatives and kin. Of those in care, 41.8 per cent of Aboriginal children were under the care of their Aboriginal relatives and kin in 2022–23. This represents 1,198 children.

In total, the proportion of Aboriginal children placed with either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal relatives or kin was 80.7 per cent in 2024. This has steadily increased from 76.5 per cent in 2019.

The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Act 2023

recognises that that ongoing structural inequality and systemic racism impact Aboriginal people and their culture in relation to decision-making in the child protection system and the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system. The Act strengthened the legislative provisions for the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. This introduced all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle that decision-makers must consider when making decisions about Aboriginal child placement. These principles recognise the significance of connection to culture, family and community for Aboriginal children and must be maintained at all points of involvement in the child protection system.

The proportion of Aboriginal children in care are with their relative or kin continues to increase

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

Aboriginal relatives/kin

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020–21	929	38%
2020–21	1,018	39.7%
2021–22	1,027	39.6%
2022–23	1,077	40.4%
2023–24	1,198	41.8%

Other non-Aboriginal carer

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020–21	412	16.9%
2020–21	412	16.09%
2021–22	391	15.1%
2022–23	391	14.7%
2023–24	348	12.1%

Non-Aboriginal relatives/kin

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020–21	975	39.9%
2020–21	1,010	39.44%
2021–22	1,014	39.1%
2022–23	1,033	38.7%
2023–24	1,117	39%

Residential care or family group home

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020–21	92	3.8%
2020–21	86	3.3%
2021–22	113	4.4%
2022–23	120	4.5%
2023–24	124	4.3%

Other Aboriginal carer

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020–21	34	1.4%
2020–21	35	1.37%
2021–22	42	1.6%
2022–23	38	1.4%
2023–24	50	1.7%

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

Most Aboriginal children and young people in care have a cultural plan, with the number of these plans remaining stable since 2019–20. 70 per cent of all Aboriginal children and young people in care had a cultural plan in 2023–24.

The Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is required to provide a cultural plan for every child in care. They are a legislatively mandated enabler for Aboriginal children in care to maintain and strengthen their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal culture and community.

ACCOs support the 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. Work is underway 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 2023–24, 43 per cent of Aboriginal children were on a contractible order in the care of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). This is an increase of five percentage points from the previous year, meaning that rates have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

This data excludes Aboriginal children on Children's Court protection orders managed by ACCOs through Section 18 (known as the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care [ACAC] Program), reflected in measure 2.2.4. Where appropriate, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing prioritises transitioning Aboriginal children in care through ACAC over case contracting to ACCOs, recognising that ACCO's are best placed to hold decision-making responsibility for Aboriginal children in care.

It is important to note that in line with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, the removal of a child in the first place is considered a last resort. Continued engagement with, and expansion of, earlier intervention and prevention services will be key to preventing Aboriginal children from entering care in the first place.

Continuing to support capacity-building of the ACCO sector to deliver critical services within the child protection system remains a key priority of government as part of the commitment to keeping Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care.

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 2023–24, nine per cent of Aboriginal children on a protection order were in the care of an Aboriginal organisation through the ACAC program. Over the last five years, the proportion has increased from 3.3 per cent in 2018–19. Between 2022–23 and 2023–24, the number of Aboriginal children and young people on protection orders under the direct authority of an ACCO increased from 210 to 258.

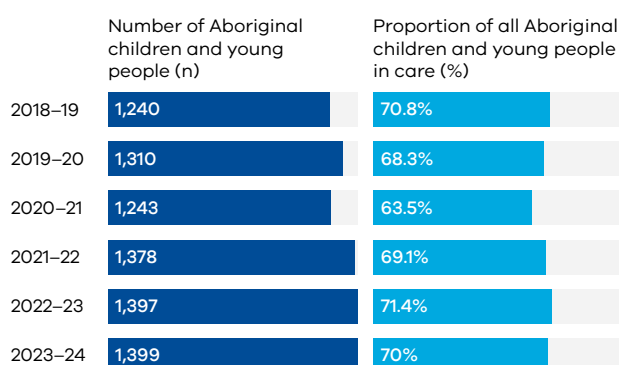
Enabled through Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the ACAC program gives authorised ACCOs legal responsibility for Aboriginal children on protection orders.

Aboriginal children under ACAC are not always in out-of-home care. This data includes Aboriginal children under ACAC on Family Preservation Orders, reflecting Aboriginal children in the care of one or both parents and supported by an ACCO. This promotes continuity of care for a child by a parent, whilst ensuring an ACCO can provide culturally appropriate support to address protective concerns and keep children safely at home.

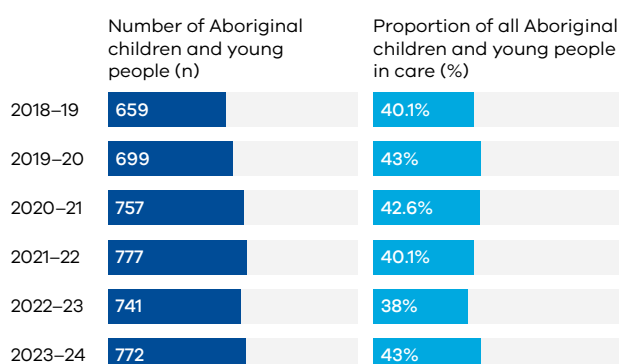
These increases are a sign of positive change. However, there is still a significant amount of work and investment required to transition the child protection system to a self-determined model.

The vast majority of Aboriginal children in care have a current cultural plan

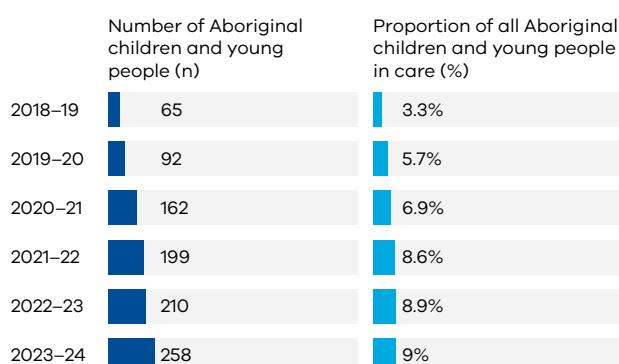
Measure 2.2.2 Aboriginal children and young people in care with a cultural plan



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.

Statement of Recognition Act Implementation

The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self Determination and Other Matters) Act 2023 (Statement of Recognition Act) passed Parliament on 20 June 2023, with the Statement of Recognition coming into effect on 1 July 2024.

The Act amended the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the CYFA) by:

- Introducing a Statement of Recognition and binding principles for consideration by decisionmakers.
- Legislating all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in line with elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles.
- Expanding authorisations to the Aboriginal Children in Care program to include investigative functions and powers, known as the Community Protecting Boorais program.

The Statement of Recognition Act is an important step in the Victorian Government's plan to meet the National Agreement on Closing the Gap target to reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care by 45 per cent by 2031 (Target 12). The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), in partnership with ACCOs, has delivered several initiatives in 2024 to support the operationalisation of the Statement of Recognition, including:

- Developing a Statement of Recognition policy, which sets out the requirements to embed Aboriginal self-determination and the Statement of Recognition in service delivery and planning for DFFH staff and funded agencies.
- Online training packages and a guidance tool for DFFH staff and community service organisations on applying the eleven recognition principles (section 7E of the CYFA) when working with, or planning for, Aboriginal children and families.

- Enhancements to the Child Protection Manual, child protection client recording systems and integration with child protection risk assessment and decision-making frameworks to include and consider the Statement of Recognition.
- Updated guidance to Children's Court documents to include evidence of recognition principles within applications.
- Information sessions with child protection practice forums and the funded agency workforce.

Implementation of the Statement of Recognition was guided by a Statement of Recognition Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Advisory Group and workshops with ACCOs and legal stakeholders.

Work commenced in November 2024 to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan that will be delivered in partnership with ACCOs. This work will consider data available through client recording systems, program outcomes, and work with ACCOs and community service organisations to consider the implementation and impact of the Statement of Recognition and the further work needed to realise its principles in practice.

The DFFH acknowledges that implementation of the Statement of Recognition will be an ongoing journey to continue to embed the principles in policy and program design and ensuring accurate and considered reporting on policy and legislative requirements when working with Aboriginal children and families. DFFH recognises that the Aboriginal Children's Forum and associated governance groups dedicated to the Statement of Recognition will be integral to continuing to build on learnings and evaluate the impact of the Act in future years.

For the full Statement of Recognition, please see: <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/bills/children-and-health-legislation-amendment-statement-recognition-aboriginal-self-determination>

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 into care

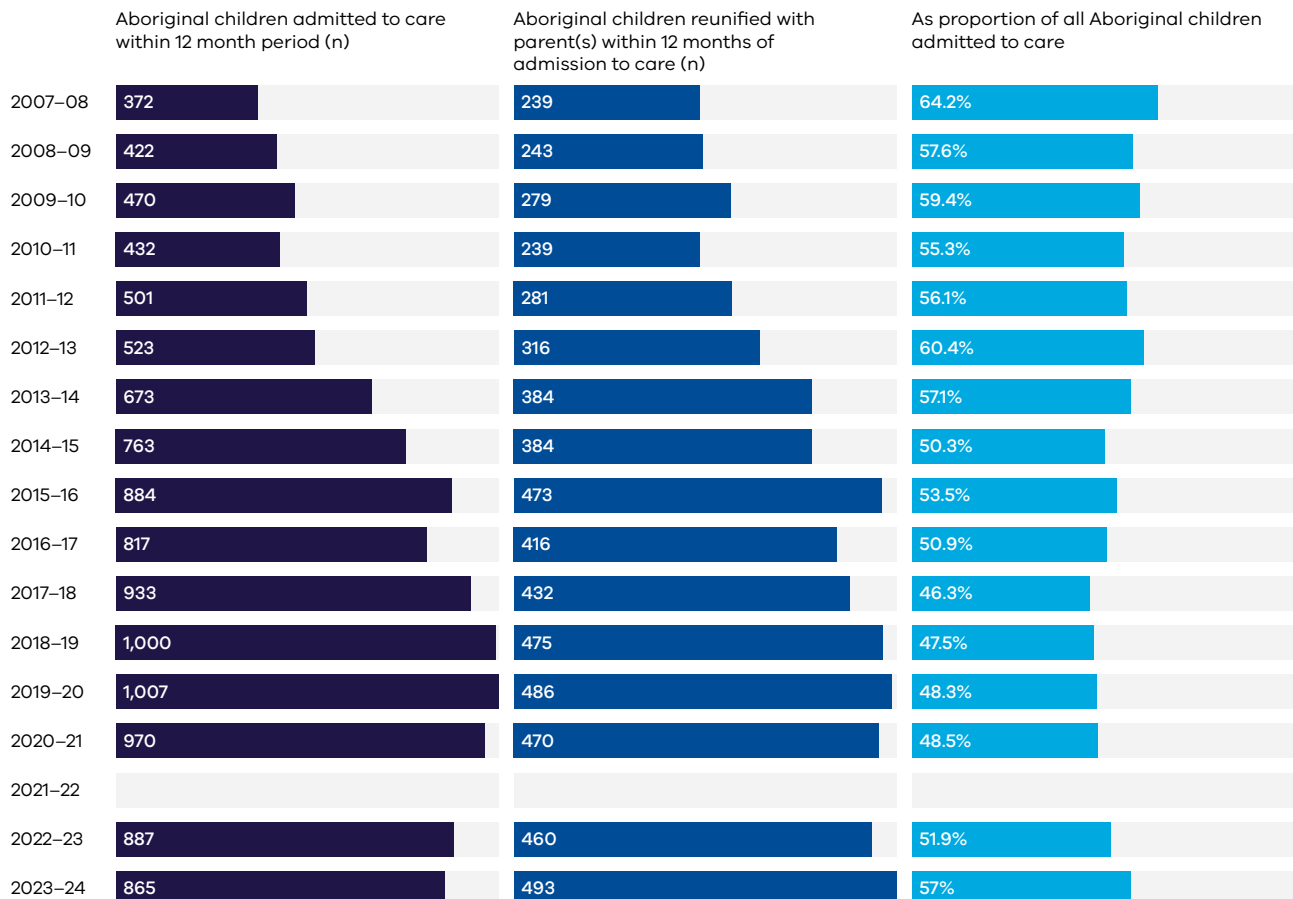
Between 2022–23 and 2023–24, the number of Aboriginal children and young people reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care increased from 460 to 493. In 2023–24, 57 per cent of

Aboriginal children were reunited with their parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care. This is the highest rate since 2013–14.

This increase coincides with ongoing reforms to the child protection system to give ACCOs a greater role in the out-of-home care of Aboriginal children and support for Aboriginal families.

In 2024 Aboriginal children in care were reunified with their parents at highest rate since 2013–14

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



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

Chief Commissioner of Police's apology to the Stolen Generations: Statement of Commitment Action 19

On 24 May 2024, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police delivered an acknowledgement and apology for the historical role and police involvement in removing Aboriginal children of the Stolen Generations from their families and communities. The Apology was delivered at the Aborigines Advancement League before approximately 350 attendees. The Apology was also live streamed to ensure members of the Stolen Generations and their families who could not attend in person were able to observe the event and hear the Apology remotely.

Through this apology to the Stolen Generations, Victoria Police accepted responsibility for the widespread harm caused to Aboriginal people due to the role of police in forcibly removing children from their families, and the deep impact this had on severing their connection to country, culture, kin, and identity.

To ensure this event was executed in a culturally safe way, Victoria Police consulted with members of the Aboriginal community, the Stolen Generations Advisory Committee and government representatives. An internal working group was also established to oversee the planning and included Senior Victoria Police Aboriginal Employees, members of the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and other senior employees.

The Apology symbolises a commitment to the Victorian Aboriginal community that Victoria Police will address ongoing systemic injustices for Aboriginal people in their interactions with law enforcement. The Chief Commissioner's Statement of Commitment reflects Victoria Police's genuine commitment to delivering tangible change. Its action items represent a commitment to partner with and build trust with Aboriginal community members and organisations to realise better outcomes.

Address trauma and support healing

Premier's In-Person Apology to the Stolen Generations

On 10 October 2024, the Premier delivered the first apology to the eligible applicants to the Stolen Generations Reparations Package. Planning for subsequent apologies to be delivered by Senior Ministers over the next two years is currently being undertaken.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety implemented the apology model in consultation with the Stolen Generations Advisory Committee members and select ACCOs to ensure it was culturally appropriate and met the unique needs of the Stolen Generations members to support them to heal. The Advisory

Committee and ACCOs were involved in planning and providing cultural guidance in delivering the apology, including providing training to the Premier.

A gathering of 32 Stolen Generations survivors and their families were present to receive the Premier's personal apology at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd. Overall, the community engaged positively, and the Advisory Committee will continue to support delivery of future apologies. Feedback from community, partners and eligible applicants will continue to inform the delivery of future apologies.

Address trauma and support healing

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

Less Aboriginal children are returning to care within 12 months of leaving than ever before. The number of Aboriginal children exiting care increased to 922 in 2023–24. Of these, 766 did not return to care within 12 months. The proportion of Aboriginal children who did not return to care was 83.1 per cent in 2023–24 compared to 72.1 per cent the previous year. This is an increase of 11 percentage points, compared to

7.4 percentage points for non-Aboriginal children, and coincides with the greater involvement of ACCOs in providing child protection and family support services.

It is important to note that, in line with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, the removal of a child in the first place is considered a last resort. Continued engagement with, and expansion of, earlier intervention and prevention services will be key to preventing Aboriginal children from entering care in the first place.

Less Aboriginal children are returning to care within 12 months of exiting than ever before

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

Aboriginal children

	Children exiting care (n)	Children that exit care and do not return to care within 12 months (n)	Children that exit care and do not return to care within 12 months (%)
2007–08	472	369	78.2%
2019–20	746	563	75.5%
2020–21	789	595	75.4%
2022–23	850	613	72.1%
2023–24	922	766	83.1%

Non-Aboriginal children

	Children exiting care (n)	Children that exit care and do not return to care within 12 months (n)	Children that exit care and do not return to care within 12 months (%)
2007–08	2,503	1,990	79.5%
2019–20	2,719	2,096	77.1%
2020–21	2,611	2,089	80%
2022–23	2,220	1,769	79.7%
2023–24	2,867	2,502	87.3%

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 varied in performance

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.

The number of family violence notifications to child protection involving Aboriginal children has again increased significantly. The 7,019 notifications involving Aboriginal children in 2022–23 was the highest since records have been kept.

The proportion of Aboriginal adults running out of food and being unable to buy more and the proportion of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services have also increased.

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, which aims to ensure First Peoples communities receive essential services that meet or exceed jurisdictional standards, 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 3.2.5a:** 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.

3.1 Reduce the incidence and impact of family violence affecting Aboriginal families

Measure 3.1.1 Number and proportion of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal other party³; and proportion of those who were the subject of a previous family incident report

In 2023, Victoria police reported responding to 7,019 family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal other party. This made up 7.5 per cent of all family violence incident reports. Relative to the Aboriginal population, the proportion of family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal other party is high. Of the 7,019 incidents in 2023, 87.3 per cent involved a repeated incident and 37.6 per cent had charges laid.

Over time the number of family violence incidents has continued to increase for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Part of this increase could be attributed to a safer family violence reporting environment. It may also be impacted by the misidentification of women who have experience violence as the 'aggressor' or 'other party'. Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, significant work has been undertaken across government, including by Victoria Police to improve the recording of family incidents.

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 2023, there were 5,784 family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal affected family member. This made up 6.1 per cent of all family violence incident reports. It should not be assumed that family violence incidents involving an Aboriginal affected family member also involved an Aboriginal other party.

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 5,784 incidents in 2023, 83.3 per cent involved a repeated incident and 32.6 per cent had charges laid.

When looking further into when charges are laid, 92.1 per cent of charges are laid for repeat incidences.

Family violence incidents continue to rise in 2023

Measure 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 Other parties (OTH) and affected Family Members recorded by Indigenous status, charges laid and repeat incidence

Measure 3.1.1 Aboriginal Other Parties

Aboriginal Other Parties

	Number of reports (n)	Proportion involving repeat incident (%)	Proportion where charges were laid (%)	Proportion of all incident reports (%)
2012	3,428	73.1%	26.3%	6%
2020	6,230	86.1%	37.9%	6.7%
2021	6,455	86.8%	38.9%	7.1%
2022	6,502	86.4%	37.3%	7%
2023	7,019	87.3%	35.8%	7.5%

Measure 3.1.2 Aboriginal Affected Family Members

Aboriginal Affected Family Members

	Number of reports (n)	Proportion involving repeat incident (%)	Proportion where charges were laid (%)	Proportion of all incident reports (%)
2012	3,119	71.1%	24.3%	5.5%
2020	4,999	83.3%	32.6%	6.1%
2021	5,292	82.9%	35.2%	5.8%
2022	5,425	81.5%	34.6%	5.9%
2023	5,784	83.3%	32.6%	6.1%

Source: Crime Statistics Agency.

3. 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

No data is available for this year for measure 3.1.3 due to the implementation of a new reporting environment. Currently the new environment is undergoing testing to ensure consistent reporting with previous years.

Aboriginal Access Points

Two Aboriginal Access Points marked 12 months of operation in 2024, following extensive community consultation to design and implement the Aboriginal-led service model.

The Bayside Peninsula Access Point has supported more than 100 Aboriginal people since commencement in July 2023. A second service, established in November 2023, provided support to more than 50 community members in the Barwon area. There has been strong community support and trust in the Access Points, demonstrated by the high proportion of self-referrals to both services.

Aboriginal Access Points complement The Orange Door network to provide access to culturally safe information, planning, referral and exit pathways for Aboriginal families affected by family violence.

The self-determined approach to delivering the Aboriginal Access Points supports increased accessibility of the family violence and children and families service systems, expanding choice and ensuring greater agency in accessing and utilising culturally safe services.



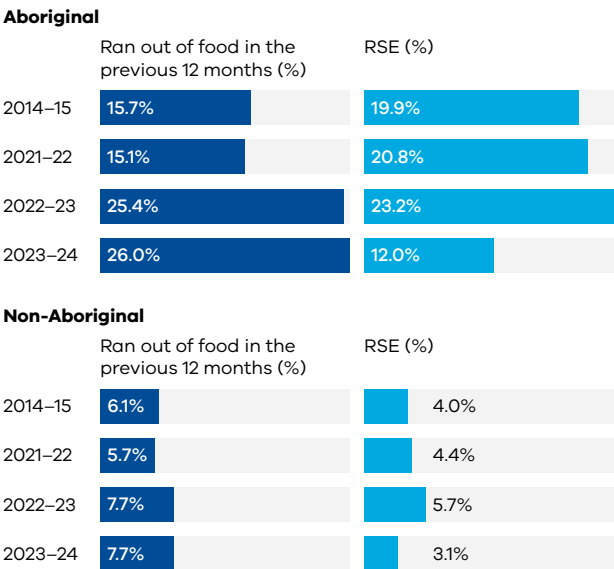
3.2 Increase income and housing security for Aboriginal households

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 2023, 26.0 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 is similar to results in 2022 with 25.4 per cent. Compared to non-Aboriginal adults, Aboriginal adults were more than three times likely to run out of food in 2023. Over the long term this trend has been getting worse. In 2017, 15.7 per cent of Aboriginal respondents ran out of food, a 10-percentage point increase since that period. Food insecurity is becoming an increasing issue for First Peoples in Victoria. The rising cost of living as well as food shortages is affecting First Peoples' households far more than their non-Aboriginal peers.

More than 1/4 of Aboriginal people in Victoria ran out of food in 2023

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



* RSE between 25 and 50% — estimate should be interpreted with caution.
** RSE is 50% or more — estimate is unreliable hence not reported.

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey.



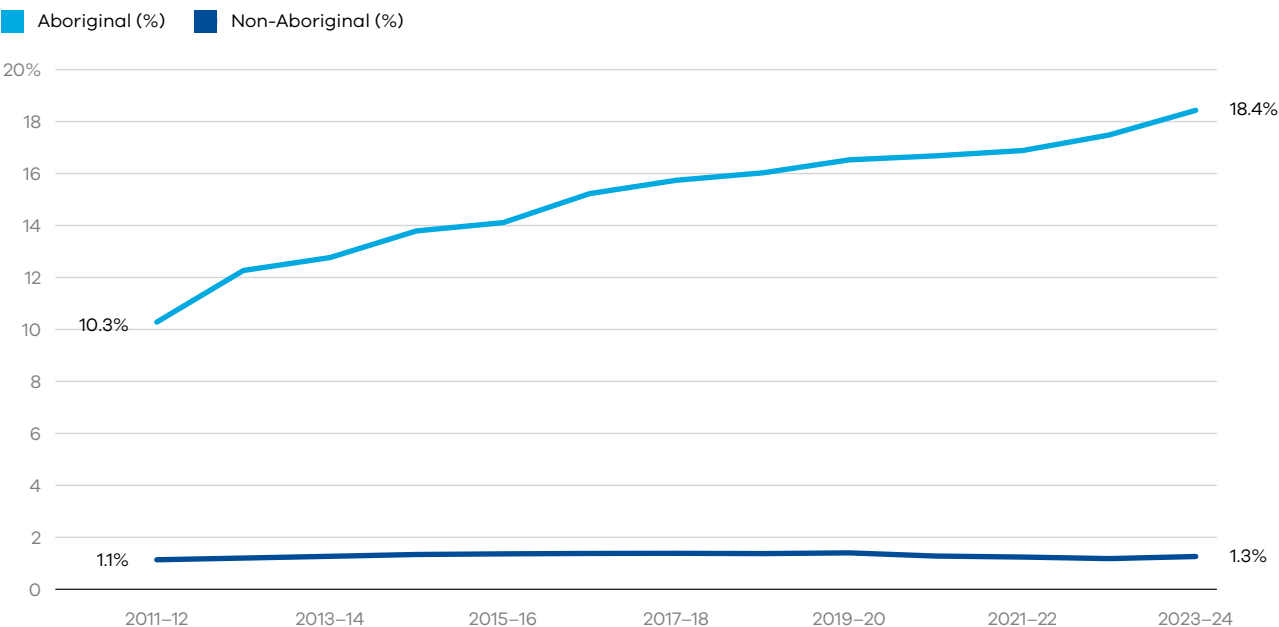
Measure 3.2.4 Proportion of Victorians accessing homelessness services

In 2023–24, 18.4 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians accessed homelessness services. This percentage has been steadily climbing since 2011–12. Over the past decade the number and proportion of

Aboriginal people accessing homelessness services has increased from 13.8 per cent in 2014–15. Over the same period, non-Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services remained steady. The leading cause of homelessness for Aboriginal Victorians is family violence, particularly for Aboriginal women and children.

18 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians accessed homelessness services in 2023–24

Measure 3.2.4 Proportion of Victorians accessing homelessness services



Counting rules: Clients are counted once only in each jurisdiction. Gap and rate calculations based on crude data.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist homelessness services annual report, AIHW, Australian Government.



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 and Child Health

Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health program

Throughout 2024, the Department of Health continued to fund the Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health (MCH) program, supporting 15 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) operating across 17 sites. This includes funding for Aboriginal MCH service delivery, additional funding to boost flexible support to meet the growing Aboriginal population, and funding to enable staff to undertake lactation training and provide lactation support.

To ensure the delivery of ongoing Cultural Safety professional development, the Department of Health has continued to provide access to free cultural safety training for the MCH workforce.

INFANT program

The INFANT (Infant Feeding, Active play and Nutrition) program is an initiative of the Victorian Government's **Healthy kids, healthy futures** five year plan for children's health and wellbeing. INFANT is an evidence-based program that supports new parents to establish healthy eating and active play for their baby's first year of life. The initiative is delivered by maternal and child health nurses, and community health and early years professionals who have undertaken INFANT training.

The Institute of Physical Activity and Nutrition at Deakin University was funded to partner with VACCHO to deliver training for the INFANT program, with VACCHO playing a lead role in the program's implementation and evaluation. A total of 1,492 health professionals completed INFANT facilitator training since 2020. This includes:

- 164 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health professionals.
- 857 Maternal and Child Health Nurses, 85 Dietitians and 551 'other' professionals such as Local Government staff, NGO staff, State Government staff, and MCH nursing students.
- 48 out of 79 local government areas have embedded INFANT in their existing service delivery.

Deakin University research shows the INFANT program is providing positive health, social and economic outcomes for all participants. For its Aboriginal clients, program data will be reviewed to ensure targeted messaging for Aboriginal people is culturally appropriate. VACCHO will seek further funding to update training materials and resources for this purpose.

Perinatal mental health screening

In 2024, the Department of Health commissioned a co-design process with Aboriginal families and sector representatives to improve inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness of screening approaches, including development of new perinatal mental health screening guidelines. Participants contributed their experiences and advice to inform the development of the new guidelines from 2025.

Birth Registration

Strong Identity, Strong Spirit (SISS) program

The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) Strong Identity, Strong Spirit (SISS) program is an Aboriginal-led initiative to deliver BDM services.

The program recognises that Aboriginal people may experience unique barriers to accessing BDM services, including historical distrust of birth registrations, and fear of penalties for late birth registrations.

Under SISS, the BDM Marguk-bulok koolin-ik team travels throughout Victoria to provide in-person, culturally safe support in partnership with Aboriginal Community organisations.

BDM supports parents to register the birth of their child at any age. It also provides clear and accessible information and processes and around birth registration, including for kinship carers to receive children's birth certificates

A person may apply to the Registrar of BDM for a financial hardship and fee waiver to waive the fee for certain certificates or registrations. The Financial hardship and fee waiver policy outlines the circumstances under which the Registrar may consider a fee waiver, the process of applying for a fee waiver and the criteria used to establish eligibility.

The Registrar recognises the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in prison and on application, may waive fees for their legal birth certificate.

Victorian Aboriginal Commemorative Certificates fee waiver during NAIDOC Week

On an annual basis BDM waives the fees for Victorian Aboriginal commemorative certificates around NAIDOC week. The initiative has been popular since it began in 2019. Importantly, it promotes the importance of birth registration. The Victorian Aboriginal commemorative birth certificate brings together three of Victorias well-known Aboriginal artists. Each artists depicts an element of birth in a way that recognises and celebrates Aboriginal heritage in Victoria.

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.

In 2024, implementation of the second Three-Year Action Plan under the Dhelk Dja Agreement (the Plan) continued. The Plan was publicly released in April 2024 by the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence.

The Plan is ambitious and includes 116 actions to be delivered by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Education, Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Police across the five strategic priority areas of the Dhelk Dja Agreement. The Plan also aligns strongly to Victoria's commitment to deliver on Target 13 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Each department is responsible for actions under the Plan and is required to submit a report to the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, held three times a year, in order for progress against them to be tracked.

Of the 116 activities under the Plan, 110 are due to be delivered in years one and two. As of December 2024:

- 17 are in development (15%).
- 50 are on track (45%).
- 27 are completed/ongoing (25%).
- 16 are delayed/not started (15%).

Six additional activities are due to commence and be completed in year three (2025).

The following activities were completed in 2024:

- Establishment of a dedicated data position in Family Safety Victoria to support the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum in accessing and interpreting family violence data with regional profiles.
- Identification of gaps and data linkages in current data collection processes and systems to build an evidence base and hold service providers to account.

- The Standard Indigenous Question was mandated within The Orange Door network to ensure the option for a culturally safe response with flexibility to change how they identify.
- Mandated the capture and recording of the Standard Indigenous Question for family violence victims including children and young people and those who use violence.
- Establishment of a target reduction of unknown status across the family violence service system.

Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund 2023–24

Victoria is privileged to have a long history of committed Aboriginal communities and services championing Aboriginal-led approaches to ending family violence. This history includes the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, appointed in October 2001 to raise Community awareness and engage Aboriginal Victorians in the development of statewide and local responses to family violence. The Task Force handed down its final report in December 2003.

As part of its response to the report, the Victorian Government committed to a long-term partnership with Aboriginal communities. Many of the initiatives and recommendations in the report are still operational today, including the Victorian Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund (CIF).

In May 2024, funding of \$2.2 million was provided for the 2023–24 CIF. The funding was allocated equally across the 11 Dhek Dja Action Group regions resulting in 44 culturally appropriate, place-based community-led projects dedicated to preventing and responding to family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities. These projects are being delivered by 30 Aboriginal organisations and Community groups across Victoria. Examples of funded projects include:

- A prevention program that engages young people at risk of family violence and focuses on cultural connection.
- Women's groups supporting Aboriginal women in refuges or in prison through yarning circles.
- An awareness-raising project to address violence against Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals in Community.
- A program designed to help heal, empower, and culturally connect elders affected by family violence.
- Therapeutic retreat for fathers and carers of young Aboriginal children affected by family violence.

The Dhek Dja Action Groups determine the composition of Aboriginal-led regional assessment panels. These panels decide which initiatives will be recommended for funding in their region. Projects must follow the CIF Funding Guidelines and align to the regional priorities identified by Action Groups to prevent, reduce and respond to family violence.

The CIF has been operating for over 20 years having funded more than 377 projects in the last 10 years.

Aboriginal Access Points

Staffed by an Aboriginal workforce, Aboriginal Access Points support Aboriginal women, children, men and families to navigate the family violence service system.

Implementation of the Aboriginal Access Points is a key deliverable of the Dhek Dja 3-Year Action Plan 2019–2022. **Two Aboriginal Access Points have been servicing the Barwon and Bayside Peninsula areas for over 12 months.** Delivered by ACCOs, the Aboriginal Access Points are designed to be culturally safe and culturally responsive, underpinned by self-determination and providing an Aboriginal-led service choice for Victorian Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Sexual Assault Services

In May 2024, the Women's Safety Package provided additional investment to Aboriginal sexual assault services to ensure that Aboriginal people who are victim survivors of sexual assault, including Aboriginal children and young people, can access culturally safe and appropriate holistic services delivered by Aboriginal-led services.

As part of their commitment to self-determination, the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing is working with the Aboriginal Sexual Assault Working Group to determine how the investment will be implemented. The working group is Aboriginal-led and membership consists of the four ACCOs delivering the sexual assault services to Community.

The services align to the Nargneit Birrang which is the Aboriginal-led and co-designed statewide family violence holistic healing framework for Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Nargneit Birrang describes what Aboriginal holistic healing is, why healing is needed and how healing works to heal family violence and associated trauma including sexual assault for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal family violence and sexual assault services funding

The Victorian Government has significantly increased funding to ACCOs for family violence and sexual assault service delivery from approximately \$5.2 million in 2017–18 to approximately \$66.6 million in 2023–24. This funding represents approximately 12 per cent of total family violence service funding provided across Victoria in 2023–24. DFFH is committed to ensuring that funding and service agreements support self-determination by ensuring alignment to the Dhelk Dja 10-Year Agreement's vision and strategic priorities. Family Safety Victoria has set a target that at least 10 per cent of all new funding is provided to ACCOs.

The 2023–24 Victorian State Budget committed \$31 million to maintain Aboriginal-led family and sexual violence service delivery and includes:

- \$25.5 million over four years and \$6.8 million ongoing for Aboriginal-led family violence case management and counselling.
- \$5.6 million over four years and \$1.6 million ongoing for Aboriginal-led sexual assault support services.

A component of this budget outcome includes \$6.1 million per annum in ongoing funding to Aboriginal frontline family violence services. DFFH is working with two Aboriginal-led groups, the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and the ACCO Family Violence Sector Forum, to agree on an approach to allocate the funding in a self-determined way including:

- Co-designing an equity funding allocation method based on Aboriginal data and evidence.
- Providing service development funding to be used flexibly depending on the needs of the ACCO to meet local workforce and capacity building needs.
- Ensuring a flexible approach to service delivery so ACCOs can determine the service offering mix that best supports their Community.
- Additional culturally appropriate therapeutic interventions and support.

Children, Youth and Family Services

Refresh of Wungurilwil Gapgapduir and Aboriginal Children's Forum

The Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) gives practical effect to the implementation and monitoring of *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* to promote the safety, health and resilience of First Peoples children and young people.

Over 2024, the Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) undertook a refresh to provide the ACCO Caucus with greater power to oversee the ACF. This included stronger Aboriginal-led governance, setting the ACF agenda, and leading a refresh of the next four-year Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Strategic Action Plan.

The ACF identified and agreed to four priorities for the refreshed Strategic Action Plan:

1. Equitable local access to Aboriginal models of prevention and early intervention services.
2. Self-determining and ACCO-led responses to child safety.
3. Building knowledge and the evaluation of Aboriginal child and family ways.
4. Aboriginal decisions over investment into Aboriginal children and families.

At the 30th Aboriginal Children's Forum in December 2024, members reflected that commitment to action by Wungurilwil Gapgapduir signatories had never been stronger and will continue to drive shared collaboration and reform across the sector.

The Strategic Action Plan is anticipated to be publicly released in 2025.

Aboriginal Workforce Fund - Final Tranche

Through the 2023–24 State Budget, the Victorian Government committed to an investment of \$140 million over four years to transform the Children and Families service system to reduce Aboriginal overrepresentation in child protection and family services.

\$4.958 million of the Stronger Families Fund was allocated to the 2023–24 Aboriginal Workforce Fund (AWF) and to 40 ACCO's under the direction of the AWF Steering Committee.

Proposals for this round demonstrate a range of needs and priorities across ACCOs, with a primary focus on upskilling the Aboriginal workforce (57%)

and strengthening organisational capability (18%). Activities such as professional development (24%) and policy, systems, and governance updates (18%) are also prominent, indicating a focus on both individual skill development and broader organisational improvements.

Less frequently proposed activities include fixed-term contracts, recruitment, youth programs, higher education, and cultural safety training (all <10%). These funding priorities reflect a commitment to long-term sustainability and improved service delivery to the Aboriginal sector.

Mid-term reporting highlighted difficulties for ACCOs in attracting local Aboriginal candidates, retaining young employees, and managing workforce gaps due to limited funding and staff shortages.

ACCOs have advocated for a needs-based, self-determination-driven model to better support their workforce and operational sustainability.

Mid-term reporting was due 31 January 2025 with final acquittals due at the end of the 2024–25 fiscal year.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) and the Community Protecting Boorais pilot expansion

Through the 2023–24 State Budget, the Victorian Government has committed an investment of more than \$140 million over four years to help transform the children and families service system. The ACAC program, which includes the Community Protection Boorais Program, was expanded. The ACAC gives authorised ACCOs legal responsibility for Aboriginal Children or young people who have been placed on a Children's Court protection order. Under this program, an authorised ACCO will actively work with the child's family, Community and the relevant professionals to develop a case plan. The case plans address protective concerns and achieve long-term objectives in a way that is culturally appropriate and in the best interests of the child.

There are currently four ACCOs authorised to operate under the ACAC program. During 2024, the ACAC program:

- Announced two new ACCOs who would commence pre-authorisation (Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative in August 2024 and Goolum Goolum in 2025–26).
- Allocated an additional four teams across the state.

- Saw the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative become the third ACCO to be authorised to deliver ACAC in the Central Highlands Area.
- Saw the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and Njernda Aboriginal Cooperative engage in early service provision to support their pre-authorisation delivery of ACAC.

Community Protecting Boorais pilot

The 2023–24 State Budget allocated an investment of more than \$140 million over four years to help transform the children and families service system, with the aim of reducing First Peoples overrepresentation in child protection and family services. This included funding of \$13.7 million over four years to enable the Community Protecting Boorais pilot to support up to 348 children by 2026–27.

Authorised by the passing of the Statement of Recognition Act in June 2023, the Community Protecting Boorais pilot (the pilot) enables ACCOs to undertake investigations of child protection reports directly, rather than through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. This means that when a report is made to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing with concerns for the safety of an Aboriginal child and an assessment is made that an investigation is required, an authorised ACCO can take responsibility for the child's investigation, and any required case management.

The pilot commenced in October 2023 with two ACCOs currently authorised and funded to establish a team each to undertake this work – the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) and the Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC).

Since the pilot commenced in October 2023, 148 First Peoples children have been supported by the Community Protecting Boorais program to 30 June 2024:

- BDAC has worked with 84 children across 42 families.
- VACCA has worked with 91 children across 35 families.

The pilot is a strong example of successful investment in best practice, Aboriginal-led and self-determined approaches, with positive initial results observed.

Feedback from ACCOs and co-located DFFH Child Protection Specialists indicate that the culturally attuned strengths-based approach provided through the pilot has been more successful than the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing in effectively and quickly engaging Aboriginal families to address child safety concerns and has reduced the need for legal intervention.

Additionally, where Children's Court applications are required, they are typically resolved sooner and appear to be less adversarial, with an increased likelihood of court outcomes being reached by agreement.

An example of how BDAC and VACCA are committed to transforming the business of protecting Aboriginal children is using Cultural language terms that reflect (and prioritise) their own unique practice approaches. This includes changing the language of "investigating" concerns to "understanding the story" of the child and family.

Housing and Homelessness

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

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHHF) provides a 20-year plan to guide policy reform in responding to specific housing needs for Aboriginal Victorians. The VAHHF 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.

As Aboriginal people represent 20 per cent of the homelessness population in Victoria, strategies to deliver on goals in Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort are critical to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal people without a home.

In April 2022, Homes Victoria committed \$116 million for three years to support the VAHHF implementation. The delivery of the VAHHF is monitored through the VAHHF Annual Report Card. The Annual Report Card provides a status update of the VAHHF yearly work plan and a report against 20 outcome measures that align with specific strategic directions outlined in the VAHHF.

The VAHHF Implementation Working Group (IWG) is a key governance group of the VAHHF. The membership consists of Aboriginal Housing Victoria 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 VAHHF including the development of an annual work plan.

VAHHF 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 VAHHF and guide the transformation of the Aboriginal housing sector over two decades. The Aboriginal Community housing sector's vision outlines the role and aspiration for a unified and vibrant Victorian Aboriginal community housing sector delivering quality services and housing equity within a generation.

This approach will be guided by the VAHHF 5-year implementation plan which is currently being developed by the sector. The VAHHF 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 Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum on a quarterly basis as part of this commitment.

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

Social Housing Regulation Review

Prioritising and supporting self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians to deliver Aboriginal housing outcomes is one of the three key streams of reform for implementation announced late in 2024. These reform streams are in response to the Victorian Government initiated Social Housing Regulation Review.

This reform stream will promote Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety by embedding the goals of the Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home – The Victorian Housing and Homelessness Framework.

Social Housing Accelerator Program

In 2023–24, the Victorian Government invested \$496.5 million through the Social Housing Accelerator Program in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, to provide a boost to social housing in Victoria. This includes providing 10 per cent of 78 committed new and refurbished dwellings in Metropolitan Melbourne to registered Aboriginal housing providers.

Regional Housing Fund

The \$1 billion Victorian Government 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 minimum 10 per cent allocation of the funding commitment will be targeted towards First Peoples housing.

Building Works package

As part of the Victorian Government \$2.7 billion Building Works package announced in May 2020, \$528 million has been invested in 2023–24 to support delivery of 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.

Developing Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Five-year Regional Growth Plans

Funding of \$540,000 provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2024–25 is going towards the development of Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Five-year Regional Growth Plans, with a minimum of five regional plans to be delivered by 1 May 2026.

The regional plans will aim to capture key activities to implement the VAHHF, including new social and affordable housing supply, homelessness reforms to improve support for Aboriginal Victorians, improved accommodation and long-term housing outcomes, capacity building activities to support workforce development, and the scaling up of Aboriginal housing and homelessness providers.

Community Housing Sector Development Fund - Building the Capacity of the Aboriginal Housing Sector

The Community Housing Sector Development Fund was established in 2020 with \$6 million funding and 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.

Supporting Aboriginal Registration project

The Community Sector Development Fund provided funding in 2023–24 to support and increase the number of Aboriginal housing providers. The project aims to support 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

The Community Sector Development Fund provided funding in 2023–24 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, codify commitments, and foster connection between councils, ACCOs and TOCs.

Breaking down barriers for ACCOs to the Big Housing Build

The Community Sector Development Fund provided funding in 2023–24 for the Breaking Down Barriers to the BHB project. This funding provides grants to ACCOs to support their participation in BHB founding rounds and to increase the number of ACCOs and TOCs seeking to deliver social housing. The grant funding can contribute to building internal business capacity towards developing proposals for the development of land, including feasibility studies and other required technical assessments.

Victorian Public Tenancy Association Aboriginal Advocacy program

In 2023–24, \$350,000 has been provided by Homes Victoria to extend the implementation of the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) Aboriginal Advocacy Program.

One new Aboriginal advocacy role was created at the VPTA to provide advice, assistance, and referrals for Aboriginal people, including those who are homeless, or otherwise in significant housing 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 VAHHF Aboriginal Governance Groups.

Aboriginal Public Housing Tenancy Management Transfer Pilot

\$400,000 has been provided 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.

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 (Program). Funding of \$5.1 million was provided in 2023–24 to continue the Program.

The Program is a preventative intervention that provides private rental brokerage and holistic support to households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is intended to prevent or end the 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 the Program. The Program initially served five regions determined by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The Program is now funded in Western Melbourne, Mallee, North Eastern Melbourne, Loddon, Bayside Peninsula, Inner Gippsland, Brimbank Melton, Goulburn, Outer Gippsland and Barwon.

Aboriginal Private Rental Access Project

The Aboriginal Private Rental Access Project (Project) arose from a recommendation in the Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home and was undertaken by the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies in collaboration with Aboriginal Housing Victoria and others. The aim of the project was to identify and address access barriers to the private rental market for Aboriginal people.

The Project produced two reports that were officially launched by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in October 2022 and included fourteen recommendations. The reports were developed in consultation with Aboriginal housing and homelessness organisations and analysed systemic issues and access barriers experienced by Aboriginal people accessing the private rental market. The report included recommendations for reform. Implementation of the recommendations progressed during 2024 and will continue through 2025.

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. The ACHPI program is currently being delivered by Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) and Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS). The ACHPI program provides an avenue for culturally safe support to Aboriginal people aged 18 years and over, in addition to the mainstream Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative.

Domain 2: Learning & Skills



Our shared commitment

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

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



Goal 4: Aboriginal children thrive in the early years



Overview

Measures under Goal 4 have varied in performance

In 2023, the proportion of eligible Aboriginal children enrolled in kindergarten was 100 per cent. This proportion was also achieved in 2022 and 2020.

Also in 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal children funded to participate in Early Start Kindergarten increased to the highest proportion recorded between 2016 and 2023 (92.3 per cent).

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 2023, an estimated 101.8 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 141.1 per cent in Victoria. Enrolment proportions may exceed 100 per cent due to enrolment and population data being from different sources and limitations in the accuracy of Australian Bureau of Statistics Aboriginal population estimates for kindergarten aged children.

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 AEDC domains, compared to 35.6 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening. In Victoria this target shows improvement based on progress from the baseline, however, there remains significant work to do.

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.

Data Note



The following measure relies 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 this measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report.

Aboriginal participation rates in kindergarten are calculated using the number of children enrolled in kindergarten who identify as Aboriginal (numerator) and the estimated population of Aboriginal kindergarten-age children based on Australia Bureau of Statistics data. There is a margin of error in this data.

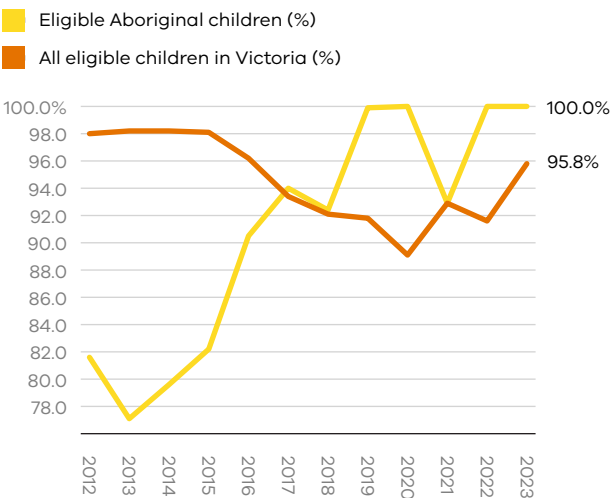
4.1 Optimise early childhood development and participation in kinder

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

In 2023, approximately 100 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children enrolled in kindergarten. Aboriginal children are enrolled in kindergarten at a greater proportion than all Victorian children (95.8 per cent). 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. Over the long term the percentage of Aboriginal child enrolments has remained very high. Since 2016, enrolments have been greater than 90 per cent.

Aboriginal enrolment in four-year-old funded kindergarten remains high

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



* 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.



Building Strong Cultural Connections: Early Years Engagement Program and KESO Collaboration

In 2024, the Early Years Engagement Program (EYEP), delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), the Department of Education's principal Aboriginal education partner, focused on building the capability of early childhood services to incorporate First Nations perspectives into their service design, delivery and practice. VAEAI's EYEP Facilitators (four in metropolitan locations and four in regional locations) work with early years teachers and educators through the Department of Education's 64 Early Years Networks across the State to connect kindergarten services with local ACCOs, Traditional Elders, and relevant resources to improve cultural safety and inclusion.

In the North Western Victoria Region, the EYEP Facilitator worked with the Department of Education's Kindergarten Improvement Advisors (KIAs) and Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) to support early childhood staff to increase their understanding of self-determination principles and strengthen their existing cultural knowledge program. This collaboration reached over 135 educators and 320 early years services via Early Years Learning Network meetings and the Whittlesea Early Years Conference. This successful collaboration demonstrates the value of structured engagement and partnership to enable lasting change in early years services.

Early Years Workforce Development project

VAEAI's Early Years Workforce Development Project is focused on building the capacity of First Nations teachers in the early years workforce between June 2024 - June 2027. This project provides cultural support to Koorie educators and teachers ensuring they feel heard, supported, nurtured and valued.

This project aims to increase and retain the numbers of Koorie educators and teachers working in the early years sector in Victoria.

VAEAI is engaging with early years Aboriginal teachers and educators through sharing a First Nations Educator and Teacher Survey, facilitating monthly online educator and teacher networks and organising service visits to understand the challenges and needs of this group. VAEAI is collaborating with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) to improve support for First Nations Teachers in the early years sector.

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

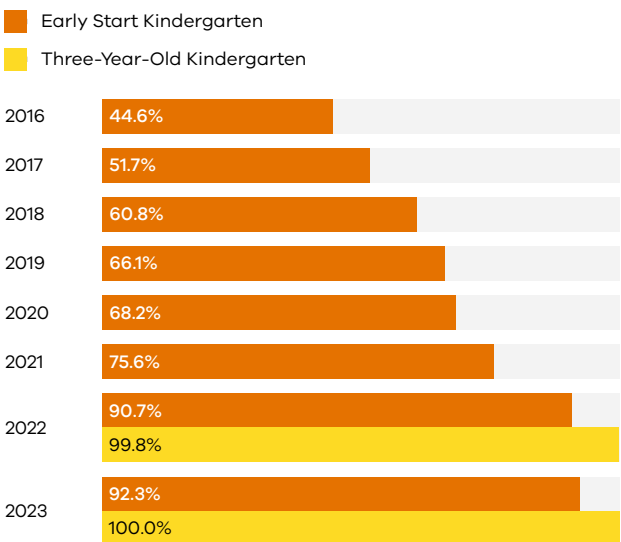
In 2023, 1,442 Aboriginal children with funding participated in Early Start Kindergarten. This represents 92.3 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children, up from 90.7 per cent in 2022 and 75.6 per cent in 2021. Early Start Kindergarten gives Aboriginal children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week, for two years before starting school. With a 92.3 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.

In 2023, 1,578 Aboriginal children were enrolled and funded to participate in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. This represents approximately 100 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children. The introduction of statewide, universal Three-Year-Old Kindergarten for up to 15 hours per week in 2023 has meant that some three-year-old Aboriginal children participate in a funded kindergarten program without being enrolled through Early Start Kindergarten.

From 2026, all four-year-old Aboriginal children statewide will have access to up to 25 hours a week of Pre-Prep. This will increase to up to 30 hours a week from 2028. Led by qualified teachers, additional hours through Pre-Prep will give children greater opportunities to socialise and learn through play and create stronger connections with children and families. The additional hours mean even greater access to the many benefits of early childhood education.

The vast majority of Aboriginal children are funded or in kinder programs

Measure 4.1.2 Number of children funded to participate in Early Start and Three-Year-Old Kindergarten



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



Goal 5: Aboriginal learners excel at school



Overview

Measures under Goal 5 have varied in performance

In 2024, the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in schools decreased across all year levels between Year 1 and 10 compared to 2023 and the proportion of Aboriginal students who felt connected to their school varied across year groups.

The 2024 NAPLAN results for Aboriginal Victorians shows variability in the proportion of Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 Aboriginal students in the top three bands for reading and numeracy.

Aboriginal representation in school staff has slightly improved in 2024 with the number of Full Time Equivalent Aboriginal education workers increasing to 268.5, making up only up 0.4 per cent of all school-based education workers.

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 this measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at 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 Dashboard.

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

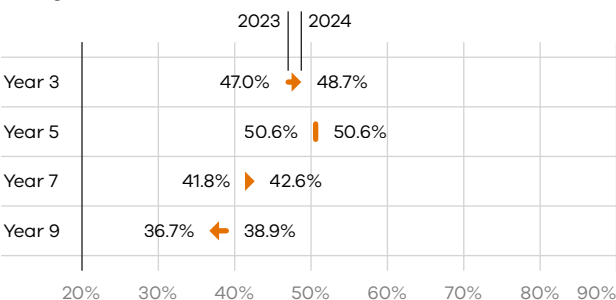
Measure 5.1.1 Percentage of students scoring strong or exceeding – Reading and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9

For reading, 48.7, 50.6, 42.6, and 36.7 per cent of Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 Aboriginal students in Victoria scored strong or exceeding proficiency levels on their NAPLAN results in 2024. These results are consistent with 2023 except for Year 3 students and 9 students. 1.7 per cent more Aboriginal Year 3 students and 2.2 per cent fewer Aboriginal Year 9 students scored strong or exceeding in 2024. For non-Aboriginal students, strong or exceeding results for reading remained consistent except for Year 5 students with a 2.4 per cent point decrease.

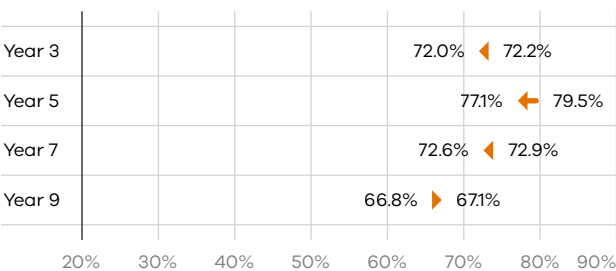
Reading skills have improved for Aboriginal students in Year 3 and declined for Aboriginal students in Year 9

Measure 5.1.1a Percentage of students scoring strong or exceeding – Reading (NAPLAN) in Year 3, 5, 7 and 9

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



From 2023, ACARA reset the NAPLAN measurement scale, moving from 10 achievement bands to 4 proficiency levels. This change marks the start of a new time series. For historical data, refer to the 2023 edition of the VGAAR. For definitions of measurement scale please see <https://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/results-and-reports/proficiency-level-descriptions>.

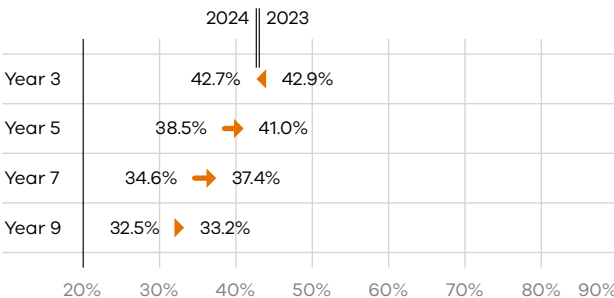
Source: National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy, National Report, ACARA.

For numeracy, 42.7, 41.0, 37.4, and 33.2 per cent of Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 scored strong or exceeding proficiency levels in NAPLAN. These scores were consistent with 2023 data for Year 3 and 9. There were increases by 2.5 and 2.8 percentage points for Year 5 and 7 showing improvement. For non-Aboriginal students, scores for strong or exceeding proficiency levels in NAPLAN remained consistent for Years 5 and 7 and decreased for Years 3 and 9.

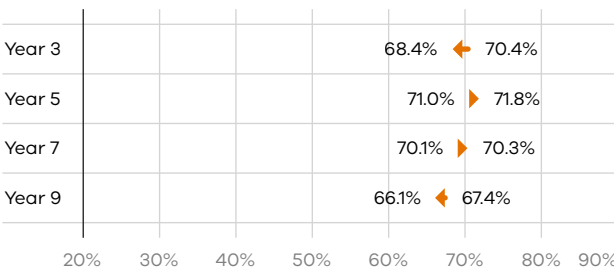
Numeracy skills have improved for Aboriginal students in Year 5 and 7

Measure 5.1.1b Percentage of students scoring strong or exceeding – Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Year 3, 5, 7 and 9

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



From 2023, ACARA reset the NAPLAN measurement scale, moving from 10 achievement bands to 4 proficiency levels. This change marks the start of a new time series. For historical data, refer to the 2023 edition of the VGAAR. For definitions of measurement scale please see <https://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/results-and-reports/proficiency-level-descriptions>.

Source: National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy, National Report, 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

Survey questions relating to school connectedness include the options: 'I like this school', 'I am happy to be at this school', 'I feel like I belong at this school', 'I look forward to going to school' and 'I feel proud about being a student at this school'. In 2024, 73.2 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6 felt connected to their school compared with 42.1 per cent of students in Years 10 to 12. Overall, students in Victorian Government-funded schools feel less connected to their school as they progress to higher Year levels.

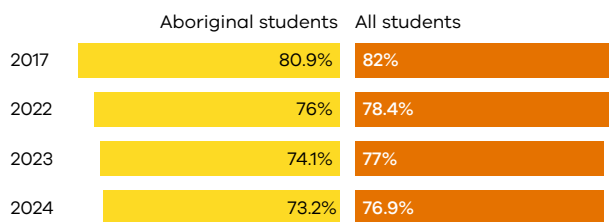
Since 2017, there has been a decrease by 7.7 percentage points in the proportion of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6 who feel connected to their school. There have been smaller decreases in the proportion of Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 12 who feel connected to school (6.2 percentage points and 2.9 percentage points respectively). Over the short term, the proportion of Aboriginal students who feel connected to their school has remained steady with only the proportion of those in Years 7 to 9 decreasing by 1.6 percentage points between 2023 and 2024.

Questions relating specifically to experiences of racism were added to the Attitudes to School Survey in 2023. Data from the survey is being used to inform school improvement and planning to support student learning and wellbeing.⁴ The Victorian Government acknowledges that learning outcomes for all Aboriginal learners are greatly improved with strong partnerships and connections to and with their families and communities.⁵ The Victorian Government is continuing to progress self-determination in education using the Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan and the Strengthening Aboriginal Self-Determination in Education Campfire Conversations: reflections and directions 2022–2023 report.

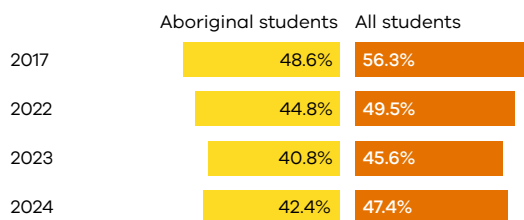
Aboriginal students feel less connected to school than all students

Measure 5.2.1 Proportion of students who feel connected to their school

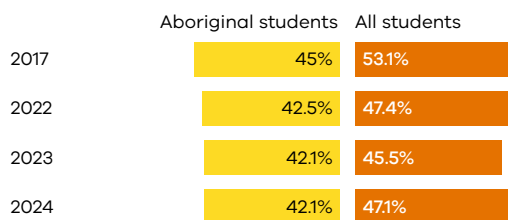
Years 4 to 6



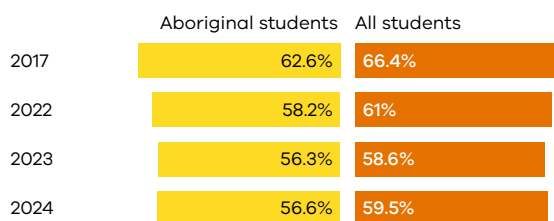
Years 7 to 9



Years 10 to 12



Years 4 to 12



(a) In 2017, the Attitudes to School Survey was redesigned and as such cannot be compared to earlier years. (b) In 2023 the methodology for calculating percentage endorsement for surveys was revised to no longer include skipped responses. The time series has been updated to use the new methodology and has been applied to previous years. (c) Data for 2017 to 2021 may not match previously published data due to a change in methodology in 2022. (d) Data is reported by Victorian government-funded schools only.

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

4. Attitudes to School Survey (AtoSS), Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/attitudes-school-survey-atoss> >

5. Marrung, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/marrung> >

Building cultural safety through centring Aboriginal voices - Western Heights College

Western Heights College, a secondary school in Hamlyn Heights, Geelong, has 996 students, including 44 Aboriginal students (four per cent of the school population). Shortlisted as a finalist in the 2024 Victorian Education Excellence Awards 'Outstanding Koorie Education' category, the school is recognised for achieving positive change through its commitment to promoting Aboriginal voices and agency to create a school environment that empowers Aboriginal students and families to feel valued, respected and culturally strong.

The College recognised the need to strengthen self-determination through improved connections with Aboriginal Communities. In collaboration with Aboriginal students, families and the Koorie Education Workforce, new structures were established to provide strengths-based platforms for Aboriginal voices to drive a range of initiatives at the College.

In 2024, College leadership continued their professional development by participating in the intensive residential Strengthening Professional Capability of Principals in Koorie Education

(SPPIKE) workshop program sponsored by the Department of Education. Following this, further initiatives have commenced, including a project working with the Koorie Education Workforce focused on ensuring meaningful and high-quality Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are in place for all Aboriginal students, and a partnership with the Polly Farmer Foundation to provide further mentoring and tutoring for Aboriginal students in 2025. The College has also committed to funding a leading teacher to oversee the package of Aboriginal inclusion programs in 2025.

The impact of the self-determination initiatives at Western Heights is being demonstrated through significant improvement in Aboriginal attendance rates in 2024, positive feedback provided by Aboriginal students through the annual Attitudes to School Survey when compared to similar schools, as well as increased Aboriginal student enrolments.

While still in its early stages, the work underway to strengthen self-determination at Western Heights College demonstrates how working with Aboriginal students, families and Community is key to creating culturally safe environments and improving outcomes.

Prioritise culture

Community Curriculum Workshops

In 2023, the Department of Education's Northwestern Victoria Region (NWVR) ran six workshops to embed Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. These workshops brought together department and regional staff, school leaders, teaching staff, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. and Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group representatives. The workshops highlighted the need for deeper understanding of Aboriginal history and cultures, and for supports to increase teacher confidence to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in lesson plans.

In 2024, NWVR continued to develop teaching resources that embed Aboriginal perspectives, such as the creation of a standard resource

template and adapting existing materials to this format. Feedback and insights from community workshops and review sessions ensured accuracy and appropriateness of information and resources, including adherence to community protocols.

These workshops provided two units launched at the Area Principal Forums in Term 4. School leadership teams can access these through their Educational Improvement Leaders (EILs). A further nine units are being prepared for release in 2025. The units and the development process exemplify engagement with the Aboriginal community and provide resources to flexibly meet local contexts and school communities.

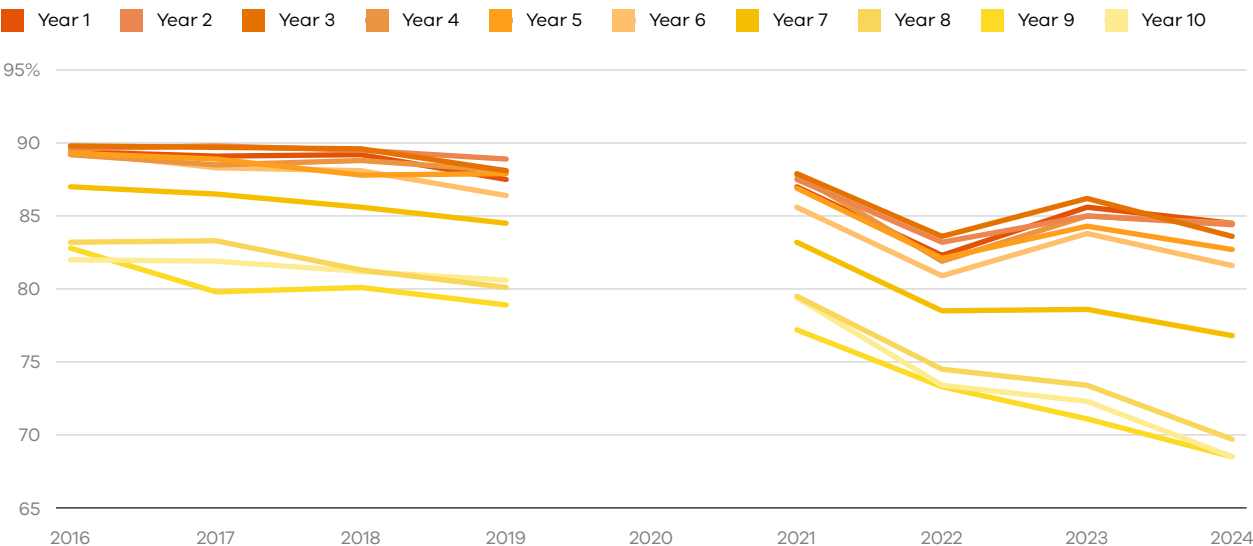
Measure 5.2.2 Student attendance rates in government schools

In 2024, the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in schools decreased across all year levels for Years 1 to 10. This follows a slight increase in attendance for Aboriginal students in reported primary school year levels (Years 1 to 6) and decrease in attendance for Aboriginal students in reported high school year levels (Years 7 to 10) in 2023. On average, the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in reported primary school years levels is higher than in reported

high school year levels. In 2024, Aboriginal students in Years 1 and 4 demonstrated the highest level of attendance at 84.5 per cent and Aboriginal students in Years 9 and 10 demonstrated the lowest level of attendance at 68.5 per cent. Attendance in school is important to support students to develop skills and knowledge to help them learn, develop social and emotional skills, and establish connections with peers which help develop self-esteem and a sense of belonging.⁶ Concerns about the impacts of racism on attendance have been raised at several Marrung Central Governance Committee meetings.

School attendance rate has decreased for Aboriginal students in Year 1 to 10

Measure 5.2.2 Student attendance rates in government schools



Data was not collected in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Measure 5.2.3 Number of Aboriginal people on school councils

In 2024, 105 schools reported that they had Aboriginal representation in their school council. The total number of Aboriginal council members reported by these schools was 127 people. Compared to 2023, this is an increase of 20 schools with Aboriginal council members, and a decrease of 60 Aboriginal council members overall. The Principal Survey used to collect this data is sent to all schools, however, participation is voluntary. The number of participating schools thereby fluctuates each year. Caution must be applied to interpreting this data.

Aboriginal representation on school councils is critical to support self-determination in education. Some key functions of school councils include establishing the broad direction and vision of the school within the school’s community and informing itself and taking into account any views of the school community to make decisions regarding the school and the students at the school.⁷ Aboriginal education stakeholders have shared feedback 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.

The number of schools with Aboriginal representation on their council has continued to increase since 2021

Measure 5.2.3 Number of school councils with Aboriginal representation and number of Aboriginal persons on school councils

	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
2024	105	13%	127

Definition: The number of Aboriginal people reported to be on school councils of Victorian Government schools, and the number of Victorian Government schools reporting to have a least one Aboriginal person on their School Council, as reported by the school through the Principal Survey.

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



7. School Council – Power and Functions, Victorian Government < <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-powers-and-functions/policy> >

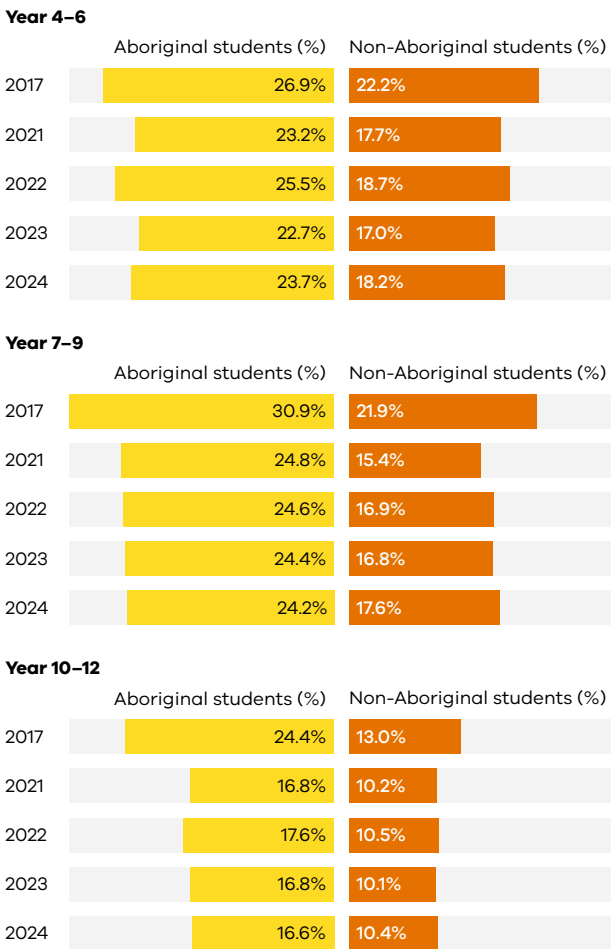
Measure 5.2.4 Proportion of students who report bullying at school

Aboriginal students continue to experience bullying at higher rates than non-Aboriginal students. In 2024, 23.7 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6, 24.2 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 9 and 16.6 per cent of Aboriginal children in Years 10 to 12 reported experiencing bullying at school. In the same year, 18.2, 17.6, and 10.4 per cent of non-Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6, Years 7 to 9, and Years 10 to 12 reported experiencing bullying at school. For Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6, their proportion has increased by 1 percentage point since 2023. For Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12, their proportion has remained steady since 2021. The data highlights the importance of changing the way schools are addressing bullying. Worsening bullying outcomes coincide with the general decline in student attendance and connection to school reported in measures 5.2.3 and 5.2.1.

Students who experience bullying are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and feelings of loneliness and isolation. They are also more likely to feel disconnected from school and have lower attendance rates and academic outcomes.⁸ Bullying comes in many forms including bullying based on racism. In 2024, the Victorian Government released Victoria's first anti-racism strategy. The five-year strategy outlines how the Victorian Government can acknowledge, prevent and address racism and discrimination in schools, workplaces, government services and daily interactions.⁹ The Bully Stoppers program led by the Department of Education remains an active resource for the school community to understand, prevent and respond to bullying.¹⁰ The Department of Education will continue to focus on addressing systemic racism, increasing cultural inclusion and reducing bullying.

A greater proportion of Aboriginal students report experiencing bullying than non-Aboriginal students

Measure 5.2.4 Proportion of students who report experiencing bullying at school



(a) In 2017, the Attitudes to School Survey was redesigned and as such cannot be compared to earlier years. (b) In 2023 the methodology for calculating percentage endorsement for surveys was revised to no longer include skipped responses. The time series has been updated to use the new methodology and has been applied to previous years. (c) Data for 2017 to 2021 may not match previously published data due to a change in methodology in 2022. (d) Data is reported by Victorian government-funded schools only.

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

8. What is bullying? Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/what-bullying> >

9. Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024–2029, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-anti-racism-strategy-2024-2029> >

10. Bully Stoppers, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/bully-stoppers> >

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

The number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) school-based Aboriginal education workers increased to 268.5 workers in 2024, making up 0.4 per cent of all school-based education workers. This is the highest growth in number of school-based Aboriginal education workers in six years. However, the proportion of school-based Aboriginal education workers has remained low, fluctuating between 0.3 and 0.4 per cent.

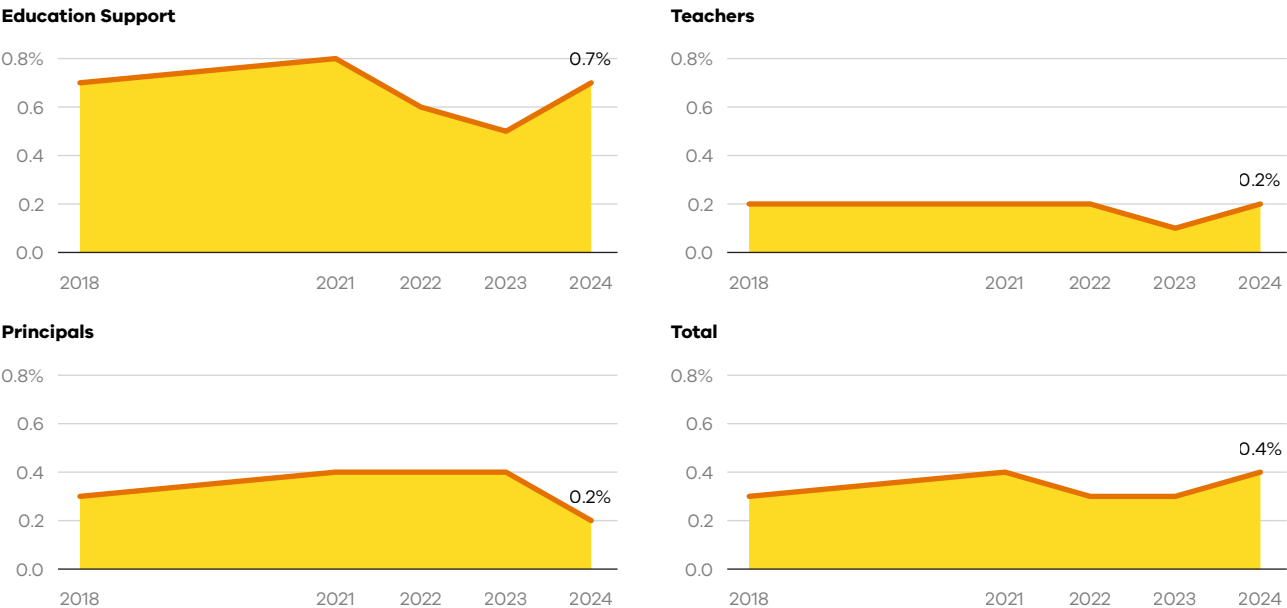
Of the 73.6 new school-based Aboriginal education workers in 2024, 45.6 are employed as Education Support staff and 28 are employed as teachers. This has supported a growth in the proportion of Aboriginal Education Support staff to 0.7 per cent

of all Education Support staff and proportion of Aboriginal teachers to 0.2 per cent of all teachers. In the same year, the number of Aboriginal principals decreased to only nine, making up 0.2 per cent of all principals.

The Victorian Government is working to grow the number and proportion of Aboriginal education workers through programs such as Aspiring Koorie Teachers (AKT) Now, which supports Aboriginal people to work and learn in Victorian Government schools while they complete their teaching and education support studies, and the Secondary Teaching Scholarships which supports secondary teaching degree students with the cost of studying and living.^{11, 12}

The proportion of FTE school-based education workers who are Aboriginal remains low

Measure 5.2.5a Proportion of school-based Aboriginal education workers across all schools



(a) 'Education Support' workers include the Koorie Engagement Support Officers, being positions that are not based in schools. (b) 'FTE' represents Full Time Equivalent positions. (c) Data is reported by Victorian government-funded schools only.

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

11. Become a Koorie teacher in Victoria, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/become-koorie-teacher-victoria> >

12. Scholarships for secondary teaching degrees, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/scholarships-secondary-teaching-degrees> >

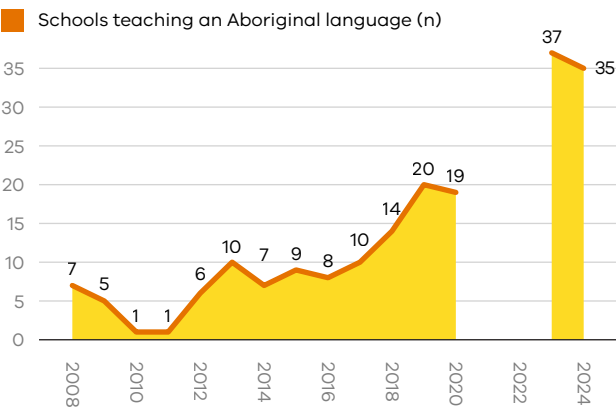
Measure 5.2.6 Number of schools teaching an Aboriginal language

In 2024, there were 4,908 student enrolments in Victorian Aboriginal languages in 35 Victorian government schools (33 primary programs and two secondary programs). Victorian Aboriginal languages taught included Barkindji, Bangerang, Dhauwurd Wurrung, Dhudhuroa, Gunai Kurnai, Gunditjamara, Taungurung, Wadawurrung, Woiwurung and Yorta Yorta.

The Victorian Government remains committed to Aboriginal language revitalisation. 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.

The number of Victorian schools teaching an Aboriginal language remains high

Measure 5.2.6 Number of schools teaching an Aboriginal language



(a) For 2021 and 2022, the data was not collected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (b) Data is reported by participating Victorian government-funded schools only.

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

The Koorie Curriculum Clusters

The Koorie Curriculum Clusters pilot project continued in 2024 with the goal of strengthening teaching practice in clusters of schools, through partnering with Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), and in accordance with the principles of self-determination. These Koorie Curriculum Clusters have continued to work collaboratively to develop libraries of locally anchored Aboriginal teaching and learning resources. The partner RAPs provide on-Country cultural learning experiences for staff in participating schools, as well as develop resources for teachers to use in their teaching practice. Feedback about the pilot to date has been positive and there is potential for the approach to be scaled up across more locations in future.

 **Prioritise culture**

Measure 5.2.7 Number and proportion of government schools having undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST)¹³

In 2024, 98 per cent of schools had undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST). This represents 1,564 schools and is consistent with the proportion in 2023. Compared to 2018, the proportion has grown by 76 percentage points.

CUST is professional learning for school staff to increase their understanding of Aboriginal 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. CUST is typically delivered to schools by Koorie Engagement Support Officers in collaboration with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

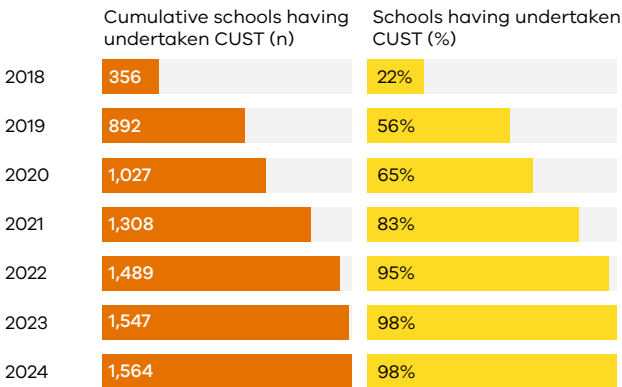
As regions finalise the delivery of CUST to individual schools, the ongoing rollout of CUST will focus on delivery to new schools, offering refresher sessions to existing staff, as well as area-based sessions for school staff that are new to the region.

A suite of professional learning is being developed to build teacher capacity in addressing the Strengthening Factors identified in the *Strengthening Aboriginal Self-Determination*

in *Education Report* which include transitions, connectedness, school environment, support services, leadership, teacher practice, communication, professional learning and curriculum. While there is currently no formal relationship between CUST and the professional learning suite, options are being explored for embedding CUST as a foundational module for the broader suite.

CUST training has remained steady

Measure 5.2.7 Number and proportion of government schools having undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training



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

Marrung in WSW – Everyone's business

In the Wimmera South West (WSW) area, the "Marrung in WSW - Everyone's Business" initiative received the 2024 Secretary's Marrung Award for its whole-of-organisation approach to enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Its emphasis on collective responsibility and cultural competence across all staff levels, from department to classroom teachers, is key to its success.

The initiative uses a Community of Practice model to develop Cultural Champions within schools, to enable discussions with regional staff to improve schools' support for Aboriginal students by evaluating current practice and identifying strengths and next steps. Adoption of these methods by early childhood teams within the Department of Education speaks to its versatility and expanding influence.

65 regional Department of Education staff attended the 2024 annual On-Country professional development – a highlight of this initiative. Led by Traditional Owners from Gunditj Mirring and Barengi Gadjin Land Council, staff deepened their cultural understanding through engagement with Elders and local Aboriginal organisations. This included a session at Bunjil's Cave facilitated by three Traditional Owner groups, and expert-led workshops exploring Aboriginal art styles across Australia.

Daily work is connected to cultural understanding by consistent engagement, sharing practice, continuous improvement, and developing resources based on community needs through weekly Marrung talks, regular newsletter highlights, and the inclusion of Marrung goals into development plans. This ultimately creates more supportive and culturally responsive educational environments for Aboriginal students.

13. Formerly 'Cultural' Understanding and Safety Training.

Goal 6: Aboriginal learners are engaged at school



Overview

Measures under Goal 6 have varied in performance

In 2024, the apparent retention rate for Aboriginal students in Years 10 to 12 remained low at 57 per cent.

In 2023, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major (VM) and Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) were introduced as part of significant reforms to improve vocational and applied learning in schools. Students mid-way through the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) were able to complete their certificate during the year before it was phased out. In 2023, 619 students completed the VCE, VCAL, VCE VM and VET (Vocational Education Training) in Schools certificate.

In 2024, the data set was updated to reflect completion of the VCE, VCE VM and VPC only, starting a new time series for year 12 completion. In 2024, 636 Aboriginal students completed the VCE, VCE VM and VPC.

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.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 5: In 2021, 68.1 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20–24 years had attained Year 12 or equivalent qualification across Australia, compared to 72.6 per cent in Victoria. Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Data Note



The following measure relies on a dataset that is 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 this measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report.

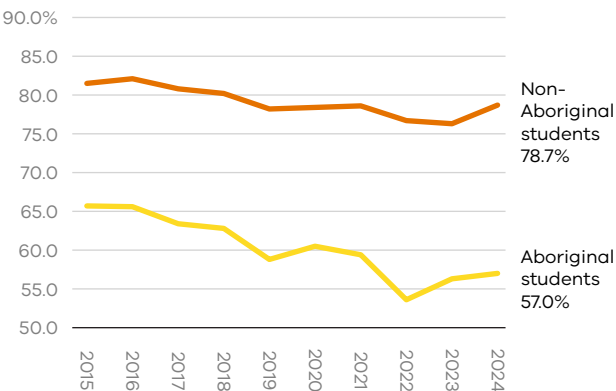
6.1 Increase Year 12 or equivalent attainment

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

Aboriginal students are less likely to remain in school from Year 10 through to Year 12 than non-Aboriginal students. In 2024, the apparent retention rate for Aboriginal students was 57 per cent. While this rate has remained stable since 2023, it has decreased by 8.7 percentage points compared to a decade prior in 2015 when the apparent retention rate was 65.7 per cent, the highest figure recorded between 2010 and 2024. Comparatively, in 2024, the apparent retention rate for non-Aboriginal students was 78.7 per cent. This is a slight increase by 2.4 percentage points since 2023, and a decrease by 2.8 percentage points compared to 2015. The highest apparent retention rate recorded for non-Aboriginal students was 82.1 per cent in 2016.

Aboriginal students are less likely to finish high school than non-Aboriginal students

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



Definition: The apparent retention rate is an indicative measure of the number of full-time school students in a designated year level of schooling as a percentage of their respective cohort group in a base year. For example, the apparent retention rate for Year 10 – Year 12, 2017, is the number of students in Year 12, 2017 as a percentage of the number of students in the Year 10 cohort in 2015 (the base year), two years earlier. Part-time and ungraded students are not included in calculations of apparent retention rates.

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), including VCE Vocational Major, and who complete the Victorian Pathways Certificate

In 2024, 636 Aboriginal students completed VCE, VCE Vocational Major (VM), or the Victorian Pathways Certificate. Over the long term, Aboriginal completion of Year 12 and equivalents has remained relatively steady, averaging around 609 completions over the past ten years, with a high point of 688 completions in 2019. This small decline has coincided with a population increase for late Aboriginal teens aged 10 to 19. This decline has also coincided with decreases in the apparent retention rates of students in Years 10 to 12.

Changes in completions might be affected by several factors, including the implementation of the Senior Secondary Pathways Reform across all local Victorian government senior secondary schools. This suite of reform initiatives has aimed to provide more opportunities for students to pursue their strengths and interests, with an increased number of students participating in VET and gaining valuable workplace skills while completing their Year 12 certificate.

Measure 6.1.3 previously reported on the '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'. The VCE Vocational Major (which includes VET studies) and the Victorian Pathways Certificate were introduced in 2023 to provide improved pathways, VET opportunities, and work-related learning to support students to transition to successful post-school destinations.

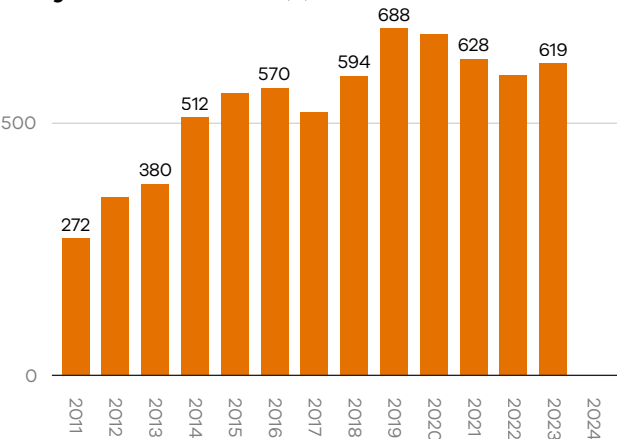
This is a new measure to reflect the number of Aboriginal students who completed a foundation or senior secondary certificate in 2024 and is not able to be compared to Measure 6.1.3 from previous years (2011–2023). The Senior Secondary Pathways Reform is being implemented to improve vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling, and VCAL is no longer available in schools. The VCE Vocational Major (which includes VET studies) and the Victorian Pathways Certificate were introduced in 2023 to provide improved pathways, VET opportunities, and studies for students to develop the literacy, numeracy, work-related and personal skills to transition to successful post-school destinations.

In this report, Measure 6.1.3 has been renamed to the 'Number of Aboriginal students who complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), including VCE Vocational Major and Victorian Pathways Certificate'. This is a significant change to Measure 6.1.3 and 2024 data is not comparable to data reported in previous years (2011–2023).

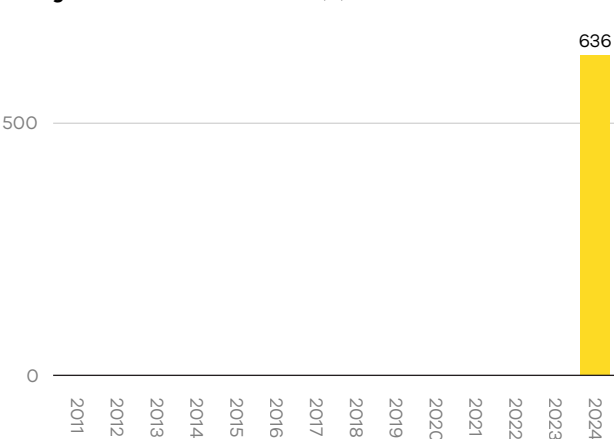
Aboriginal students continue to complete secondary schooling certificates at higher numbers relative to 2011

Measure 6.1.3 Number of Aboriginal students who complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), including VCE Vocational Major and the Victorian Pathways Certificate

Aboriginal students 2011–2023 (n)



Aboriginal students 2024 onwards (n)



The Senior Secondary Pathways Reform is being implemented to improve vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling and the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) is no longer available in schools. Data in 2023 includes Aboriginal students who completed VCE, VCE Vocational Major, VCAL or VET (Vocational Education Training) in Schools Certificate. Data in 2024 includes Aboriginal students who completed VCE, VCE Vocational Major or the Victorian Pathways Certificate only. The data set from 2011–2023 is not directly comparable to the data set from 2024 onwards.

Source: Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).



Goal 7: School leavers achieve their potential

Overview

Measures under Goal 7 have varied in performance

In 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal students aged 18–24 years enrolled in Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies increased at non-university VET providers but remained similar at university providers compared to 2022.

Overall, the proportion of Aboriginal VET graduates aged 20–64 engaged in employment and/or in further study also increased in 2023 but remained consistent for those in government funded programs compared to 2022.

In 2023, the university access rate of Aboriginal students (Aboriginal students as a proportion of total commencing Victorian onshore students) remained similar to the rate in 2022.

For the third year in a row, the number of Aboriginal people employed through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program decreased. In 2024, only 23 Aboriginal people were employed through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program. This is the lowest intake recorded between 2017 and 2024.

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, Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.

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 are available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at 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

Aboriginal Year 12 completers are less likely to be in education or training than non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers. In 2024, 62.8 per cent of Aboriginal Year 12 completers were in education or training. This includes 20.8 per cent in an apprenticeship or traineeship, 29.7 per cent undertaking a bachelor's degree and 12.3 per cent undertaking a certificate or diploma. In the same year 75.9 per cent of non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers were in education or training. This includes 8 per cent in an apprenticeship or traineeship, 57 per cent undertaking a bachelor's degree and 10.9 per cent undertaking a certificate or diploma.

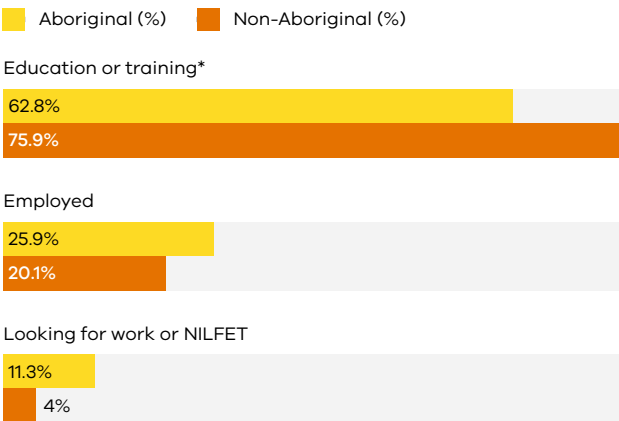
Compared to 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers in an apprenticeship or traineeship increased by 6.4 percentage points whereas the proportion of those undertaking a bachelor's degree or certificate or diploma remained consistent.

Aboriginal Year 12 completers are more likely to be in employment than in education or training compared to non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers. In 2024, the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers in employment was 25.9 per cent and 20.1 per cent respectively. However, between 2023 and 2024 the proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers in employment dropped significantly (down by 11.4 percentage points) compared to non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers (down by 2.3 percentage points).

In 2024, the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers who were looking for work or 'not in labour force, education or training' was 11.3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. Compared to 2023, the proportion increased by 4.1 percentage points for Aboriginal Year 12 completers and remained consistent for non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers.

Aboriginal Year 12 completers are less likely to be in education or training compared to non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers in 2024

Measure 7.1.1 Destinations of year 12 completers

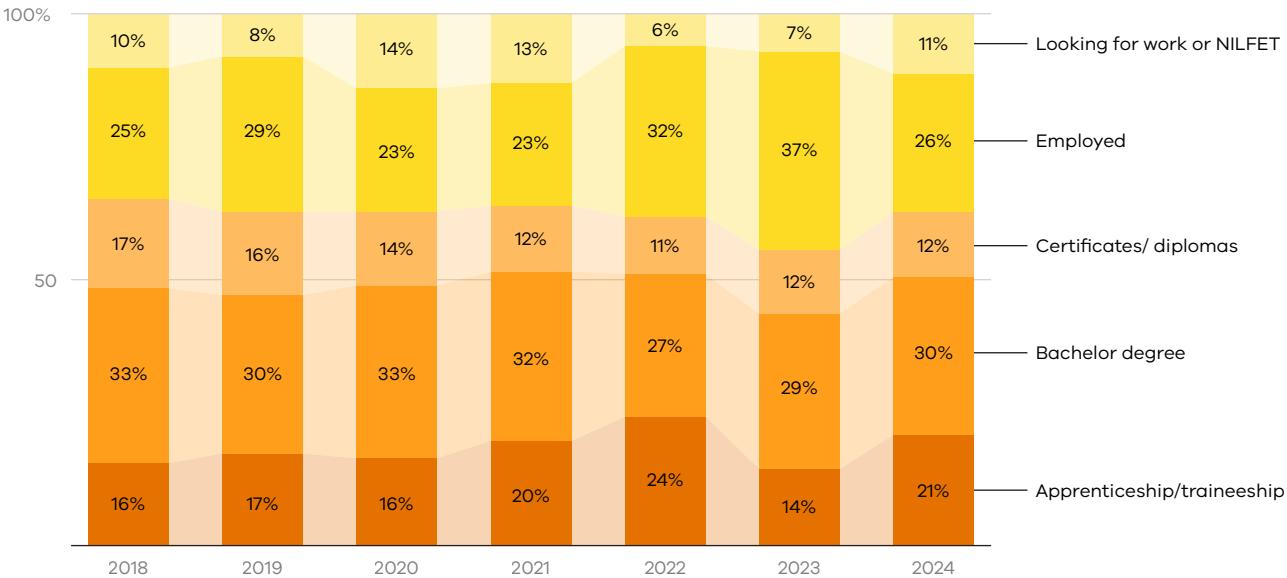


* Includes apprenticeship or traineeship, bachelor's degree and certificate or diploma. NILFET: Not in Labour Force, Education or Training.

Source: OnTrack Survey, Department of Education, Victoria.

The majority of Aboriginal Year 12 completers are in education or training

Measure 7.1.1 Destinations of year 12 completers



NILFET: Not in Labour Force, Education or Training.

Source: OnTrack Survey, Department of Education, Victoria.

Dr Mary Atkinson Scholarship Program

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) continued to partner with Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) to develop and deliver an Aboriginal Tertiary Scholarship Program throughout 2024. The program provided up to 10 scholarships over four years (2021–2024) for Aboriginal students to excel in their studies thus leading them to achieve academic success with more employment opportunities. It is designed to

assist Victorian Aboriginal students by investing in their academic development by offering financial support to undertake full-time study in a broad range of fields related to the portfolio areas of DJSIR. In partnership with VAEAI, DJSIR is committed to investing in building and supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal students to address systemic barriers to education by providing a fortnightly study allowance to ease the financial pressures associated with full-time study.



Transfer power and resources to communities

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

In 2023, 6,063 Aboriginal students enrolled in VET studies. This includes 5,664 enrolled at a non-university VET provider and 399 at a university, which represents 63.8 per cent and 4.5 per cent of the Aboriginal population aged 18–24 respectively. Since 2022, the proportion of enrolments relative to the Aboriginal population aged 18–24 increased by 3.3 percentage points at non-university VET providers and remained stable at universities. Compared to 2015, the proportion of Aboriginal enrolments decreased by 9.9 percentage points at non-university VET providers but increased by 1.6 percentage points at universities.

Aboriginal students are more likely to enrol in VET studies than non-Aboriginal students. In 2023, the proportion of enrolments for non-Aboriginal people relative to the non-Aboriginal population aged 18–24 was 29.6 per cent at non-university providers and 3.8 per cent at universities.

The pandemic experience highlighted the need for holistic supports for Aboriginal students and their families, such as career mentors, pastoral

care, academic assistance, and accessible Koorie Units. Providers noted that access to devices, secure internet connections, and suitable study environments were, and continue to be, crucial for successful participation in VET. Increases in enrolment are associated with support made available under the Wurreeker Strategy through TAFE Koorie Units and may also be attributed to the internal supports offered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACC-RTOs).

Non-Aboriginal students continue to have a higher completion rate for VET studies than Aboriginal students. In 2023, the proportion of completions relative to enrolments for non-Aboriginal people was 26.6 per cent at non-university VET providers and 26.3 per cent at universities. For Aboriginal people, the proportion was 18.4 per cent at non-university VET providers and 14.8 per cent at universities. VET studies provide students with practical and skills-based learning, supporting students into employment and further education. It is important that all students are supported throughout their studies, to increase course completion and improve their job prospects.

The majority of Aboriginal students aged 18–24 years participate in VET studies

Measure 7.1.3a Participation and completion of Victorian 18–24 year olds in VET studies

Non-University

	Enrolments (n)	Completions (n)	Completions as a proportion of enrolments (%)	Enrolments as a proportion of Aboriginal 18–24 year old population (%)	Completions as a proportion of Aboriginal 18–24 year old population (%)
2015	5,790	1,293	22.3%	73.7%	16.5%
2020	6,297	892	14.2%	73.3%	10.4%
2021	5,447	868	15.9%	62.4%	9.9%
2022	5,364	982	18.3%	60.4%	11.1%
2023	5,664	1,041	18.4%	63.8%	11.7%

University

	Enrolments (n)	Completions (n)	Completions as a proportion of enrolments (%)	Enrolments as a proportion of Aboriginal 18–24 year old population (%)	Completions as a proportion of Aboriginal 18–24 year old population (%)
2015	228	54	23.7%	2.9%	0.7%
2020	313	46	14.7%	3.6%	0.5%
2021	322	75	23.3%	3.7%	0.9%
2022	329	56	17%	3.7%	0.6%
2023	399	59	14.8%	4.5%	0.7%

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

The university access rate of Aboriginal students (Aboriginal students as a proportion of total commencing Victorian onshore students) in 2023 is consistent with the rate in 2022 at 1.3 per cent. The attainment rate for Aboriginal students (Award course completions by Aboriginal students as a proportion of total Victorian students who completed an award course) in 2023 is also consistent with the rate in 2022 at 0.9 per cent.

First Peoples engagement in university courses has remained steady

Measure 7.1.3b University access, participation and course completion

	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%
2022	1,186	2,853	1.3%	1.1%	0.9%

(a) Aboriginal students as a proportion of total commencing Victorian onshore students (b) Aboriginal students as a proportion of total Victorian onshore students (c) Award course completions by Aboriginal students as a proportion of total Victorian students who completed an award course.

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

Empowering success: Box Hill Institute's Pastoral Academic and Cultural Support program

Box Hill Institute's (BHI) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit (ATSIU) is the force behind their new case management system, Pastoral Academic and Cultural Support (PACS), designed to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Since its launch in February 2023, it has driven a remarkable 600 per cent increase in student engagement, providing over 553 personalised support sessions to date. Through PACS, students have gained access to a wide range of services, including literacy and numeracy support, mental health and wellbeing resources, scholarship opportunities, and career guidance.

This proactive approach ensures early intervention to overcome academic, personal, and career-related challenges. At the heart

of the program is a unique traffic light system that assesses student needs—red for high need, orange for medium, and green for low. This enables BHI's ATSIU to deliver customised, wraparound support that addresses individual barriers, giving students a greater chance of achieving educational success, employment readiness, and emotional wellbeing.

The PACS program has not only enhanced the quality of support but also deepened BHI's relationships with its students, building trust and creating opportunities for lasting impact. In 2024 alone, PACS supported 342 engagements with 147 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, demonstrating its critical role in empowering students to thrive academically, personally, and professionally. Box Hill Institute is committed to continuing this journey, ensuring every student has the tools and support they need to achieve their full potential.

Measure 71.5 Proportion of 20–64-year-old government-funded and total VET graduates employed and/or in further study after training

Aboriginal VET students are highly likely to be employed or engage in further study after graduating. In 2023, 89.1 per cent of all 20–64-year-old Aboriginal VET graduates were employed and/or in further study. This is the highest proportion recorded between 2016 and 2023 and is a 4.3 percentage point increase since 2022. The proportion of 20–64-year-old Aboriginal VET graduates from government funded programs

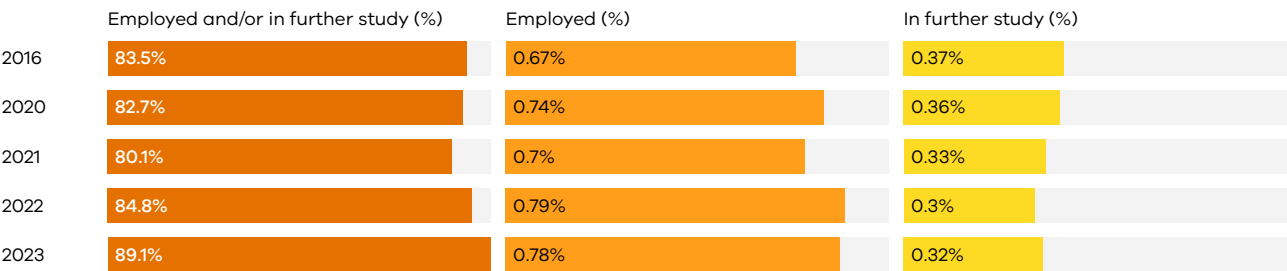
in employment and/or in further study remained consistent in 2023 compared to 2022, at 87.9 per cent. The highest proportion recorded between 2016 and 2023 was in 2016 at 88.9 per cent.

The proportion of 20–64-year-old Aboriginal VET graduates in employment and/or further study is similar to the proportion for 20–64-year-old non-Aboriginal VET graduates in 2023. In 2023, 88.8 per cent of all 20–64-year-old non-Aboriginal VET graduates and 87.6 per cent of non-Aboriginal VET graduates from government funded programs were employed and/or in further study.

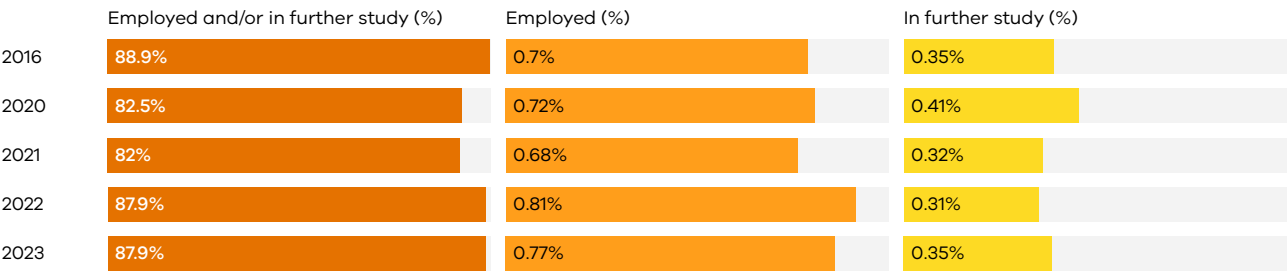
The majority of Aboriginal VET graduates are employed or in further study

Measure 71.5 Proportion of 20–64 year old government-funded and total VET graduates employed and/or in further study after training

Total VET Graduates



Government funded VET Graduates



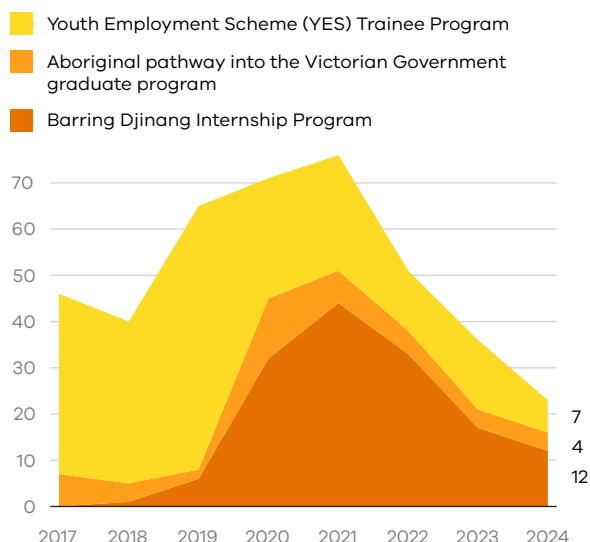
Source: Source: ROGS 2025; Total VET graduates from Table 5A17.

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

For the third year in a row, the number of Aboriginal people employed through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program decreased. In 2024, 23 Aboriginal people were employed through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program. This is the lowest intake between 2017 and 2024 and includes 12 Aboriginal people through the Barring Djinang Internship Program, 4 Aboriginal people through Aboriginal pathway into the Victorian Government graduate program and 7 Aboriginal people through the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) Trainee Program. Of these Aboriginal employees, only 17 remained in or completed their program in 2024. The highest recorded intake of Aboriginal people through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program was in 2021, with 76 Aboriginal people employed.

The number of Aboriginal people employed through a Victorian Government graduate or trainee program in 2024 is the lowest recorded

Measure 7.1.6 Graduates and trainees employed in the VPS



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

Victorian Government Graduate Program Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Pathway, Generalist Stream - Amber's story

"My name is Amber. I'm a proud Wergaia woman from the Wimmera region of Victoria. I studied a Bachelor of Science majoring in zoology.

I completed three rotations throughout my graduate program and really enjoyed gaining insight into what different departments across government do.

Two rotations were in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. I was on the roading team for reducing bushfire risk and also working on policy and procedures surrounding seizure of wildlife.

At the Department of Premier and Cabinet, I was a part of the First Peoples – State Relations team. We organised events such as the Ricci

Marks Awards and the Aboriginal Honour Roll, so it's been amazing to see the diversity within government.

A benefit of going through the Aboriginal pathway has been having that smaller, tight-knit community of other Aboriginal grads. The Aboriginal Staff Network has also really helped me to come out of my shell and remind myself that I have a network of support around me.

So to any of you mob out there thinking of applying, I would really suggest that you research more about it to see if it aligns with your career and employment opportunities and goals. And also, to really just give it a shot.

Being a part of the program has opened me up to some amazing opportunities and I'm proud that I did it. You never know what's going to happen. So just apply, see where it takes you, and keep checking in with mob."

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: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026

Marrung is the key strategy guiding the delivery of the Education State for Koorie Victorians and is underpinned by a commitment to the principle of self-determination. It is a 10-year plan to improve learning and development outcomes for all Koorie Victorians, so that every Koorie learner achieves their potential, succeeds in life, and feels safe and strong in their cultural identity.

The Victorian Government has delivered \$138 million since 2016 and is delivering \$16.7 million ongoing for the implementation of Marrung.

Early Years Education

Balert Gerrbik: Koorie Families as First Educators

There are nine ACCOs funded to deliver evidence-based parenting support through the Balert Gerrbik: Koorie Families as First Educators (KFFE) initiative.

KFFE supports Koorie families to provide a strong foundation for their children's early learning and development through high-quality, culturally safe, evidence-based parenting support (pre-birth to school age, including the transition to school).

ACCOs in identified areas deliver KFFE by employing and supporting Koorie educators to work with parents/carers to build the capacity of Koorie families to support their children's early learning and development.

Bupup balak wayipungang

Bupup balak wayipungang (previously called the Koorie Preschool Assistant program) is a Victorian Government early childhood initiative that has identified several barriers to kindergarten participation that are specific to Koorie communities and children, including the need for improved inclusion of Koorie children and families, and embedding/ensuring Aboriginal perspectives throughout kindergarten services and programs.

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.

Best Start, Best Life

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 2032. In 2026, Pre-Prep will be available for all Aboriginal children across the state. Initiatives include funding for ACCOs and Traditional Owners to work with early childhood services to improve cultural safety and inclusion.

Koorie Kids Shine

Koorie Kids Shine (KKS) promotes the benefits of kindergarten for Koorie children and was launched in 2015 to enable a differentiated approach in communicating the benefits of kindergarten for Koorie children in ways that resonate with families and the broader Koorie community. An evaluation of KKS will take place during 2025 to inform the next phase of KKS through community and stakeholder consultation to ensure it continues to remain relevant and support Aboriginal participation in the expanded offering available to all students through Pre-Prep.

Early Years Engagement Program

The Early Years Engagement Program, introduced in 2024 and delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), builds on the efforts of existing programs and supports by fostering collaboration between kindergartens and local ACCOs. Facilitators connect ACCOs and Traditional Owner organisations with kindergartens to support cultural inclusivity within each service.

School

Self-determination in Education Campfire Conversations

The Department of Education is working with community to progress reform directions identified through Self-determination in Education Campfire Conversations, funded through the 2021–22 and 2022–23 State Budgets. More than 3,000 people participated in the conversations including more than 1,300 Koorie young people. The consultation and co-design process culminated in the Strengthening Aboriginal Self-determination in Education report, which was released in May 2024. The findings of the report underpin ongoing consultation and co-design with community to develop resources and initiatives that improve outcomes for Koorie learners.

The Victorian Government is investing \$51 million in the 2024–25 State Budget to improve outcomes for Koorie students in line with the findings from the Campfire Conversations. This investment includes:

- \$31.0 million over 4 years for Registered Aboriginal Parties and ACCOs to increase their capacity to support education outcomes for Koorie students.
- Locally tailored Koorie curriculum resources and provision of support and professional learning for schools, developed alongside community.
- Resources for schools to enhance their cultural safety.

Strengthening Professional Capability of Principals in Koorie Education

The Strengthening Professional Capability of Principals in Koorie Education program (SPPIKE) has been delivered to 676 participants state-wide.

SPPIKE equips school leaders to have challenging conversations, actively engage the school community and promote positive cultural identity and excellence in schools. The program supports school and systems transformation that includes and promotes Koorie culture as a fundamental element of the Victorian education system. It seeks to develop school leaders' capacity to incorporate traditional knowledge and perspectives into ways of being and use them to enhance all students' learning experiences. Through this professional development program, school leaders are supported to develop the tools to enhance their leadership capacity, challenge their assumptions, and contribute to the critical mass of leaders, creating a positive climate for change in education.

Koorie Academy of Excellence

The Koorie Academy of Excellence continues to be delivered in four locations across Victoria. It supports Koorie secondary students in remaining engaged in education and offers opportunities to connect with culture, grow their leadership, and pursue their desired tertiary pathway. Its development and implementation are overseen in partnership with the Victorian Koorie community, including VAEAI, the Victorian Government's principal partner in Koorie education.

Additional literacy and numeracy support

The Department of Education provides both universal programs and targeted supports to improve Koorie education outcomes.

Under Marrung, the Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program provides additional literacy and numeracy support for all Koorie students in government primary schools, who are assessed as 'needs additional support' in NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy.

Additional literacy and numeracy supports are also provided to eligible Koorie students through the Tutor Learning Initiative and 'Catch-Up' funding.

Community Understanding and Safety Training

Community Understanding and Safety Training for all Victorian Government schools continues to build the capacity of government school staff to better support Koorie learners, including through developing more culturally inclusive practices. School staff at 1,564 Victorian government school campuses have completed this training.

Anti-racism professional learning program

The Victorian Government is increasing awareness of racism and its impacts in schools through the Anti-racism professional learning program which received \$412,750 in 2023–24. The learning program also provides participating school staff access to the Australian Human Rights' Commission's Anti-racism eLearn course. To date, over 2,700 participants have enrolled in the eLearn course.

Koorie Education Working Group

A Koorie Education Working Group is supporting the cross-sectoral School Policy and Funding Advisory Council in its priority for Koorie students: *collaborate on raising aspirations and achievement for Koorie students, including implementing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*.

Four sub-working groups have been established to support this work, to focussing on embedding Koorie perspectives in the curriculum, supporting schools in meeting Child Safe Standard 1 (Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued), improving Koorie school attendance and engagement, and developing the Koorie workforce.

Skills and Employment

First Nation's Languages

Aboriginal language programs are increasing in demand in Victorian schools and early childhood services. A significant barrier to this growth is the limited number of available Aboriginal community members to teach these programs. New Certificate II and III in Learning an Australian First Nations Language courses were funded under a 2021–22 State Budget 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. As a result of a partnership between the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, VAEI and Swinburne University of Technology, courseware for the following First Nations Language courses have been developed with delivery expected in 2025:

- 10890NAT Certificate II in Learning an Australian First Nation's Language.
- 10891NAT Certificate III in Learning an Australian First Nation's Language.
- 10892NAT Certificate IV Teaching an Australian First Nation's Language.

Aspiring Koorie Teachers Now

Implementation of the Aspiring Koorie Teachers Now, or AKT Now, program commenced in July 2024 as part of the Department of Education's commitment to support and grow the schools' workforce. Funded through the 2023–24 State Budget, the program was established to attract and retain new and returning First Nations people into the workforce and to support First Nations candidates to complete qualifications in education whilst undertaking paid employment in schools.

AKT Now will provide training, fixed-term employment and wrap-around supports for up to 160 First Nations participants over the next three years in their choice of pathways for Certificate IV, undergraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) studies, or postgraduate ITE studies, for employment in the teaching profession or in education support roles. The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) has been engaged to work with Holmesglen TAFE to deliver a Certificate IV in School Based Education Support, with the first cohort commencing in early 2025.

Learners will be provided with wraparound support from AFL SportsReady and opportunities to connect with other Koorie teachers and education support staff.

The program also actively works to re-engage First Nations teachers (who are not currently teaching) back into the teaching workforce, through financial incentives and other supports.

Actions to strengthen inclusion and cultural safety for existing First Nations staff across the Department of Education are set out in Dhelk Wukang 2022–2026. The Department of Education's Aboriginal Employment Plan 2020–2026 is a key action under Dhelk Wukang, and includes strategies designed to make the department an employer of choice for First Nations staff. In particular, and as described in detail in the previous report, the department's Koorie Staff Network continues to strengthen, with continually increasing numbers of First Nations staff accessing the opportunity to connect, share experiences and access professional development through this forum.

Supporting First Nations Vocational Education and Training Learners and Workforce in Victoria

Wurreker Funding totalling \$5.19 million per annum is provided across the TAFE network (including Dual Sector Universities) to support improved vocational education and training (VET) outcomes for First Nations learners. Funding is primarily used to support the employment of Koorie Liaison Officers (KLOs) and Koorie Student Support Officers (KSSOs) within institutions. The KLOs and KSSOs work with TAFEs and dual sector universities to support First Nations VET learners. This includes providing tailored support and mentoring to individual students, guiding community engagement activities, contributing to internal workforce development strategies, and building cultural competency within the broader VET workforce.

The activities of KLOs and KSSOs are guided by a Wurreker Implementation Plan (WIP). Consistent with a self-determined approach, VET institutes develop their WIP in consultation with Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. As the peak body for First Nations education in Victoria, \$1.743 million per annum is provided to VAEAI to support the organisation and its Wurreker Brokers to advocate for Aboriginal Victorians in matters related to education across the state and through the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) in the regions.

Victorian Skills Plan

The Victorian Skills Plan Implementation Update for 2024 was released in December alongside the release of the new Victorian Skills Plan for 2024 into 2025. The update included an overview of progress on Skill Plan Action 14: "Empower self-determination for First Nations peoples", highlighting developments and activities across schools, Learn Locals, and TAFEs as well as a case study featuring the Koorie Student of the Year at the 2024 Victorian Training Awards, Taylor Hampton.

The Ministerial Statement (Statement) on the Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020–2025

The Statement was released by the Minister for Training and Skills in November 2019 and recognises the important place of adult community education in Victoria as part of an integrated post-secondary system and establishes a crucial role for the Adult, Community and Further Education (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.

Supporting Koorie Self-Determination in Pre-accredited Training project

The Koorie Education in Learn Locals: Best Practice and Protocols was developed by VAEAI in partnership with the ACFE Board as a part of the Self Determination in Learn Local Koorie Education initiative. The objective of this partnership is to increase and retain Koorie participation through supportive and culturally inclusive learning environments and include local Koorie histories, culture and perspectives across the curriculum of each Learn Local provider for the benefit of all students. The Minister for Skills and TAFE co-launched the document with VAEAI in April 2024.

Hard copies of the document and posters have been distributed to all Learn Local providers and e-copies made available for Learn Locals. The Department for Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions is currently engaging with VAEAI on the creation of professional development information sessions for Learn Local providers on implementing the protocols and principles in the Guide, to support self-determination and cultural safety in ACFE/Learn Local training delivery.

The Department for Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions is also working to ensure that the protocols and principles outlined in the Guide underpin the development of other ACFE Board projects.

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 and made available for Learn Local practitioners.

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 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.

The program includes First Nations participants, providing targeted support to help them overcome barriers to accessing education, training, and employment, and guiding them toward further study or sustainable career pathways. This includes supporting Aboriginal self-determination and collaboration with community organisations, leveraging culturally appropriate resources, and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Reconnect providers deliver a range of supports, including counselling, mentoring, and housing and accommodation services. Each year, the program is funded to assist over 1,700 participants by offering wrap-around supports and interventions to address non-vocational barriers that may hinder their ability to achieve their full potential.

Skills First Aboriginal Access Fee Waiver

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 seeks 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. As of September 2024, 1,940 First Peoples had accessed the fee waiver representing a 9 per cent increase in First Nations learners enrolled in VET courses.

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 in 2024. 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 million over four years with \$440,000 ongoing.

Skills First funded training provider

Throughout the second half of 2024, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions worked closely with Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Incorporated to support an application to become a Skills First funded training provider for 2025. Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Incorporated's submission was successful, and a VET Funded Contract has been awarded for 2025. This means that all Victorian ACC-RTOs are now funded to deliver training under the Skills First program.

Consultation with First Nations communities, leaders, and TAFEs

Throughout 2024, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and VAEAI continued to engage with TAFE and registered training providers to discuss the trends and qualitative factors underpinning First Peoples participation and completion in VET. As part of that process, the partnership approach with First Peoples was expanded and embedded in the implementation

of the National Skills Agreement. Four ACCOs with expertise in learning, skills and training, and culture joined the Victorian Government in formal partnership to represent the aspirations, needs, and priorities of First Peoples in Victoria's VET sector.

The partners include VAEAL and the members of the Victorian First Nations VET Alliance. The Alliance formed in 2024 and brings together three ACC-RTOs with a combined 55 years of experience in VET across health, community services, and early childhood education and care – the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd and Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Incorporated.

The diverse expertise of each partner has been drawn upon to co-develop the Jurisdictional Action Plans and Bilateral Implementation Plans under the National Skills Agreement. Consultations in 2024 built on the insights generated in 2023 – participation and enrolment rates, student outcomes, course and location preferences, gender, intersections with departmental programs and funding, and key drivers for VET pathways. In 2024, partners continued to explore these areas and expanded the focus to include workforce issues, cultural safety, and how to build the sustainability and capability of ACC-RTOs. The themes of 2024 consultations are captured in Victoria's Jurisdictional Action Plan and will be published by the Commonwealth in early 2025.

Yani Bangal Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Careers Strategy 2023–2028 (Yani Bangal)

A key focus for the Department for Transport and Planning in 2023–24 was implementation of the Yani Bangal Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Careers Strategy 2023–2028 (Yani Bangal), which was launched during Reconciliation Week in 2023. Yani Bangal is underpinned by a minimum 2 per cent First Peoples employment target and includes 42 actions. Of the 42 actions, 15 are completed (some ongoing), and 13 are in progress. Some of the key actions completed in 2023–24 include:

- Continued delivery of the Yani Bangal Scholarship Program.
- Establishment of the First Peoples Staff Reference Group.
- Launch of the Cultural Safety Framework.
- The annual First Peoples Staff Conference in May 2024.

In June 2024, Yani Bangal First Peoples Scholarship Program provided 18 scholarships in total to nine secondary school students, eight university students and one TAFE student. This was the largest intake of university students to date, with a strong focus on providing career opportunities and employment pathways into the transport and planning sector.

The Program is funded by entities across the Transport and Planning Portfolio, with agencies contributing \$152,000 per annum in shared pooled funding. In January 2024, the program was extended for a further three years until 2026.

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.

Since its inception in 2020, a total of 60 scholarships have been awarded, comprising of 45 secondary school, two TAFE and 13 university scholarships.

In May 2024, the Department of Transport and Planning hosted the third annual Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Staff Conference, held on Wadawurrung Country in Torquay. The conference was attended by 32 First Peoples employees from across the Transport and Planning Portfolio, including the Department of Transport and Planning, the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, Suburban Rail Loop Authority, V/Line, Development Victoria, Yarra Trams, and Metro Trains. It provided First Peoples staff with a chance to connect, network, participate in cultural and professional development workshops, and encourage relationship building, enabling better peer-to-peer support.

Domain 3: Opportunity & Prosperity



Our shared commitment

Building opportunity and economic prosperity for all Aboriginal Victorians.

Fully participating in the economy provides Aboriginal Victorians with the resources they need to self-determine their future. The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Aboriginal Victorian workers, employers and businesses to thrive, including supporting them to recover from the 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

Only one measure under Goal 8 had new data at the time of reporting.

- **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.

Procurement of goods, services and construction from Aboriginal businesses is important to support economic participation and prosperity for Aboriginal Victorians.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 8

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

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



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.

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

8.3 Increase Aboriginal business ownership and support Aboriginal entrepreneurs

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

In 2023–24, 0.2 per cent of Victorian government purchase agreements were with Aboriginal businesses. This procurement represented 113 Aboriginal businesses receiving a combined total of \$51.3 million. When looking at procurement over the long term the Victorian Government is spending more money with Aboriginal businesses than in 2020–21 and 2021–22 combined.

In 2022–23 there was a refinement to the reporting criteria for identifying Aboriginal businesses in scope for the reporting period to align it to the Social

Procurement Framework (SPF). The SPF establishes requirements that apply to Victorian Government departments and agencies when they procure goods, services and construction. 'Opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people' and 'Sustainable Victorian social enterprise and Aboriginal business sectors' are objectives in the SPF and seek the following outcomes:

- Purchasing from Victorian Aboriginal businesses.
- Employment of Victorian Aboriginal people by suppliers to the Victorian Government.
- Purchasing from Victorian social enterprises.

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

Measure 8.3.2.a 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

	Number of Victorian Aboriginal businesses	Total procurement amount (\$)	Proportion relative to all Victorian Government procurement of small to medium enterprises (%)
2018–19	94	\$16,700,000	0.4%
2019–20	127	\$46,100,000	0.6%
2020–21	129	\$21,200,000	0.7%
2021–22	129	\$21,600,000	0.7%
2022–23			

Includes Victorian Aboriginal businesses, Traditional Owner Groups, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations and Aboriginal Trusts.

Source: Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions.

Aboriginal businesses that government enters into a purchase agreement with as a proportion of all enterprises government enters into a purchase agreement with

Measure 8.3.2.b Aboriginal businesses that government enters into a purchase agreement with as a proportion of all enterprises government enters into a purchase agreement with

	Number of Victorian Aboriginal businesses	Total procurement amount (\$)	Proportion of all government procurement (%)
2023–24	113	\$51,300,000	0.2%

Financial Year 2023–24 includes only those Victorian Aboriginal businesses certified with Kinaway Chamber of Commerce and/or Supply Nation, per the Victorian Government Social Procurement Framework reporting guidelines.

Source: Department of Government Services.

Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre

Regional Development Victoria has partnered with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) on the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre project. The name 'Nyaal Banyul, meaning 'open your eyes to the hills', was gifted by WTOAC, inspired by a project narrative crafted by WTOAC about baierr, the Wadawurrung term for what many know as corroboree.

The Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre will include the construction of the purpose-built convention and exhibition space, incorporating a 1,000 seat venue, two large exhibition spaces, meeting rooms, conference facilities and flexible event spaces. Partnership with WTOAC has involved a thorough co-design process from the project's early stages, including

establishing a set of design principles to guide the project team, ensuring that our goals and ambitions align strongly with the WTOAC's 'Caring for Country' plan. WTOAC engaged in an interactive tender process with potential consortium partners and organised a 'walk on Country' to highlight the project's connection to the land, while also fostering awareness and educating the site workforce about the Traditional Owners and the site's history.

All approvals were obtained in late 2023, and main construction works began in early 2024. Nyaal Banyul has set an Aboriginal Victorian business spending target of at least 1 per cent of total construction cost and employment targets for Aboriginal Victorians of at least 1 per cent of total hours worked. Several First Peoples candidates have also participated in the project's bespoke trainee and apprenticeship program.

Upgrade infrastructure and the nature reserve at Tower Hill near Warrnambool

Regional Development Victoria has partnered with Parks Victoria who engaged with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) to upgrade infrastructure and the nature reserve at Tower Hill near Warrnambool. The \$6.7 million project was completed in 2024 and includes conservation works for the Robin Boyd-designed visitor centre and upgrades to amenities including enhanced trails, a new viewing platform and signage to celebrate Eastern Maar's connection to Koroitj – a significant Aboriginal cultural site. An upgraded dance ground with a new shelter that will support cultural events and celebrations by Traditional Owner communities has also been completed.

The upgraded visitor centre and cultural event infrastructure will provide economic opportunities for Traditional Owners as well as employment and skill opportunities through the visitor centre. Collaboration with EMAC on the project included aligning the project scope to best support future management of the reserve. The project also included EMAC representation in decision-making, site visits, and cultural heritage protection. EMAC were also engaged on the development of the dance ground and interpretive materials.

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



Overview

Measures under Goal 9 have varied in performance

In 2024, the proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the Victorian Public Service (VPS) at VPS 6 level and above was consistent with the proportion of the Aboriginal population in Victoria (11 per cent) and increased by 0.1 percentage points since 2023. The proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the VPS level 6 and above as a proportion of all Aboriginal VPS staff decreased from 18.3 per cent in 2023 to 13.7 per cent in 2024.

In 2024, the proportion of Aboriginal people on Victorian Government boards was more than double the proportion of the Aboriginal population in Victoria (2.6 per cent). This is an increase by 0.4 percentage points since 2023.

Progress against the number of jobseekers supported into work has decreased significantly. This may be partially influenced by a reduction in investments in employment services to pre-pandemic levels.

The Victorian Government has invested \$8.6 million from the 2024–25 State Budget, on top of the initial \$25 million funding envelope, to continue implementation of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy (Invest in Tomorrow) – Victoria's bold plan to address inequality and build Aboriginal economic parity within a generation.

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 9.3.1d:** Workforce participation by regional 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.

9.1 Increase Aboriginal workforce participation

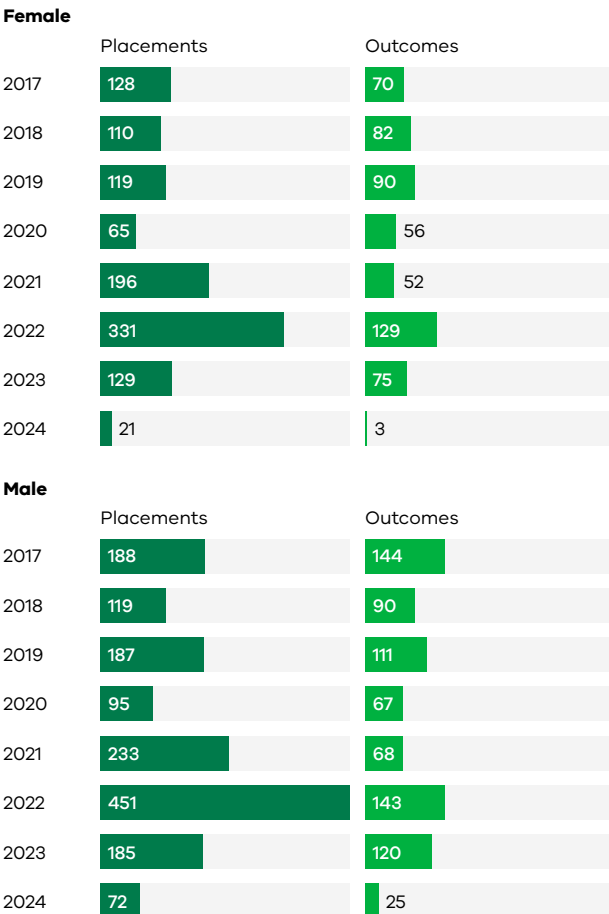
Measure 9.1.3. Aboriginal jobseekers supported into work

In 2024, 21 Aboriginal women and 72 Aboriginal men were supported into job placements. In 2023, 129 Aboriginal women and 185 Aboriginal men were supported. This is the second significant decrease in supported job placements since 2022. In 2024, 3 Aboriginal women and 25 Aboriginal men were supported to achieve 26-weeks of employment. Compared to 2023, this is a decrease by 72 Aboriginal women and 95 Aboriginal men.

Although investments in employment services have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the number of Aboriginal Victorians supported into job placements and supported to achieve 26-weeks of employment is the lowest recorded by the Report. The objectives of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy are focused on addressing inequality and build Aboriginal economic parity within a generation. The Victorian Government has invested \$8.6 million from the 2024–25 State Budget, on top of the initial \$25 million funding envelope, to continue implementation of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy.

The number of Aboriginal job seekers supported to achieve 26-weeks of employment is the lowest ever recorded

Measure 9.1.3 Aboriginal jobseekers supported into work



(a) Program commenced in October 2016. (b) Figures for 2023 were revised to include participants that gained placements and outcomes prior to relevant services being renewed in the 2023–24 State Budget.

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

Yuma Yirramboi Program

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions' (DJSIR) Aboriginal Economic Development branch (AED) was allocated \$25 million in funding over two years from 2022–2024 and an additional \$8.6 million from the 2024–25 State Budget to support the implementation of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy. The Yuma Yirramboi Program (the Program) was developed to deliver on DJSIR's commitment to the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy that supports wealth creation and achieving economic parity for Aboriginal Victorians within a generation. The program is designed to achieve outcomes under the departmental strategy to support Aboriginal economic development, by providing a coordinated, consistent, and long-term approach to supporting Aboriginal Business growth and economic development in Victoria. The program delivers on the Victorian Government's commitments to the National Agreement on

Closing the Gap, self-determination and Treaty Readiness. Outcomes achieved include:

- Addressing the lack of capital investment available to Victorian Aboriginal business owners.
- Innovation grants to 10 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.



Transfer power and resources to communities



9.4 Increase Aboriginal leadership and representation across all sectors and levels

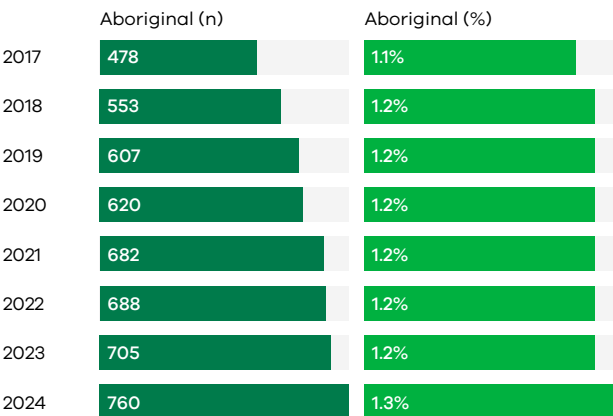
Measure 9.4.2 Aboriginal employees within the Victorian Public Service (VPS)

The proportion of Aboriginal employees in the VPS has increased by 0.1 percentage points in 2024, totalling to 1.3 per cent. This represents 760 Aboriginal employees. In the same year, 66.4 per cent of employees in the VPS chose not to respond to the question 'Are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?' or were not directly asked the question.

In 2025, the Victorian Public Sector Commission released the Barring Djinang First Peoples Workforce Development Framework which sets out the refreshed approach to improving First Peoples workforce outcomes under the previous Barring Djinang strategy. The previous Barring Djinang strategy adopted a target that by 2022, employment of Aboriginal people in the Victorian public sector will increase to 2 per cent of total employees. Victoria has not met this target, with the proportion growing by 0.2 percentage points since 2017.

Number of Aboriginal VPS staff continue to grow with VPS

Measure 9.4.2 Proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the VPS (with 2 per cent target by 2022)



Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's First Peoples Women's Forum

The second First Peoples Women's Forum was attended by 21 women on Taungurung Country at Holmesglen, Eildon in September 2024, hosted by the Aboriginal Employment and Development team. The First Peoples Women's Forum supports the career development and retention of DEECA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female workforce. It aims to do so by creating a space for Aboriginal female staff to connect, share knowledge, experiences and learn new skills as well as build on career aspirations. Workshops were conducted by First Peoples women on: financial planning and literacy; weaving and yarning; an earth, mind, body, and spirit 'Wuurkshop'; and a weaving radical self-care with First Nations wisdom workshop. The women enjoyed the safe space to yarn and talk about life as a First Peoples woman. The Aboriginal Employment and Development team has committed to ensuring the women can continue to connect and support each other through the establishment of a First Peoples Women's Network.



Transfer power and resources to communities

Implementation of Aboriginal Cultural Safety as part of the Aboriginal workforce strategy 2021–2026

People and Culture, Corporate and Delivery Services lead the internal implementation of Aboriginal Cultural Safety in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) as part of the Aboriginal workforce strategy 2021–2026, Anti-Racism Action Plan 2024–2027 and Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework. The program of work is focused on building internal cultural capability and removing systemic barriers. This includes the delivery of the full Aboriginal Cultural Safety Curriculum including mandatory development for all staff, the Aboriginal staff network and conferences,

wellbeing projects and allyship programs. Tailored supports are provided to Aboriginal staff through DFFH's Aboriginal Social and Emotional Employee Wellbeing Program by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

The development and introduction of a new Aboriginal Cultural Safety workplace monitoring tool uses data driven index ratings to ensure that DFFH can monitor how it is tracking against Cultural Safety implementation and focus on priority areas for improvement. All programs of work are led by First Nations staff and businesses to ensure self-determination and cultural expertise are embedded in DFFH's ways of working.

Address racism and promote cultural safety



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

In 2024, Aboriginal employees made up 11 per cent of employees at VPS grade 6 and above. This represented 125 Aboriginal employees and is an increase by 0.1 percentage points since 2023. Relative to all Aboriginal employees in the VPS, Aboriginal employees at VPS grade 6 and above made up 16.4 per cent. This is a decrease by 1.9 percentage points since 2023.

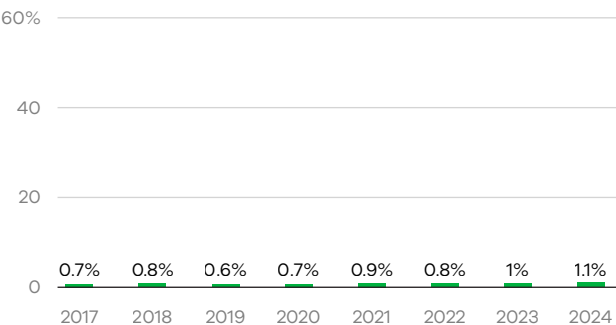
In 2024, the proportion of non-Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above increased to 31.8 per cent, which represented 3,698 non-Aboriginal employees. The proportion of non-Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above relative to all non-Aboriginal employees decreased in the same year to 20 per cent.

In 2024, 67.2 per cent of employees at VPS Grade 6 and above chose not to respond to the request 'Are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' or were not directly asked the question.

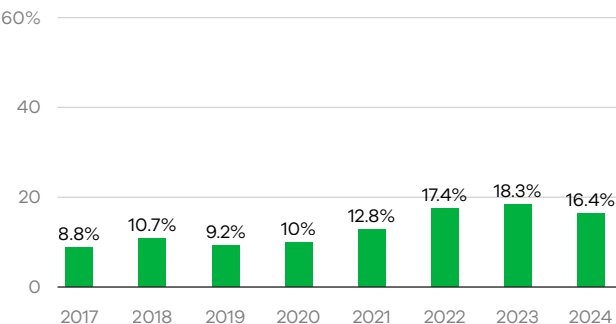
Proportion of Aboriginal leaders in the VPS relative to all Aboriginal VPS employees declines for first time since 2019

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

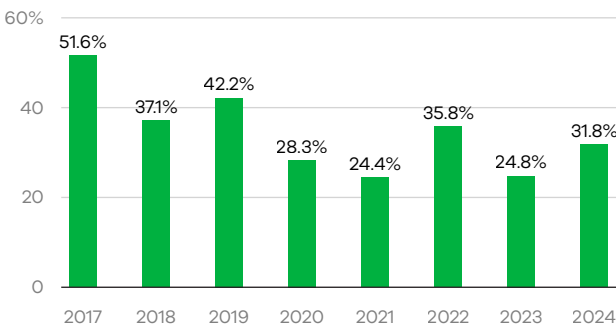
Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above (%)



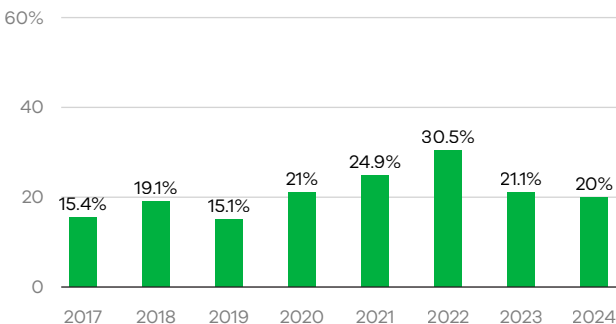
Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above relative to all Aboriginal employees (%)



Non-Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above (%)



Non-Aboriginal employees at VPS Grade 6 and above relative to all non-Aboriginal employees (%)



Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records.

Barring Djinang First Peoples' leadership program

In the Barring Djinang First Peoples' leadership program, participants learn from high-profile First Nations leaders in a culturally safe environment, access individual and group coaching sessions and attend a 3-day leadership residential course featuring learning and development, coaching, mentoring, and cultural activities.

This program is open to First Nations people from the Victorian public sector, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Victorian Traditional Owner groups.

Participant Lindi Dietzel, Senior Adviser – Aboriginal Partnerships and Practice West,

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, was asked about her experience of the program:

"As a result of the program I can move forward deeply-grounded in Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and working with more confidence and self-determination, not just professionally but personally as well."

We asked what effective leadership means to her:

"Effective leadership is the ability to successfully influence and support yourself, a team or groups of people in many different spaces. It's much more than just delegating from the top."

The program builds and supports leadership skills for First Peoples employees within the Victorian public sector and community.



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

In 2024, Aboriginal members made up 2.6 per cent and non-Aboriginal members made up 63.4 per cent of all Victoria Government board members. These proportions translated to 164 Aboriginal members and 4,008 non-Aboriginal members. Compared to 2017, the proportion of Aboriginal members on Victorian Government boards more than doubled.

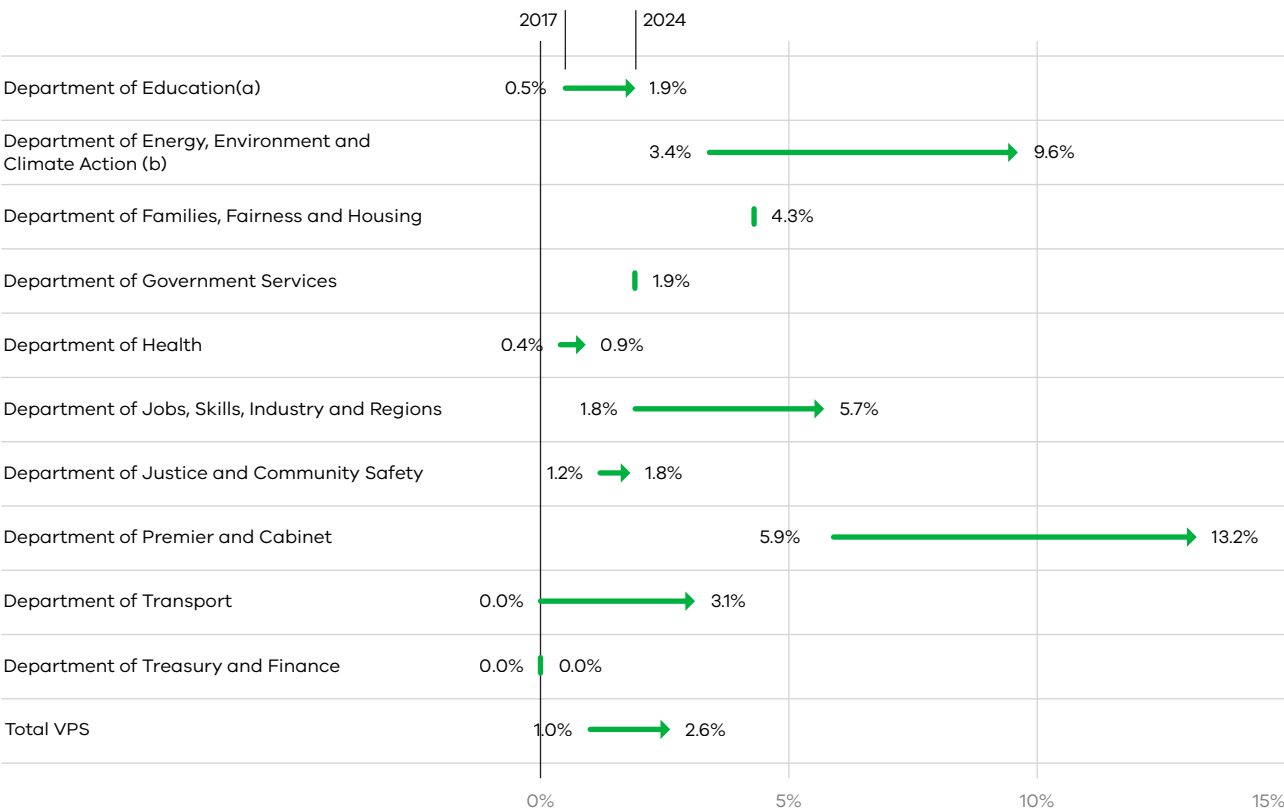
The three departments with the highest proportion of Aboriginal representation on their boards in 2024 were the Department Premier and Cabinet (13.2 per cent), the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (9.6 per cent) and the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (5.7 per cent).

Departments with less than 1 per cent of Aboriginal representation on their boards in 2024 were the Department of Treasury and Finance (0 per cent) and the Department of Health (0.9 per cent).

Boards are more effective when they represent the diverse voices of the community. When Aboriginal people are not represented on Victorian Government boards, they are excluded from significant opportunities to design and share strategic policy and program directions.¹⁴ 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 Victorian Government boards, not just Aboriginal specific boards.

Aboriginal representation on Victorian Government boards has more than doubled since 2017

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



(a) Excludes school councils (b) Excludes small committees.

Source: Victorian Public Service Commission internal records.

14. Diversity on Victorian Government Boards Guidelines, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/diversity-victorian-government-board-guidelines/key-considerations-cohorts/aboriginal-people> >

Women Leading Locally program

Born and raised on Yorta Yorta land in Greater Shepparton, Marie Barbance feels a deep connection to family and her community.

"Dad lived off the land in the Shepparton Flats. I'm a bush kid, so the Flats are still my go-to place for serenity and when I need that deep connection to country."

This connection led Marie to join Women Leading Locally, a Local Government Victoria program that equips women with the skills, knowledge and connections to run for local council.

While she's already familiar with local government through her role as OHS Team Leader with Greater Shepparton City Council, Women Leading Locally has provided Marie with a unique opportunity to hear from CEOs, mayors and councillors across Victoria about their local government journeys.

Marie is enthusiastic about Women Leading Locally because she believes her community needs good leaders and fair representation.

"This [Yorta Yorta] region has a rich history, and we need effective representation and meaningful change that recognises and supports our people."



Goal 10: Aboriginal income potential is realised



Overview

Measures under Goal 10

No new data was available at the time of 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.

Ngarrimili - Empowering First Nations Women in Business

Empowering First Nations Women in Business delivered by Ngarrimili aims to provide business and entrepreneurship support to Aboriginal women located in regional, rural and metropolitan areas to build economic prosperity within their families and communities.

While the proportion of Aboriginal women in employment has steadily increased since 2021, Aboriginal women face distinct barriers to economic participation that are not experienced by all women. Aboriginal women are more likely to be carers, not only to their own children, but to extended family and community members, and are likely to experience racism, discrimination and a lack of cultural safety within the school system. This can impact self-confidence and consequently consideration of post school pathways. Within this context, Ngarrimili seeks to empower Aboriginal women economically by providing business and entrepreneurship support to Aboriginal women across Victoria.

Ngarrimili's vision is to foster generational wealth and a sustainable First Peoples economy through the development and implementation of programs, frameworks, and strategies that understand and meet the needs of First Peoples businesses, entrepreneurs, creatives, not-for-profit organisations and communities. Ngarrimili has a community vision to conduct business in a way that creates opportunities for First Peoples and communities. This celebrates culture, Country and showcases sustainable practice, supports for young people and fosters generational wealth.

In 2024, Ngarrimili supported more than 40 Aboriginal women business owners, creatives and entrepreneurs. This was achieved through tailored one-to-one support and mentoring. Women were able to attend six workshops focusing on confidence, goal setting, leadership and other transferable skills. All key areas of business development and wellbeing are delivered through a lens of culture and connection.

As part of evaluative reflections from the 2024 participant cohort, it was found that online workshop fatigue was being felt by participants. As a result of this, program delivery was adjusted to focus on face-to-face workshops, including in person business support activations and resources.

The program has created a strong network of Aboriginal women in business, through a culturally safe and wellbeing focused program which recognises the importance of peer-to-peer mentoring. It fostered a supportive environment for Aboriginal women entrepreneurs through targeted, business and mentoring initiatives, helped build confidence in participants and furthered the skills participants needed to pursue employment and establish a small business. It has enabled knowledge sharing, offered mentorship with and within community and furthered job opportunities within communities. The inclusion of cultural supports ensures that participants feel connected to their heritage and identity, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.



Transfer power and resources to communities

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.

Industry, Trade and Investment

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 in procurement are not solely focused on price but also on opportunities to deliver social and sustainable outcomes that benefit the Victorian community.

One of the objectives of the SPF is 'Opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people'. This objective seeks two outcomes:

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

Victorian Government procurement professionals play a significant role in creating social value and opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people through the adoption of targeted procurement strategies.

A key partner in supporting the delivery of the SPF objective 'Opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people' is the Kinaway Chamber of Commerce. Kinaway certifies Victorian Aboriginal businesses. Kinaway also provides culturally informed business support to Victorian Government buyers and advice to Victorian Aboriginal businesses to improve visibility, strengthen relationships and create opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal businesses.

Government buyers have access to social procurement e-training via the Procurement Knowledge Hub, and updated SPF guidance to support them in applying meaningful targets and SPF commitments in procurement processes and contracts.

Appointment of a dedicated Aboriginal Industry Adviser with the Industry Capability Network Victoria

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions has funded the appointment of a dedicated Aboriginal Industry Advisor with the Industry Capability Network (ICN) Victoria during 2024–25. The role is dedicated to advancing opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to participate in Local Jobs First projects and developing a supply chain directory with Victorian Aboriginal businesses across all sectors in the economy. The Local Jobs First Policy, legislated through the *Local Jobs First Act 2003*, ensures that small and medium-sized enterprises in Victoria, including Aboriginal owned and operated businesses, are given a full and fair opportunity to compete for both large and small government contracts. Local Jobs First, through the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, also provides opportunities to Victorian apprentices, trainees and cadets to work on high-value government construction projects; this includes opportunities for Aboriginal apprentices, trainees and cadets. With the dedicated resource, ICN can undertake more targeted engagement with Aboriginal businesses to ensure they are aware of, and able to access, the significant industry and employment opportunities created through Local Jobs First.

International Trade

In February 2024, Global Victoria partnered with the Aboriginal Economic Development (AED) group in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to deliver an Aboriginal Food and Beverage Trade Mission to Aotearoa New Zealand. The five participating businesses met with key industry figures to develop connections and export readiness and gain market intelligence. Global Victoria also provided advisory support to further initiatives under the AED Events and International Trade Program and worked to increase the participation rate of Aboriginal Businesses in existing Global Victoria programs. These initiatives support the Business and Wealth Creation streams of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy. AED and Global Victoria have a Partnership Agreement in place to articulate how the two areas work collectively to support First Nations business to be involved in trade initiatives. The agreement also supports robust and consistent program delivery, with appropriate governance and clear roles and responsibilities. AED and Global Victoria continued to participate in the cross-jurisdictional First Nations Working Group, which was established under the Ministerial Council on Trade and Investment and includes representatives from all states and territories. This included coordinating Victoria's input to the National Statement on First Nations Trade and Investment, which is expected to be finalised in 2025.

Business Victoria's Small Business Bus Visits - Indigenous Business Month Expos

Business Victoria's Small Business Bus supports planning, starting or growing small businesses. It helps business owners to develop business ideas and capabilities. The Small Business Bus is equipped with expert advisers to provide general business assistance. In 2024, Business Victoria partnered with Ngarrimili and Kinaway Chamber of Commerce to support Aboriginal businesses in Victoria during Indigenous Business Month 2024 through the Small Business Bus being onsite for Kinaway: Deadly in Gippsland First Nations Business Expo on 25 October 2024 and Mildura Indigenous Business Expo on 29 October 2024.

Collaboration – Aboriginal business support

During 2024–25, Small Business Victoria (SBV) worked in close collaboration with AED to support the establishment of two programs to support Aboriginal businesses access resources that will help to sustain or grow their business:

- Aboriginal Business Support Program (Grants between \$5K and \$10K).
- Aboriginal Business Growth Program (Grants between \$10K and \$100K).

This collaboration ensured the programs were designed to align with the aspirations of the Aboriginal community, complement other available supports for small business, and maximise the potential benefit and reach of the programs. SBV continued to work with AED on program delivery, including related communications and supporting the assessment of applications consistent with eligibility criteria.

Investment support for Yurringa Energy (Commercial in confidence)

In July 2024, a grant was provided to assist Yurringa Energy, an Aboriginal owned business, to fund the company's establishment as an energy retail business aiming to supply electricity to commercial and industrial markets. Through qualifying the Yurringa Energy's business plans and immediate commercial opportunities that it was seeking to leverage, Invest Victoria and AED undertook the process of providing a grant jointly funded under the Investment Attraction and Assistance Program, Support Program and the Building Opportunity and Economic Prosperity for Victorian Aboriginal Communities Fund. This will support the creation of seven new full time equivalent jobs and contribute to the State's BP3 wages target, enabling Yurringa Energy to secure new commercial contracts in Victoria and Australia more broadly.

Department of Transport and Planning Pilot Partnership with Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce

In November 2022, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) entered a 12-month Pilot Partnership with Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce (Pilot). This was a key factor in driving the increase in expenditure from Aboriginal businesses. The pilot finished in November 2023, but led to the following notable outcomes:

- \$10.8 million contract awarded to BA Road Services for metropolitan road maintenance, which is the largest contract awarded to a First Peoples business by DTP.
- Opportunities for Victorian First Peoples businesses to be engaged in flood recovery.
- Exclusive Kinaway member Request for Quote (RFQ) for a First Peoples Road Safety Literature Review to inform research about First Peoples and Road Safety.
- VicTrack's standing exemption to improve First Peoples business engagement from the Legal Services State Purchase Contract (SPC).

Evaluation of the Pilot identified several opportunities for further action, including increasing the number of First Peoples businesses that are prequalified to tender for certain works or registered on State Purchase Contracts and ongoing analysis of upcoming opportunities to engage First Peoples businesses. As an outcome of the Pilot, in June 2024 DTP appointed a two-year fixed term First Peoples Business Engagement Coordinator to improve procurement reporting and outcomes.

Willan Program partnership with the North East Link

A partnership between the Willan Program and North East Link is providing 10 weeks of pre-employment training to young First Peoples from backgrounds of unemployment. Upon completion, participants receive a Certificate 2 in Construction Pathways and opportunities to work on the North East Link tunnels. The program was established through collaboration with Aboriginal business and Pathway Plumbing.

Sport and Experience Economy

Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant Program

The Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant (ASGP) program provides a single-entry point for Aboriginal Victorians to access funding that assists in addressing a range of barriers to community sport participation right across the state. The ASGP Program is led and directed by Sports and Recreation Victoria's Aboriginal Programs Team (APT). The ASGP program administers two rounds per year to the Aboriginal community to increase participation in carnivals and community sport. Since 2020, the ASGP has provided more than 460 grants, totalling more than \$716,000 to ACCOs and sporting clubs and associations.

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) Funding Service Agreements

The Aboriginal Programs Team in SRV continue to embed Aboriginal outcomes in SRV funding service agreements, including Community Service Agreements with professional clubs through major infrastructure investments.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL)

From September 2019, VACSAL are a recognised State Sport and Active Recreation Body (SSARB). VACSAL is a state-wide agency that provides advice to the Victorian Government on a range of community development issues and provides extensive services to the Aboriginal community in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. It is regarded as a key advocate for Victoria's Aboriginal community, with representation on over 85 local, regional and State reference or advisory bodies. VACSAL works with SRV to coordinate information out to and from the Aboriginal community. This acknowledges the key role VACSAL plays in the sport and active recreation sector and their contribution to creating participation opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians.

As a recognised SSARB, VACSAL are eligible to apply for funding through the Participation and Sector Development area under the Community Sport Participation Programs. VACSAL currently receive funding of \$200,000 over 4 years under the Together More Active 2023–27 Program to deliver sporting carnivals to community.

Regional Development Victoria

Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation Business Case and Masterplan

Regional Development Victoria has supported the Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation (WMAC) to develop a Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation Business Case and Masterplan to be investment-ready for a cultural and tourism hub, an art retail space, café, a native nursery and a home for WMAC-Budj Bim-employed rangers.

The planning works, with funding of \$40,000 from the Victorian Government's Enabling Tourism Fund, identified the opportunity to leverage the UNESCO-listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape to increase tourism activity in the region by creating a cultural and tourism hub.

Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative Aboriginal Community Art Gallery

Regional Development Victoria provided funding to Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BADAC) to deliver the BADAC Aboriginal Community Art Gallery. The project was completed in May 2024 and received \$200,000 from Regional Development Victoria administered Living Local Regional Grant Program. The grant contributed toward the refurbishment of an existing shopfront building on Mair Street, Ballarat CBD as a BADAC owned and operated Aboriginal art gallery. The project has helped launch a business (the gallery) which enables the sale of high value art created by Aboriginal members of the community, returning a profit to those artists and their community.

Digital Inclusion

Connecting Victoria

Access to high quality telecommunications services is a fundamental requirement to support economic and social participation. The Department of Government Services' major digital inclusion initiative is the Victorian Government's more than \$500 million Connecting Victoria program which is delivering up to 1,400 mobile and broadband improvements across the State.

Although not targeting Aboriginal Victorians specifically, this investment will benefit anyone living in areas that will receive telecommunications infrastructure upgrades. For example, at the end of the 2023–24 Financial Year, the Connecting Victoria program alongside other Victorian Government telecommunications grants have funded the completion of 103 telecommunications infrastructure projects across Victorian local government areas (LGAs) with the highest proportion of Aboriginal Victorians. These LGAs include Mildura, Swan Hill, Greater Shepparton, East Gippsland and Wodonga. 70 of these projects were completed within the 2023–24 Financial Year. A further 81 additional mobile and broadband projects across these LGAs are planned for completion by June 2026.

Australian Government Regional Telecommunications Review

The Victorian Government submission to the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review (RTR) was prepared by the Department of Government Services and advocated for a range of Commonwealth telecommunications policy and program changes that would address digital inclusion gaps, including those of Aboriginal Victorians.

For example, Victoria has called for connectivity standards that would provide a clear definition of adequate services that would apply Australia-wide and would benefit underserved regional and remote First Peoples communities.

The Victorian Government is continuing to engage with Commonwealth agencies and will work to address digital inclusion issues at a national level. This includes leveraging opportunities that arise from Commonwealth responses to recommendations from the RTR and First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG) Road Map.

As part of this activity, the Department of Government Services will be leading a multi-jurisdictional reference group that focuses on connectivity literacy issues, which aligned to RTR and FNDIAG recommendations. The group will report back to Ministers through the Digital Data Ministers Meeting within the next 12 months.

Local Government

Women Leading Locally program

The Women Leading Locally program provided participants with resources and skills to take up leadership opportunities in their communities, including standing in the 2024 local government elections. Program graduates receive a Certificate in Community Leadership and Governance (Local Government).

The program prioritised participation of Aboriginal women and women from diverse backgrounds to increase diversity of people standing for council, including more Aboriginal women as candidates.

59 participants from the first round of the program graduated in August 2023. One of the graduates was an Aboriginal woman.

60 participants from the second (and final) round of the program graduated in August 2024. Four of the participants in this cohort were Aboriginal women.

Graduates of the program are supported through campaign resources, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021–2026

The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021–2026 (VALGS) provides councils across Victoria with practical guides to embed the voices and priorities of Aboriginal communities at a local government level. It includes a clear framework for shared decision-making processes and actions for Aboriginal Victorians working together with local government based on mutual control, shared power and decision-making, fairness, respect and trust.

The VALGS is centred on seven key strategic pillars: culture, respect and trust; awareness and engagement; accountability and direction; governance and participation; economic participation; health and wellbeing; and resourcing and funding. These seven pillars will help councils meet their commitments and progress towards self-determination.

The Department of Government Services continued to promote the implementation of VALGS throughout 2024.

A VALGS Strategic Working Group — made up of representatives from the Victorian Aboriginal community, local government peak bodies,

and the Victorian Government — continued to provide strategic advice and guidance on the implementation of VALGS at a statewide level. The VALGS Strategic Working Group sought to understand councils' efforts and activities in relation to VALGS pillars and to understand barriers to VALGS related activity and efforts. The VALGS Strategic Working Group concluded in July 2024 and its advice will continue to guide the Department of Government Service's future VALGS implementation work program.

Local Government Act 2020

The *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) explicitly includes Traditional Owners as part of the definition of municipal community to ensure that Traditional Owners and their interests and needs are reflected in the roles of council and councillor, and that councils work and consult with Traditional Owners.

In 2024, the Victorian Government implemented further reforms to stamp-out inappropriate councillor behaviour and improve overall councillor conduct. Under the new Model Councillor Code of Conduct, councillors are required to support the Council when applying the Council's community engagement policy to develop respectful relationships and partnerships with Traditional Owners, ACCOs and the Aboriginal community. These reforms will support traditionally underrepresented cohorts to nominate for council elections by creating a more positive environment.

Employment in the Victorian Public Service

Barring Djinang First Peoples Workforce Development Strategy

In 2024, the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) refreshed the *Barring Djinang First Peoples' Workforce Development strategy*, setting out a new range of initiatives to boost First Peoples employment, and grow Victorian public service leadership capacity, to make the Victorian public sector an employer of choice for First Peoples in Victoria.

Concurrently, the VPSC continued to deliver against the original Barring Djinang strategy, with 51 First Peoples public sector employees participating in employment programs including career development, leadership and internships.

This work is guided by the Barring Djinang Advisory Group, comprised of senior First Peoples executives from across departments, and hosted by the VPSC.

As part of the strategy, VPSC also continued to host a First Peoples staff network Nyanak Lotjpa, a Yorta Yorta word for 'we all talk'. First Peoples employees can connect with Nyanak Lotjpa on the Innovation Network to find peers, share information and build relationships across government. Nyanak Lotjpa has over 140 members from across the sector.

Barring Djinang contains two initiatives to increase the numbers of First Peoples entering the Victorian public service:

- The continuation of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Pathway in the Victorian Government Graduate Program (the Pathway), with a renewed focus on the existing entry-level program seeking to recruit more First Peoples tertiary graduates through increased direct, face-to-face engagement with universities and First Peoples university students.
- Aboriginal Vocation Education and Training (VET) Graduate Program Pilot – an updated entry-level program targeting VET graduates leading to ongoing employment in the public sector.

The VPSC coordinates the Pathway in the Graduate program. Departments reported that they value the Pathway as a mechanism for providing a pipeline for First Peoples talent.

While feedback from Pathway participants indicates that they have a positive experience overall, more work can be done to increase the numbers of First Peoples entering the Victorian public service through the Pathway.

Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework

The Transport and Planning Portfolio's First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework (Framework) and the Department of Transport and Planning's Cultural Safety Action Plan 2024–2028 were launched by Secretary Paul Younis at the department's Reconciliation Week event on 30 May 2024. The purpose of the Framework is to advance the cultural safety of First Peoples who work in or engage with the Portfolio, and who use the Transport and Planning Networks. The Action Plan sets out 22 actions that the department will take to implement the Framework.

A key outcome under the Action Plan was the Girraway Ganyi First Peoples Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a 12-month Pilot Program with Girraway Ganyi Consultancy, an Aboriginal owned business in Victoria, to provide culturally appropriate support to First Peoples employees, managers of First Peoples and employees working in First Peoples affairs within the Victorian Government. In 2024, an evaluation of the program showed positive feedback from First Peoples staff and managers. The rate of First Peoples Staff accessing Girraway Ganyi's EAP services doubled in 2024. As a result, the Girraway Ganyi Pilot Program was extended for an additional 12 months.

Beginning in February 2024, managers and senior leaders engaged in a series of workshops facilitated by Girraway Ganyi, focusing on key themes such as promoting cultural safety, addressing unconscious bias, analysing First Peoples employment statistics in Victoria, understanding historical contexts and their lasting impacts, providing effective workplace support for First Peoples, and implementing strategies to manage an inclusive workforce.

Domain 4: Health & Wellbeing



Our shared commitment

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

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

In 2023, more Aboriginal people aged 18 and over reported excellent or very good health compared to 2022.

In 2022–23, the rates of hospitalisation of Aboriginal people from potentially preventative causes remained consistent with the rates in 2021–22.

When looking specifically at emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug related harm, the rate has increased to 32.3 per 1,000 Aboriginal people in 2023–24.

Aboriginal people continue to have high cancer incidence rates. The four most common body sites for cancer are the lungs, prostate, bowel and breast. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer. The age standardised proportion of Aboriginal people aged 18 and above who are daily smokers increased to 25.3 per cent in 2023.

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

Outcome 1: People enjoy long and healthy lives.

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

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 1: Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males born in 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 under-identification in deaths records, small sample sizes, data collection issues and statistical challenges associated with the calculation methods. There are ongoing efforts to improve the quality of data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths.

Data Note



The following measure relies 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.

Historical data for this measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report.

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

Measure 11.1 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.

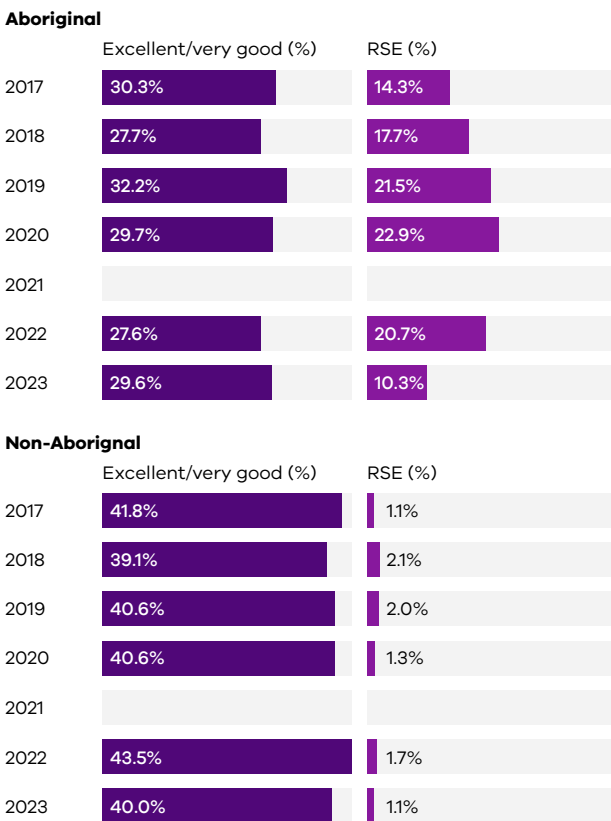


Measure 11.1.2 Proportion reporting 'excellent or very good' health status

In 2023, Aboriginal Victorians were more likely to report excellent or very good health than in 2022, but less likely than in 2017. Age standardised results for self-assessed health status from the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) have increased to 29.6 per cent, up from 27.6 per cent of respondents in 2022. Over the long term, the self-assessed health of Aboriginal adults in Victoria has remained relatively stable. In 2017, 30.3 per cent of Aboriginal respondents said their health was excellent/very good. Survey results for non-Aboriginal Victorians have also remained stable over the period. 40.0 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents reported very good and excellent health in 2023 compared with 43.5 per cent in 2022. When analysing the prevalence ratio, dividing Aboriginal per cent respondents with non-Aboriginal per cent respondents, the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal self-assessed health has remained consistent. Non-Aboriginal respondents since 2017 have reported 0.7 times greater self-assessed health.

Aboriginal Victorians self-reported excellent/good health increases for first time since 2019

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



Data was age-standardised to the 2011 Victorian population. A RSE between 25% and 50% should be interpreted with caution. A RSE above 50% has been removed as deemed to be unreliable.

Source: Source: Victorian Population Health Survey.

Free Entry to the Robinvale Pool: Improving the health and safety of the whole community

The Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative (MVAC) supports the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and their families in Robinvale by encouraging community members to participate in healthy activities such as healthy eating and exercise. MVAC promotes involvement in golf, walking and gym membership and a range of other activities to protect the local Aboriginal community from ill-health. For example, following the 2022 floods, it was deemed unsafe to swim

in the Murray River which is particularly inviting for young people who cannot afford to go to the Robinvale Pool. The staff at MVAC negotiated with the Swan Hill Shire Council and Belgravia Leisure to keep the pool free to everyone for the whole summer. As part of the Working Together for Health program, MVAC and the Shire contributed funds to Belgravia Leisure who manage the pool. Free entry to the pool benefited the whole Robinvale community with high attendance, allowing attendees to connect with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the spirit of inclusion, health and safety.

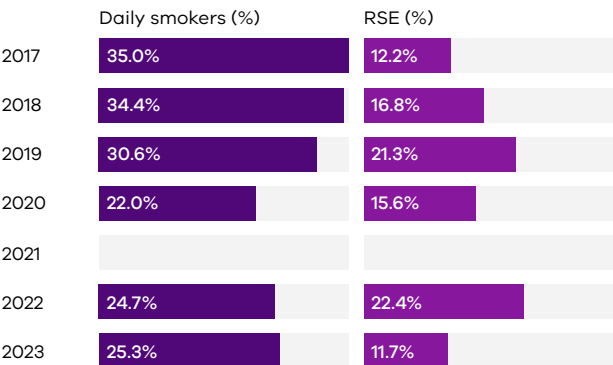
Measure 11.1.3 Rate of daily smoking

In 2023, the proportion of daily tobacco smokers increased among Aboriginal Victorians aged 18+ to 25.3 per cent. This is the second year in a row that the proportion has increased. Before 2022, the percentage of Aboriginal daily smokers had been declining since 2017. When analysing the proportion of non-Aboriginal daily smokers, the trend is not the same. For non-Aboriginal people, smoking has remained consistent in the short term with 9.8 per cent of respondents in 2023 as daily smokers. Over the long term the proportion of non-Aboriginal daily smokers has been slowly declining from 12.2 per cent in 2017. 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.

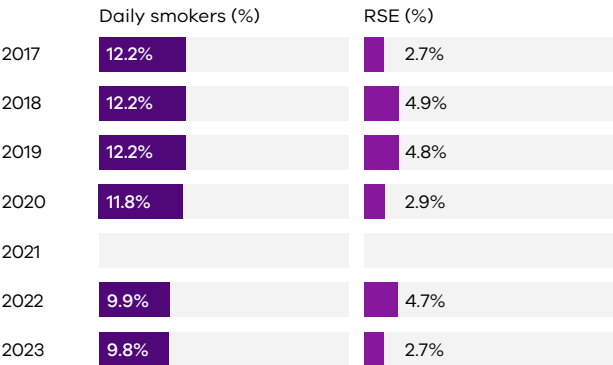
Smoking among Aboriginal Victorians increases for the second year in a row

Measure 11.1.3 Rate of daily smoking, by sex

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



Data was age-standardised to the 2011 Victorian population. The VPHS did not run in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

Aboriginal Quitline

To better support Aboriginal Victorians to quit smoking and vaping, Quit Victoria launched a new Aboriginal Quitline website (www.aql.org.au) for mob, by mob, in 2024 that includes information on the harms of smoking and vaping and tips for quitting. The website development involved working alongside an Aboriginal art creative consultancy, Aboriginal health workers, Tackling Indigenous Smoking workers, Elders and community members.

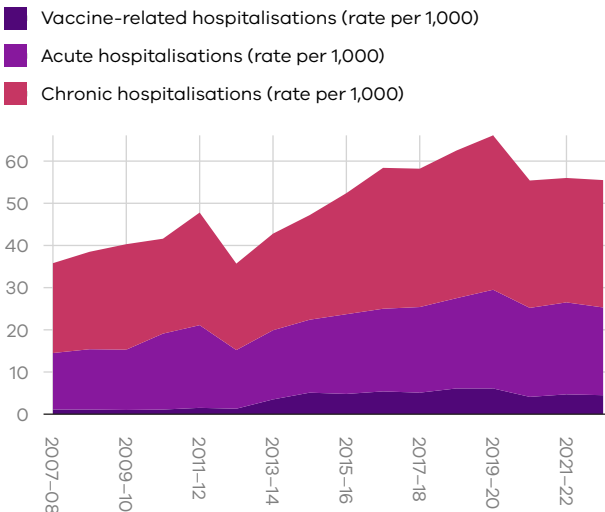
Measure 11.1.4 Rate of hospitalisations for potentially preventable causes (vaccine preventable, acute, chronic and all)

In 2022–23, 54.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal people in Victoria were hospitalised for potentially preventable causes (vaccine-related, acute and chronic). This rate has remained stable after a decline by 10.3 per 1,000 people in 2020–21. However, it is more than double the rate of non-Aboriginal people (24.5 per 1,000 people). Aboriginal people continue to experience barriers to access preventable health care, including lack of culturally safe services and Aboriginal-led healthcare.

Of the reported potentially preventable causes for hospitalisation, the highest cause for Aboriginal people is chronic potentially preventable causes. In 2022–23, 30.2 per 1,000 Aboriginal people were hospitalised for chronic potentially preventable causes compared to 20.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal people for acute potentially preventable causes and 4.5 per 1,000 Aboriginal people for vaccine-related potentially preventable causes. Chronic potentially preventable causes are conditions that could have been prevented through appropriate health interventions and early disease management. These interventions would usually be administered at primary health care or community-based settings, such as General Practitioner and Community health services.

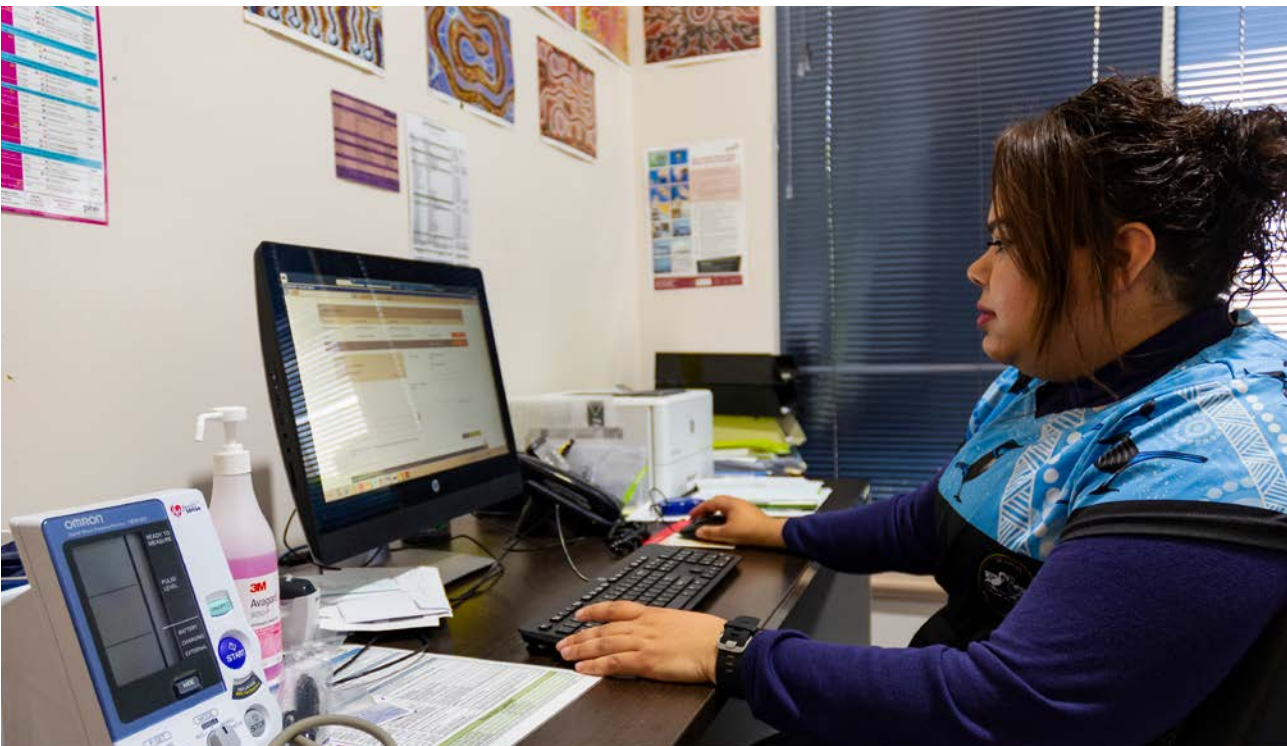
The rate of preventable hospitalisations for Aboriginal people remained stable after a decline in 2020–21

Measure 11.1.4 a-d Separations per 1,000 population for all potentially preventable hospitalisations, by Aboriginal status(a)



Rates are age-standardised to the 2001 Australian standard population. Counting: number of hospital separations, and therefore data may include multiple visits with individuals counted multiple times within a given period.

Source: Report on Government Services 2024.



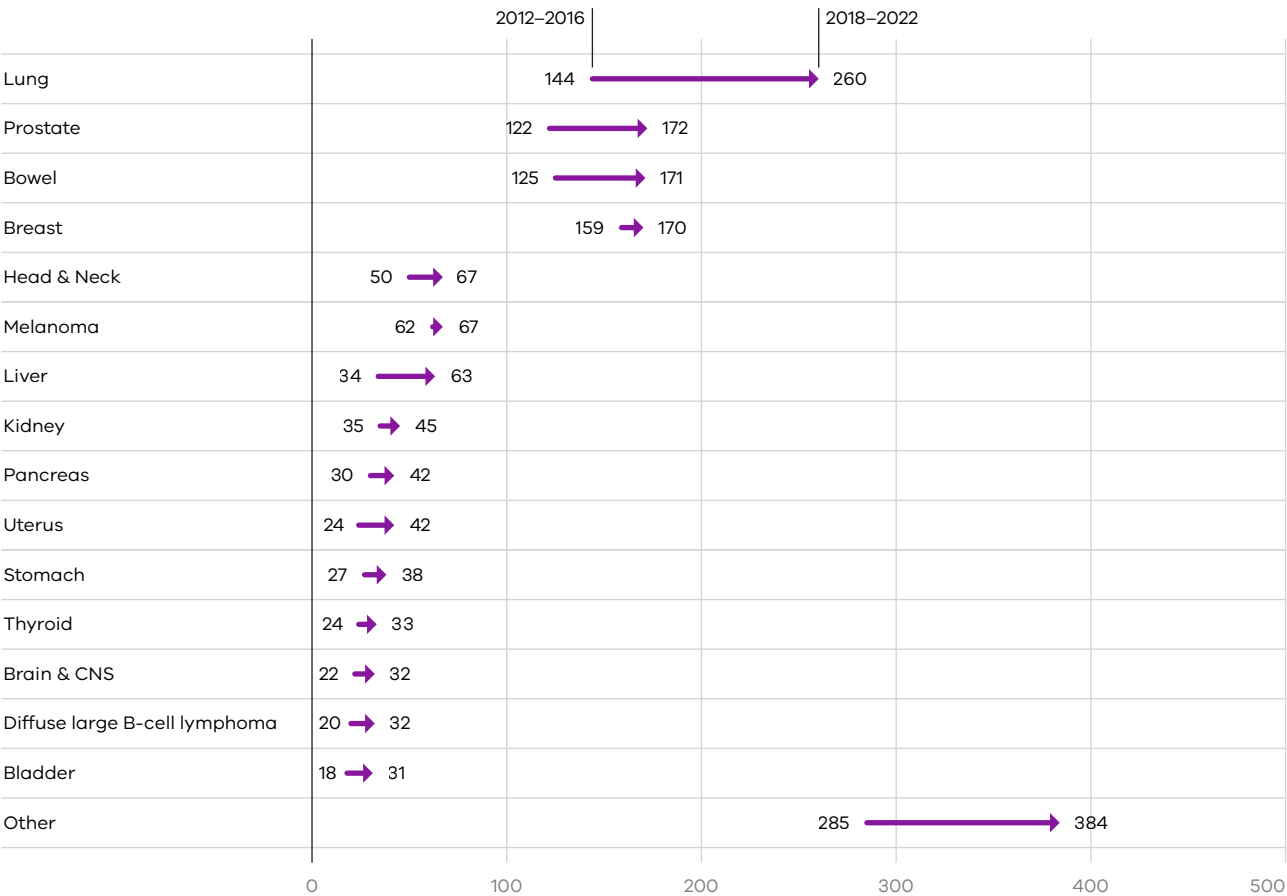
Measure 11.1.5 Incidence of selected cancers

In 2018–22, lung cancer accounted for 15.8 per cent of all cancer incidences for Aboriginal people. Prostate, bowel, and breast cancer accounted for 10.4, 10.4, and 10.3 per cent of cancer incidences respectively. These cancer sites are the four most common cancer sites for Aboriginal people. The incidences of lung cancer increased by 116

incidences to 260 between 2012–16 and 2018–22. The highest percentage increase in cancer incidences for Aboriginal people in the same period was liver cancer. Liver cancer accounted for 63 cancer incidences in Aboriginal people in 2018–22. In 2012–16, there were 34 incidences of liver cancer. This is nearly double the amount, an 85 per cent increase, of liver cancer incidences.

Lung cancer accounts for 15.8 per cent of all cancer incidences for Aboriginal people in 2018–22

Measure 11.1.5a Incidence and distribution of the 15 most common types of cancer for Victorians by Aboriginal status



CNS: central nervous system; MPD: myeloproliferative disorders; MDS: myelodysplastic syndromes.

Source: Victorian Cancer Registry.

Aboriginal people are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer than non-Aboriginal people. In 2018–22, the cancer incidence rates for Aboriginal people were higher across all reported age cohorts (under 20, 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69 and 70+). For Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the cancer incidence rate increases with age which means that those aged 70+ have the highest cancer incidence rate. Between 2018 to 2022, Aboriginal people aged 70+ had a cancer incidence rate of 505.3 per 10,000 Aboriginal men and 384.1 per 10,000 Aboriginal women. This is more than 1.5 times the rate for non-Aboriginal men aged 70+ (303.6 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal men) and more than 2 times the rate for non-Aboriginal women aged 70+ (182.9 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal women).

When comparing the change in cancer incidence rates by gender, Aboriginal men are far more likely to have cancer now than at the beginning of the time series. The largest growth in age specific cancer rates for men is the 40–49 age range, growing 42.3 per cent since the 2012–2016 period. For Aboriginal women the largest growth is in the under 20 age cohort growing 6.2 per cent in the same period.

Aboriginal people have a higher cancer incidence rate than non-Aboriginal Victorians

Measure 11.1.5b Age-specific cancer incidence rates by sex for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians

Aboriginal Male (per 10,000)

	Under 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
2012–16	3	6.7	12	32.9	93.4	235.9	456.8
2017–21	3.9	5.8	16.9	44.1	127.4	285.1	510.8
2018–22	3.9	6.1	16.8	46.9	112.9	259.5	505.3

Non-Aboriginal Male (per 10,000)

	Under 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
2012–16	1.8	4.7	8.9	22.9	70.3	168.8	303.3
2017–21	1.9	4.5	9	22.6	71.3	175.3	307.7
2018–22	2	4.5	9.1	21.8	70.6	174.8	303.6

Aboriginal Female (per 10,000)

	Under 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
2012–16	4.2	7.4	15	47.6	101.1	182.2	376.8
2017–21	3.8	9.1	25.1	46.8	102.9	175.3	427.5
2018–22	3.6	9.4	22.2	44.3	107.8	177.3	384.1

Non-Aboriginal Female (per 10,000)

	Under 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
2012–16	1.8	5	14.5	37	67.6	112.2	186.8
2017–21	1.7	4.9	14.6	36.7	68.2	111.2	185.8
2018–22	1.8	4.9	14.5	36.3	68	109.3	182.9

2012–16 refers to cumulative incidences between these years.

Source: Victorian Cancer Registry.

The standard incidence ratio (SIR) for cancer is a measure of how much more likely it is for Aboriginal people to have a cancer incidence compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. Aboriginal people have equal incidence of cancer where the standard incidence ratio is equal to one' to 'Aboriginal people have equal incidence of cancer where the SIR is equal to one.

In 2018–22, the SIRs for lung, liver, head and neck, and cervical cancer for Aboriginal women were 3.8, 4.4, 1.9, and 2.1 respectively. For lung and liver cancer, the SIRs have increased in the long term (since 2012–16). For head and neck and cervical cancer, the SIRs have decreased in the same period.

For Aboriginal men in 2018–22, the SIRs for lung, liver, and head and neck cancer increased over the long term to 3.1, 3.7, and 2.0 respectively. It is interesting to note that the SIRs for liver and lung cancer for Aboriginal women is higher than for Aboriginal men.

There are many drivers of cancer incidence in the environment and in our lifestyles. These can include smoking, alcohol consumption, diet, physical inactivity, obesity and chronic infections.¹⁵ These external risk factors are only part of the story. Growing research suggest social factors such as racism and discrimination drive cancer prevalence while cultural identity, access to traditional lands and language can be protective factors.^{16, 17}

The standard incidence ratio for cancer remains high

Measure 11.1.5c Standardised incidence ratios for selected cancer types for Aboriginal Victorians compared with non-Aboriginal Victorians, all ages, 2012–2022

Year	Gender	Lung Incidence Rate	Lung Confidence Interval	Liver Incidence Rate	Liver Confidence Interval	Head & Neck Incidence Rate	Head & Neck Confidence Interval	Cervix Incidence Rate	Cervix Confidence Interval
2012–2016	Female	3.3	(2.6–4.1)	3	(1.5–5.6)	2.2	(1.4–3.6)	2.4	(1.5–3.9)
2013–2017	Female	3.6	(2.9–4.4)	3.8	(2.2–6.6)	2.6	(1.6–4.0)	2.6	(1.7–4.1)
2014–2018	Female	3.4	(2.7–4.1)	5.1	(3.2–8.1)	2	(1.2–3.4)	2.7	(1.7–4.1)
2015–2019	Female	3.6	(3.0–4.4)	4.3	(2.6–7.0)	2.2	(1.4–3.6)	2.8	(1.9–4.2)
2016–2020	Female	3.9	(3.3–4.7)	3.9	(2.3–6.5)	2.6	(1.7–4.0)	2.7	(1.8–4.1)
2017–2021	Female	4.1	(3.5–4.9)	4.7	(2.9–7.4)	2.2	(1.4–3.5)	2.3	(1.5–3.6)
2018–2022	Female	3.8	(3.2–4.5)	4.4	(2.8–7.0)	1.9	(1.2–3.0)	2.1	(1.3–3.3)
2012–2016	Male	2	(1.5–2.5)	2.5	(1.7–3.7)	1.7	(1.2–2.3)	-	-
2013–2017	Male	2.3	(1.8–2.8)	3.2	(2.3–4.5)	2	(1.5–2.8)	-	-
2014–2018	Male	2.4	(1.9–3.0)	3.1	(2.2–4.4)	2	(1.5–2.7)	-	-
2015–2019	Male	2.6	(2.1–3.1)	3.8	(2.8–5.1)	2.1	(1.5–2.8)	-	-
2016–2020	Male	2.9	(2.4–3.5)	4.1	(3.1–5.4)	2.2	(1.7–2.9)	-	-
2017–2021	Male	3.2	(2.7–3.8)	4	(3.0–5.3)	2.2	(1.7–2.8)	-	-
2018–2022	Male	3.1	(2.6–3.7)	3.7	(2.7–4.9)	2	(1.5–2.6)	-	-

Incidence rate ratios were calculated by dividing the incidence rate for Aboriginal Victorians by the incidence rate for Non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Source: Victorian Cancer Registry.

15. Cancer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia: an overview, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Cancer Australia
< <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/aa938fd4-21e8-4854-9207-c70306e4f2b3/13732.pdf?v=20230605165253&inline=true> >

16. Cancer: Risk and protective factors, Australian Indigenous Health *infoNet*
< <https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/health-topics/cancer/risk-and-protective-factors/#aihref9> >

17. Australia's health 2022: in brief and data insights, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022), Canberra.
< <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/australias-health> >

In 2024, the Victorian Government released the Victorian cancer plan 2024–2028¹⁸ which sets the Victorian Government's strategic direction for improving cancer outcomes for all Victorians. It builds on the success of previous cancer plans to address the burden of cancer and identifies ways to prevent cancer, increase survival rates, improve people's experience of the cancer treatment and the care system, and deliver more equitable outcomes for Victorians with cancer.

Aboriginal Health Collaboration - Nangnak Warr Bagora Cancer Clinic

Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium (MPCCC) has partnered with Eastern Health to support the establishment of the Nangnak Warr Bagora First Nations Cancer Clinic in Healesville. This innovative facility delivers a new clinical model specific to local needs. The aim is to improve health outcomes for First Peoples by providing direct, targeted access to cancer care. The clinic's development and ongoing success is informed by First Peoples

volunteers and an advisory committee that includes local First Peoples representatives. Nangnak Warr Bagora provides a dedicated MPCCC Molecular Oncology Fellow who works within Eastern Health's oncology services to perform a vital role in linking local First Peoples cancer patients with genomic sequencing and clinical trials. MPCCC is working with Eastern Health to enable First Peoples communities to benefit from this approach which enables more informed choices around cancer research and care.



18. Victorian cancer plan, Victorian Government < <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/victorian-cancer-plan> >

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

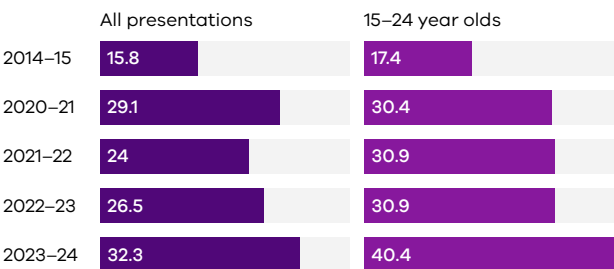
In 2023–24, 2,248 Aboriginal people presented to the emergency department for an alcohol or drug-related harm. The rate of emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug-related harm for Aboriginal people of all ages was 32.3 per 1,000 Aboriginal people. This is an increase of 5.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal people since 2022–23 and is the highest rate recorded between 2008–09 and 2023–24. This rate is also double the rate a decade prior (15.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal people in 2014–15). For Aboriginal people aged 15–25, the rate was higher at 40.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal people. This is an increase in rate by 9.5 per 1,000 Aboriginal people since 2022–23 and is the first increase since 2021–22. This rate is also the highest recorded between 2008–09 to 2023–24 and is more than double the rate a decade prior (17.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal people in 2014–15).

The rate of emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug-related harm is significantly lower for non-Aboriginal people. In 2023–24, the rate was 4 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people of all ages. This is 8.1 times less than the rate for Aboriginal people of all ages. For non-Aboriginal people aged 15–24, the rate was slightly higher at 6.6 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people. This is 6.2 times less than the rate for Aboriginal people aged 15–24. Compared to a decade prior, the rate has remained similar for non-Aboriginal people of all ages (4.7 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people of all ages in 2014–15) and decreased for non-Aboriginal people aged 15–24 (9.4 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people aged 15–24 in 2014–15).

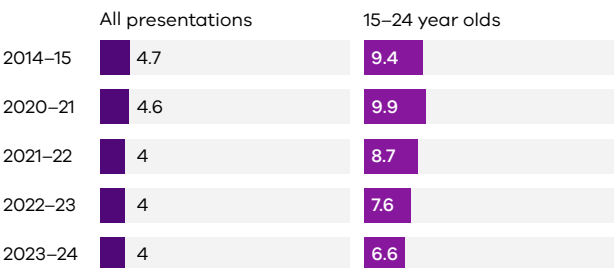
Emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug-related harm for Aboriginal people has doubled over a decade

Measure 11.1.6 Rate of emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug related harm, all ages and 15–24 year olds, by Aboriginal status

Aboriginal Victorians (presentation rate per 1,000)



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



Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection.

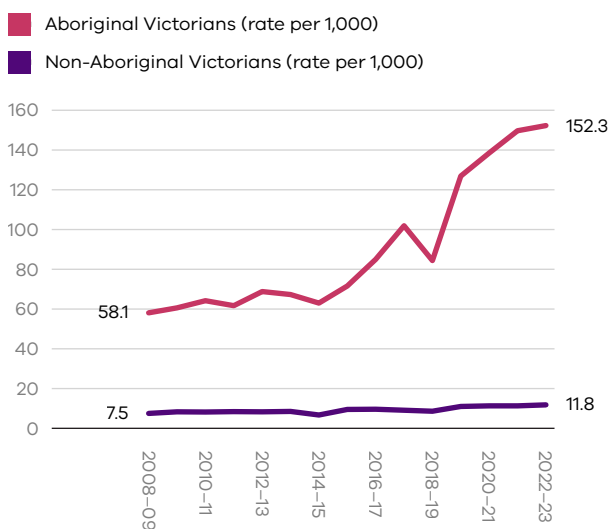
Measure 11.1.7 Specialist alcohol and other drug treatment services provided to Aboriginal Victorians.

In 2022–23, there were 10,328 closed episodes for alcohol and other drug treatment services. This is an increase of 426 closed episodes since 2021–22. The rate of alcohol and other drug treatment services for First Peoples in 2022–23 was 152.3 per 1,000 people. This rate has more than doubled in the past 10 years (67.3 closed episodes per 1,000 people in 2013–14). In 2022–23, the rate for non-Aboriginal people also increased but not to the same degree. The rate of closed episodes for alcohol and other drug treatment services were 11.8 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people. This rate is 40 per cent higher than what it was in 2013–14 (8.5 per 1,000 people).

In 2022–23, Aboriginal Victorians were 12.8 times more likely to access alcohol and other drug treatment services than non-Aboriginal Victorians. In 2013–14, this was only 7.9 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.

Treatment episodes for alcohol and other drugs continue to increase

Measure 11.1.7 Rate of specialist alcohol and other drug treatment services provided by Aboriginal status



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

Public Intoxication Reform (PIR) statewide services

Over the period November 2023 to 30 April 2024, there have been 7,489 instances of Outreach and Sobering Centre services provided to Victorians across the state, of which 81.5 per cent have been provided to Aboriginal community members.

Development of the health-led service response model included:

- Developing a health-led model and a Service Framework to guide operations in consultation with an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) and First Peoples stakeholders.
- Reviewing the Service Framework with key stakeholders including the PIR Aboriginal Advisory Group, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Victoria Legal Aid.

- A multidisciplinary, time-limited advisory group was formed to guide discussions on clinical aspects of the PIR service model. Representatives included members from Lived and Living Experience Hub and departments' Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Division.
- The Service Framework will be updated and developed collaboratively as experience working within the model is better understood through monitoring and evaluation, in line with Treaty, Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations, future Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) and mental health and wellbeing system reforms.

The Department for Health has procured an independent, First Peoples led agency for evaluating the health response to public intoxication reform, with evaluation findings expected in 2025.

Goal 12: Aboriginal Victorians access the services they need



Overview

Measures under Goal 12 have varied in performance

In 2023–24, the proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who received a health check or assessment and the proportion who accessed aged care services decreased.

In 2022–23, the participation rate of Aboriginal women for breast cancer screening decreased.

In 2024, the utilisation rate for Aboriginal Victorians with a NDIS approved plan increased. However, Aboriginal Victorians continue to use less funds available to them through the NDIS than non-Aboriginal people. The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who transitioned into the NDIS with an approved plan in 2024 is less than the proportions in the previous three years.

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.

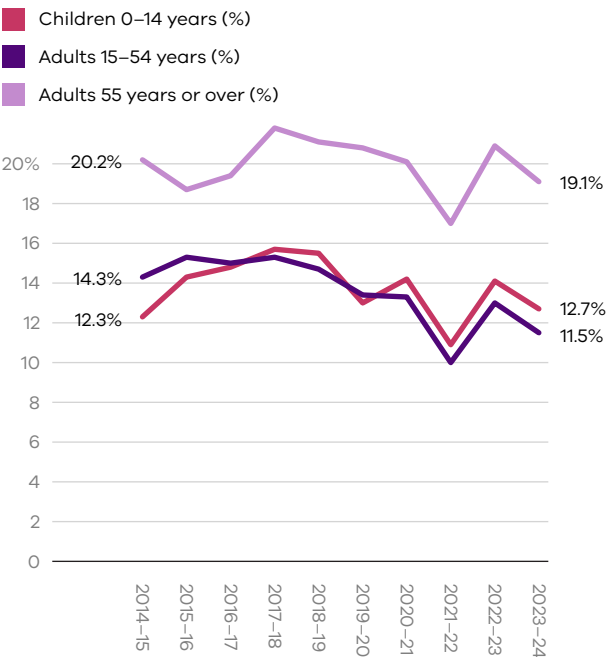
12.1 Improve access to health and community services for all Aboriginal Victorians

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

In 2023–24, 12.7 per cent of Aboriginal children aged 0–14 years, 11.5 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15–54 years and 19.1 per cent Aboriginal people aged 55 or over received a health check or assessment. This is a decrease across all age cohorts since 2022–23 and demonstrates that less than 1 in 5 Aboriginal Victorians received a health check or assessment. Regular health checks can identify current or emerging medical issues, assess risks of future medical issues and encourage a healthy lifestyle.¹⁹ Early identification of medical issues can increase chances for effective treatment. It may also reduce hospitalisation from preventable causes. When cross analysing this data with that of Measure 11.1.4 (Rate of hospitalisations for potentially preventable causes), a lack of primary care health checks could be correlated with the short-term increase in preventable hospitalisation.

Proportion of Aboriginal people who received a health check or assessment declined across all age groups

Measure 12.1.1 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who received a health check or assessment, by age



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

Aboriginal Health Practitioner-led Fluoride Varnish Program

Aboriginal children face significant barriers to accessing culturally safe oral healthcare, resulting in higher rates of tooth decay and preventable dental hospitalisations compared to non-Aboriginal children. In 2018–19, funded by the Victorian Government, the Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group (LMARG) developed a pilot fluoride varnish outreach program in collaboration with ACCOs, public dental services and community services. The pilot phase of the program reached over 200 Aboriginal children.

Based on early learnings of the pilot and consultation with the LMARG, ACCOs and the community, the pilot recommended:

- enabling Registered Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) to provide fluoride varnish, and
- delivering preventive oral health services in an ACCO setting.

Following regulatory amendments in 2022 authorising AHPs to administer fluoride varnish, trained AHPs could provide preventative treatment in culturally appropriate ways. Since 2022–23, 14 AHPs have successfully completed their training and now integrate oral health assessments into comprehensive health checks through effective referral pathways. Additional Victorian Government funding in 2023 has expanded the program to reach approximately 600 Victorian Aboriginal children, demonstrating that Aboriginal-led approaches based on principles of self-determination can lead to significant benefits for Aboriginal communities.

19. Regular health checks, Victorian Government < <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/regular-health-checks> >

Women's Health and Wellbeing Program

The Women's Health and Wellbeing program delivered by the Department of Health is overseen by the Victorian Women's Health and Advisory Council. The VACCHO CEO was appointed as a member of this Advisory Council in early 2024 to provide a voice to Aboriginal girls and women in designing a more responsive and cultural safe women's health services system in Victoria.

Later in 2024, ACCOs were invited to submit applications to deliver a dedicated Aboriginal Women's Health Clinic (the Clinic) to operate from 1 July 2025–30 June 2027. The Department of Health consulted with VACCHO before the development of submission documents for the procurement of the Clinic. ACCO applicants provided community-led service design proposals to operate the Clinic.

A mobile women's health clinic commenced in January 2025, focusing on the delivery of free, quality and culturally safe women's health services for Aboriginal girls and women residing in regional and rural Victoria. The model focuses on partnering with ACCOs in the local community to build relationships for improving referral pathways.

A new virtual women's health clinic was launched on 6 February 2025 to provide women's health services over the phone and online for all women, especially those experiencing access barriers, including Aboriginal women.

Additionally, the Department of Health established a new model of care for 20 new women's health clinics being rolled out across Victoria over 4 years. The clinics were funded to deliver Women's Health Scholarships in 2023–24 to 2024–25, which included courses on cultural inclusion, safety and Aboriginal self-determination for all health professionals.

The Department of Health also support the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare across 20 Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Hubs for women in primary community settings while prioritising Aboriginal girls and women, women of culturally and linguistically diverse background, women living with a disability, LGBTIQ+ community members and those of lower socio-economic background.

13 Women's Health and Wellbeing Supports Groups were established across metro and regional Victoria operated by not-for-profit organisations with three of them, including Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, and Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative targeting Aboriginal girls and women.

Throughout 2024, the Inquiry into Women's Pain conducted a broad sector wide consultation, including with Aboriginal women, with the groups leading the consultation for their mob and women in the community through yarn circles.

Address racism and promote cultural safety



Measure 12.1.2 Participation rates for breast cancer screening

In 2022–23, the participation rate of Aboriginal women for breast cancer screening decreased in the short-term across all reported age cohorts (40+, 50–69 and 50–74). 21.7 Aboriginal women aged 40+, 33.2 Aboriginal women aged 50–69, and 33.6 Aboriginal women aged 50–74 per 100 Aboriginal women participated in breast cancer screening. In 2021–22, 23.0 Aboriginal women aged 40+, 37.0 Aboriginal women aged 50–69 and 37.0 Aboriginal women aged 50–74 per 100 Aboriginal women participated in breast cancer screening. Compared to 2013–14, participation rates have increased for Aboriginal women. However, the participation rates for Aboriginal women continue to be lower than for all women in Victoria. In 2022–23, 30.2 women in Victoria aged 40+, 50 women in Victoria aged 50–69 and 50.2 women in Victoria aged 50–74 per 100 women in Victoria participated in breast cancer screening.

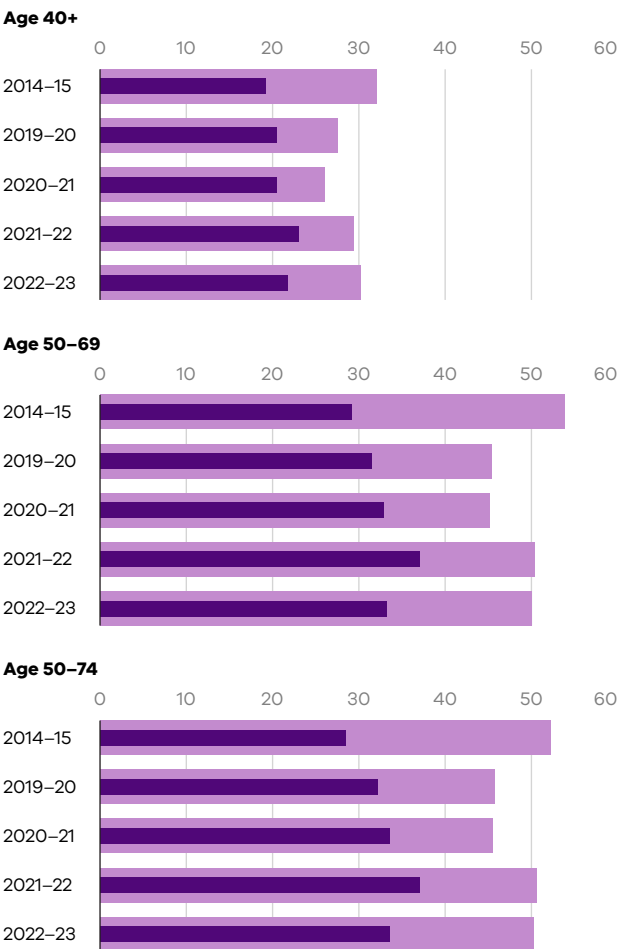
To support increased participation, BreastScreen Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and dozens of ACCOs across the state have partnered to deliver the Beautiful Shawl Project. Through this initiative, Aboriginal women are provided with customised shawls designed by Aboriginal women and artists that are culturally appropriate, familiar and beautiful to wear during breast cancer screenings. This initiative won the Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Award at the 2024 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards for its progress in increasing access to breast cancer screening across Victoria. In 2023–24, the Project saw a notable increase in screening among Aboriginal clients with a 39.5 per cent increase on the previous 12-month period. Serviced through 22 ACCOs, 406 Aboriginal clients have had a breast screen across 2023–24.

In 2024, the Victorian Government released the Victorian cancer plan 2024–2028 which sets the Victorian Government’s strategic direction for improving cancer outcomes for all Victorians. It builds on the success of previous cancer plans to address the burden of cancer and identifies ways to prevent cancer, increase survival rates, improve people’s experience of the cancer treatment and the care system, and deliver more equitable outcomes for Victorians with cancer.²⁰

Aboriginal peoples’ participation in breast cancer screening declined in 2022–23

Measure 12.1.2 Participation rates for breast cancer screening

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



Source: Report on Government Services 2024. Table 10A.51 Participation in BreastScreen Australia; AIHW (various years) BreastScreen Australia monitoring reports.

20. Victorian cancer plan, Victorian Government < <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/victorian-cancer-plan> >

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

In 2024, the proportion of Victorians with an approved NDIS plan who fully transitioned to the NDIS decreased to 90.1 per cent for Aboriginal Victorians and 92.3 per cent for non-Aboriginal Victorians. These are the lowest proportions recorded between 2021 and 2024 and represented 6,528 Aboriginal Victorians and 150,290 non-Aboriginal Victorians who transitioned to the NDIS. In 2024, 26,295 Victorians with Aboriginal status not stated also transitioned to the NDIS.

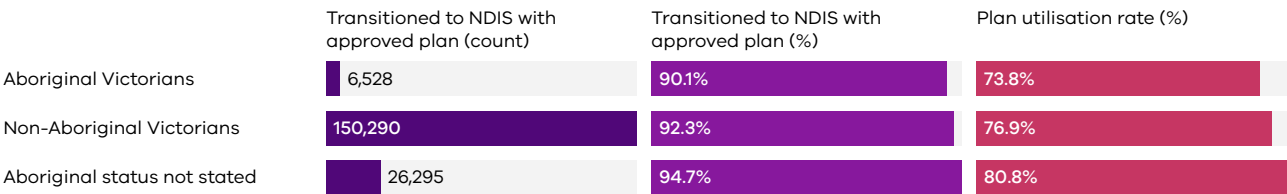
The NDIS approved plan utilisation rate has increased for Victorians. However, Aboriginal Victorians continue to use less funds available to them than non-Aboriginal Victorians with a NDIS approved plan. The NDIS approved plan utilisation rate is the total payments made from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 divided by the total annualised

committed supports. In 2024, the NDIS approved plan utilisation rate was 73.8 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians and 76.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Relative to the general Australian population, the prevalence of disability is much higher in First Peoples populations in Australia.²¹ The NDIS connects eligible participants to information and peer, mainstream and community supports. The NDIS also funds 'NDIS supports' covering services, items and equipment to support eligible participants.²² In 2025, the National Disability Insurance Agency released the NDIS First Nations Strategy 2025–2030 (First Nations Strategy) which was developed in collaboration with First Peoples. The First Nations Strategy will guide the National Disability Insurance Agency's actions to make the NDIS more equitable, culturally safe, community-centred and coordinated for First Peoples.

73.8 per cent of Aboriginal NDIS participants fully utilised their plans in 2024

Measure 12.1.3b Proportion and number accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme or in the pathway for transition, by Aboriginal status, Victoria



Source: National Disability Insurance Agency - RJ-C Dataset.

The proportion of Victorians who transitioned to the NDIS with an approved plan in 2024 is lower than the previous 3 years

Measure 12.1.3c Proportion and number (cumulative) accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme or in the pathway for transition, by Aboriginal status, Victoria



Source: National Disability Insurance Agency - RJ-C Dataset.

21. NDIS First Nations Strategy 2025–2030, National Disability Insurance Agency < <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/strategies/first-nations-strategy> >

22. Factsheet: How the NDIS can help, National Disability Insurance Agency < <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/publications/booklets-and-factsheets> >

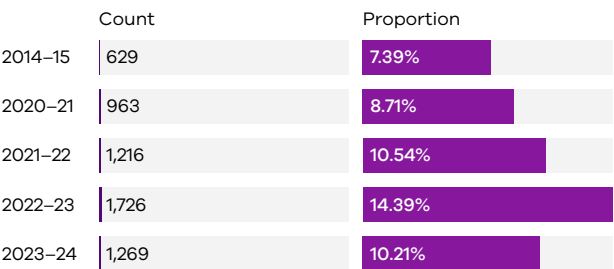
Measure 12.1.4 Number and proportion accessing aged care services

In 2023–24, the proportion of First Peoples in Victoria who accessed aged care services decreased. 1,269 Aboriginal people (10.2 per cent) accessed aged care compared with 1,726 (14.4 per cent) in 2022–23. There is a similar trend for the non-Aboriginal population with 6.4 per cent of non-Aboriginal people accessing aged care services in 2023–24. This is a decrease of 3 percentage points from the year prior. Compared to 2014–15, the proportion of Aboriginal people who access aged care services increased by 2.8 percentage points whereas the proportion of non-Aboriginal people who access aged care services is the same. In an aging population we would expect the number of users and the proportion of the population to increase year on year. More research needs to be done to understand the drivers of use of aged care services for Aboriginal Victorians.

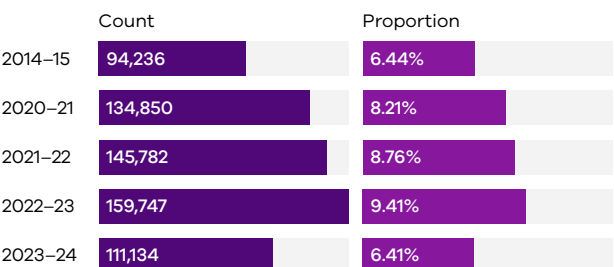
Less First Peoples are accessing aged care services in 2023–24

Measure 12.1.4 Number and proportion accessing aged care services by Aboriginal status

Aboriginal (aged 50+)



Non-Aboriginal (Aged 65+)



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, with a strong focus on intersectionality and community-led responses. Priority area 2 is Equitable, inclusive, and accessible services. Implementation of the strategy is underway, including action to support First Peoples lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer, sistergirl and brotherboy (LGBTIQ+SB) communities.

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



Overview

Measures under Goal 13 have varied in performance

In 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal survey respondents who reported that they experienced racism in a health care setting decreased. However, the proportion remains more than double the proportion for non-Aboriginal respondents.

In 2023–24, the rate of hospitalisations where Aboriginal patients left against medical advice increased to the highest rate recorded between 2011–12 to 2023–24 and is over five times the rate for non-Aboriginal people.

New data on **Measure 13.1.2** Proportion reporting positive client experience of GP services is not comparable to data from previous reports.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



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

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

Historical data for this measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report.

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.

13.1 Increase the cultural safety and responsiveness of services

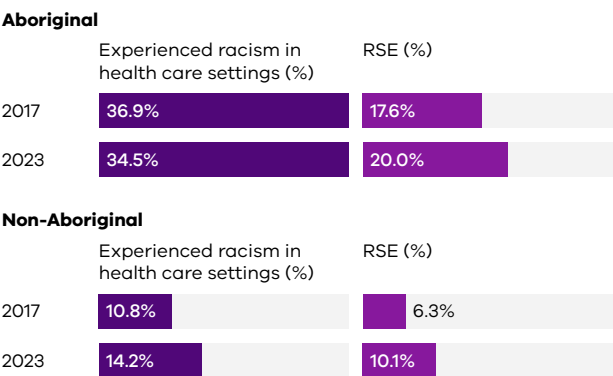
Measure 13.1.1 Proportion reporting experiences of racism in the health system

In 2023, 34.5 per cent of Aboriginal survey respondents reported that they experienced racism in a healthcare setting in the past 12 months. This is more than double the proportion for non-Aboriginal respondents (14.2 per cent). Compared to 2017, the proportion has decreased by 2.4 percentage points for Aboriginal respondents and increased by 3.4 percentage points for non-Aboriginal respondents. People who experience racism are much more likely to have poor mental and physical health.

The greater the frequency of racism, the worse the health outcomes. Research shows that First Peoples are more likely to delay seeking health services, leave hospital early, and not seek medical treatment when it is needed. This may be due to past personal, family or community experiences of negative treatment in health services.²³ Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024–2029 is the Victorian Government's plan to tackle racism and discrimination to build a safer, fairer and more inclusive state.

More than one third of Aboriginal survey respondents reported that they experienced racism in a health care setting

Measure 13.1.1 Proportion reporting experiences of racism in the health system



RSE = relative standard error which is a measure of the reliability of an estimate.

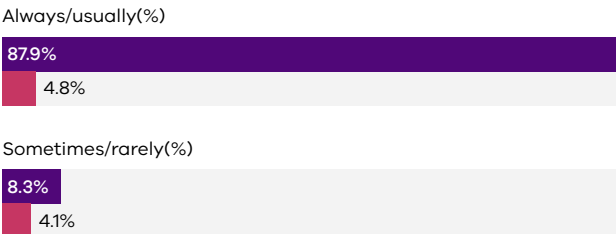
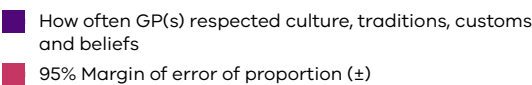
Source: Victorian Population Health Survey.

Measure 13.1.2 Proportion reporting positive client experience of GP services

In 2022–23, 89.7 per cent of Aboriginal Victorian reported always/usually having positive experiences with general practitioners where the practitioners respected culture, traditions, customs and beliefs. In the same year, 8.3 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians reported sometimes/rarely experiencing positive experiences with general practitioners. Cultural safety is a fundamental human right. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework has been developed to help mainstream Victorian health, human and community services and the Department of Health to create culturally safe environments, services and workplaces.²⁴

The majority of Aboriginal people who visit general practitioners report positive experiences

Measure 13.1.2 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians reporting positive client experience of GP services



Respondents includes Aboriginal Victorians in non-remote areas aged 15 years and over who saw a doctor or specialist in last 12 months.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022–23), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, Table 34.3 and 34.4.

23. Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024–2029, Victorian Government < <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-anti-racism-strategy-2024-2029> >

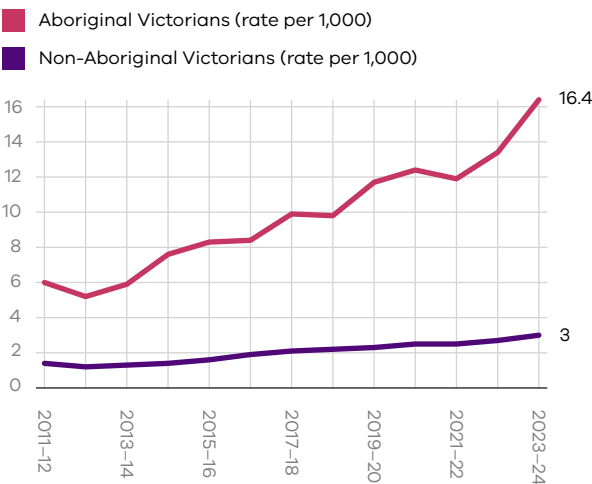
24. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety, Victorian Government < <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/health-strategies/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety> >

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

In 2023–24, the rate of hospitalisations where Aboriginal patients left against medical advice grew to 16.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal patients. This is the highest rate recorded between 2011–12 to 2023–24 and is over five times the rate for non-Aboriginal people. Compared to 2011–12, the proportion of hospitalisations where patients left against medical advice more than doubled for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients. The causes of patients leaving against medical advice vary across patients. Contributing factors may include lack of culturally safe services, racism and trauma.

Hospitalisations where Aboriginal patients left against medical advice/were discharged at own risk increased significantly

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



Source: Victorian Admitted Episodes Data collection.

Escalating Aboriginal voices in the development of community programs

VACCHO is delivering the “Culture and Kinship to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians” program as part of the 2024–25 State Budget process. This successfully secured \$9.764 million in funding over four years focussed on creating, strengthening or restoring connections to Culture, Kinship, Community and Country, all of which are known protective factors for Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

The model was originally piloted with four regional ACCOs to design their own programs, including *Budja Budja’s Gariwerd Youth Project* to engage children in knowledge sharing and cultural practices, and *Goolum Goolum’s* initiative to bring pregnant women and new mothers together in weekly gatherings to learn to make possum skin cloaks from their female Elders. The pilot was reviewed by external consultants and found to be highly effective with a ‘social rate on return’ for the investment, delivering \$8.29 for every dollar spent.

The 2024–25 State Budget proposal for the Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands initiative saw an expansion of the Culture and Kinship program in up to 16 ACCOs.

The Department of Health has also drawn from Aboriginal-led models of care to attract investment on behalf of the Victorian Aboriginal community. These include:

- A \$35 million investment in Urgent Care Pathways from the 2023–24 State Budget aimed at reducing potentially preventable hospitalisations for Aboriginal peoples.
- A \$3.9 million investment for a dedicated Aboriginal-led Early Parenting Centre (EPC) in Frankston, the first of its kind in Australia.



Transfer power and resources to communities

Early Intervention Investment Framework Cultural Safety Framework

In the 2023–24 *State Budget* the Victorian Government announced that the Department of Treasury and Finance would develop a Cultural Safety Framework to underpin the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF), following stakeholder feedback.

The two key objectives of the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework were to:

1. **Listen and learn** from the experiences of First Peoples on how to embed cultural safety in the EIIF.
2. **Identify and implement** actions that can better support cultural safety and self-determination within the EIIF.

By doing this, the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework aims to improve outcomes for First Peoples, including through supporting culturally safe partnerships, improving the design and implementation of EIIF programs, and contributing to advancing self-determination.

DTF and the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) worked in partnership for over 14 months to scope and develop the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework, consulting a range of ACCOs and Victorian Government departments engaged in EIIF.

Recognising the expertise and skills VACCA and the Department of Treasury and Finance each brought to the table helped to build trust through this partnership. These combined perspectives contributed to the integrity of the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework through genuine collaboration built on equally shared resources, workload, and two-way learning.

The findings that emerged from the consultation and development process underpinned the actions set out in the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework, which were grouped under three key domains:



The development of the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework has been a learning process, but its establishment is just the beginning of the journey. DTF will continue to listen and work with First Peoples, ACCOs and departmental stakeholders to embed the Cultural Safety Framework, including developing additional resources, undertaking enabling activities, and looking for opportunities to share learnings more broadly. DTF will also aim to measure success across a range of indicators over time, including trialling high-level public reporting.

Further information on the EIIF Cultural Safety Framework can be found on the Department of Treasury and Finance website here: www.dtf.vic.gov.au/eiif-cultural-safety-framework.

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.

In 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal Victorians reporting 'high or very high' levels of psychosocial distress increased. In 2023–24, the rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations of Aboriginal Victorians also increased.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 14: For the years 2019 to 2023, the suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria was 33.6 per 100,000 people. Of the six jurisdictions with available data (after adjusting for differences in population age structures), Victoria has the second highest suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is the first time Victorian data is available for Target 14.

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 emotional wellbeing but not suicide.

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.

14.1 Improve Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing

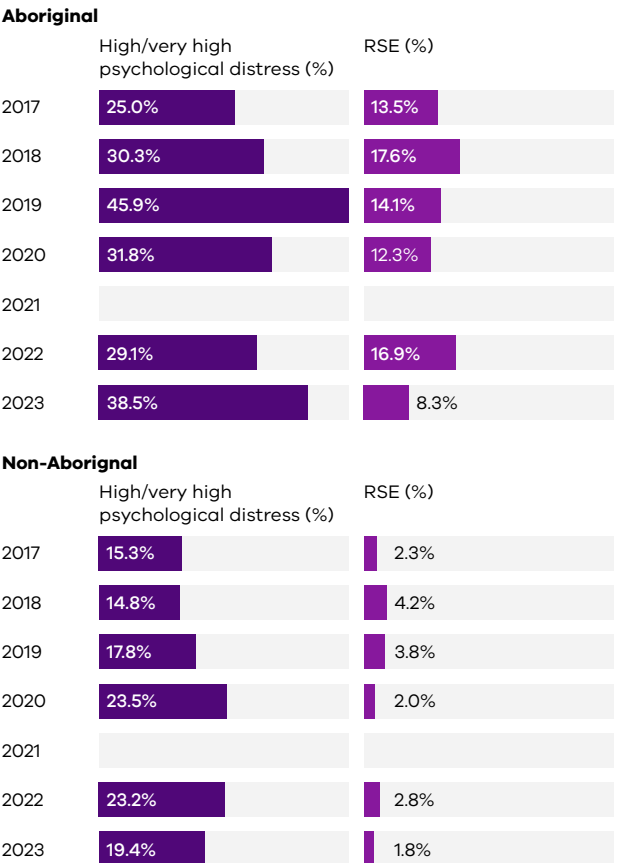
Measure 14.1.1 Proportion reporting 'high or very high' levels of psychological distress

In 2023, 38.5 per cent of Aboriginal survey respondents reported high or very high levels of psychological distress. This is an increase of 9.4 percentage points since 2022 and is the second highest proportion recorded between 2017 and 2023. In 2023, 19.4 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents also reported high or very high levels of distress. This is a decrease by 3.8 percentage points since 2022.

It should be noted that in 2023 during the Voice to Parliament Referendum, First Peoples in Australia experienced extra sources of stress from negative messaging and the burden placed upon them in public debate. It should come as no surprise that 2023 is one of the highest recorded levels of psychological distress for First Peoples in Victoria in the VPHS.

The proportion of Aboriginal survey respondents who reported high or very high levels of psychological distress increased in 2023

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



RSE = relative standard error which is a measure of the reliability of an estimate. Data is 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)

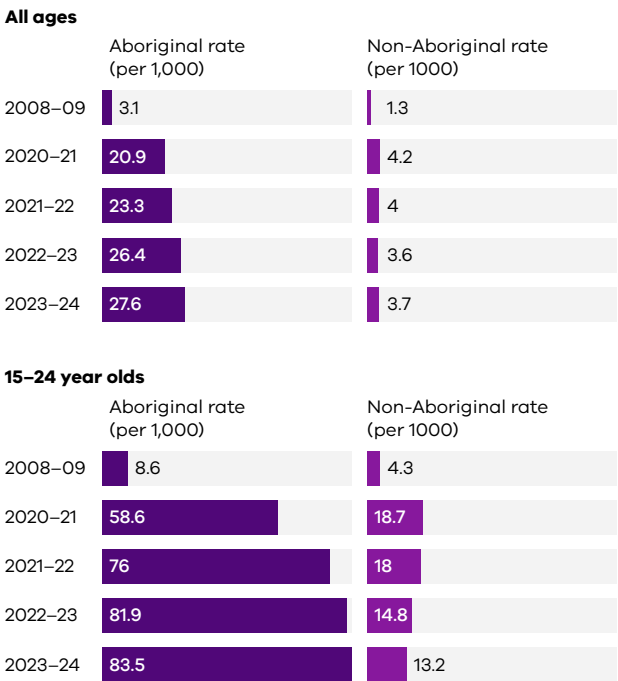
In 2023–24, the rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations of Aboriginal Victorians increased to 27.6 per 1,000 presentations. This rate is 7.5 times the rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians. When broken down to presentations from 15–24 year-old Aboriginal Victorians, the rate was 83.5 per 1,000 presentations.

Over the past decade, the rate for both 15–24-year-olds and all Aboriginal Victorians have increased nearly 5 times. In 2014–15, the rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations for Aboriginal 15–24-year-olds and all ages was 14.2 and 4.7 presentations per 1,000 people respectively.

These rates do not represent all Aboriginal Victorians who experience mental health challenges, which is much greater. In addition to providing acute services, it is critical that prevention services are also available to support the wellbeing of Victorians. The availability and uptake of prevention services plays a key role in reducing the rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations.

The rate of self-harm emergency presentations continued to increase for Aboriginal Victorians

Measure 14.1.2 Fate of self-harm-related emergency department presentations, 15–24 years old and all ages, by Aboriginal status



Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection.

Measure 14.1.5 Number of Aboriginal Victorians receiving clinical mental health services

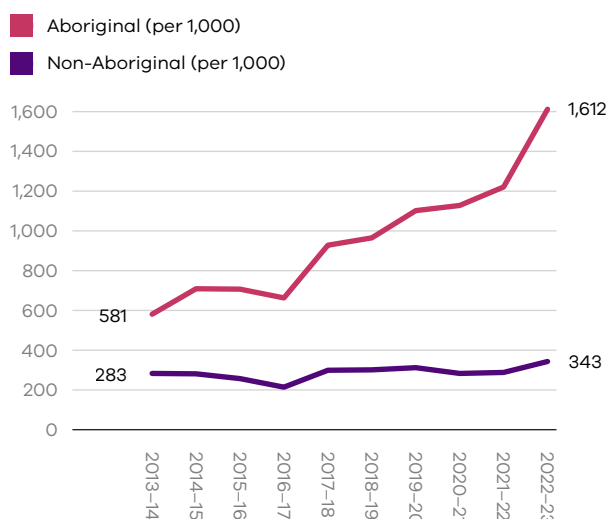
Contact with community mental health care services has continued to increase for Aboriginal Victorians since 2017–18. In 2022–23, 1,612 per 1,000 Aboriginal Victorians had contact with community mental health care services. This demonstrates a high demand for the services, with some Aboriginal Victorians accessing the services multiple times within a year. This is one of the reasons why the rate of contacts can be above 1,000.

The rate of contact with community mental health care services for non-Aboriginal Victorians remains significantly lower than for Aboriginal Victorians. In 2022–23, 343 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal Victorians had contact with community mental health care services. This may also represent multiple visits and is an increase by 55 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal Victorians since 2021–22.

An increase in contact with community mental health services does not necessarily translate to a decline in mental health. It may be a result of increase in service availability and awareness and delivery of culturally safe services.

Aboriginal people access community mental health care services at 4.7 times the rate for non-Aboriginal people

Measure 14.1.5 Number of Victorians receiving clinical mental health services by Aboriginal status



Any patient can have one or more service contacts over the relevant financial year period.

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.

Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System identified the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) as having a lead role in the design and delivery of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing recommendations, through an Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Centre of Excellence.

In its interim report, the Royal Commission recommended VACCHO be resourced to develop, host, and maintain an Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Centre of Excellence, now known as the Balit Durn Durn Centre (the Centre).

The Balit Durn Durn Centre (meaning strong brain, mind, intellect and sense of self in Wurundjeri/ Woiwurrung language), established by VACCHO in May 2022, is providing sector leadership and supporting excellence in Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing practice.

With a refreshed Strategic Plan for 2025, the vision of the Centre states that the Centre will draw on Community's rich cultural heritage across 65,000+ years of knowledge, work with purpose to support and lead sector-wide change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing and strengthen collective resilience, today and into the future, by connecting Communities using evidence-based practice and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing.

The Centre takes a rights-based approach. Its work is informed by the principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) focusing on self-determination, participation in decision-making, respect for and protection of culture and equality and non-discrimination. Once the Centre was established, the Centre took the lead in implementing a further two Royal Commission recommendations: recommendations 33.1 and 33.4.

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.

Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum

The Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership (AHWP) Forum is a strategic partnership between the Aboriginal Community Controlled health sector, the mainstream health sector, and the Department of Health. The AHWP Forum was established in 2021 and is co-chaired by the Minister for Health and the Chairperson of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO). Forum members are guided by the principles of self-determination, working in an open and transparent manner, sharing information, knowledge and resources and ensuring partners remain accountable to each other and to Community. The following five domains provide a focus for the AHWP Forum through the AHWP Agreement and Action Plan:

1. Prevention and early intervention.
2. Culturally safe healthcare.
3. A self-determined health system.
4. Working from a shared evidence base.
5. Building a sustainable health sector.

AHWP Forums in 2024 included:

- A two-day March Forum held in Bendigo focusing on the theme of sustainability.
- A one-day June Forum held on Bunurong Country for government and Koorie Caucus members to focus on 2024–25 budget outcomes and 2025–26 preparation.
- A two-day September Forum held on Wathaurong country focusing on cultural safety.

Thirteen actions from the AHWP Action Plan remain on track, 15 are not due to start and 3 actions have been delayed. The AHWP Action Plan is due for expiry in June 2025. However, it will be extended to June 2026 with preparations for developing a new AHWP Action Plan from mid-2025.

Ambulance Victoria's Reconciliation Action plan

Ambulance Victoria's (AV) Reconciliation Action plan (RAP) provides a vision for reconciliation and how AV will build strong, sustainable and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities. The RAP aims to increase awareness and appreciation of culture and elevate the voices of AV's Aboriginal staff, patients and communities to improve their experience and outcomes with AV. Activities delivered as part of the plan in 2024 include:

- Building on relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) through AV's Operational Community Engagement and Liaison Coordinators (OCELCs). The OCELCs assist AV's workforce in planning community engagement activities, support and resources. Engagement with local health services, local government services and emergency workers enable Aboriginal communities to make informed health decisions and deliver better health outcomes. AV currently has six OCELCs across the state in each region.
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Specialist was appointed to design a sustainable employment program for First Peoples at AV. This initiative reflects AV's commitment to fostering opportunities in employment, procurement, professional development, retention, and ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities.

By end 2024, AV had delivered 42 of the 43 commitments of its RAP. The remaining commitment to develop and deliver cultural safety training is in progress.

Public Health

Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27

The Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27 is Victoria's fourth legislated plan under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. The plan provides a framework for whole-of-government coordinated action and sets 10 priority areas for improving health and wellbeing that link to targeted plans. The plan recognises the need to embed self-determination in health and wellbeing policies and programs to build on the strengths of Aboriginal communities to support effective and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

The Public Health and Wellbeing Interdepartmental Committee provides oversight for implementation across Victorian Government departments. The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing External Sector Advisory Group supports implementation as part of the expanded governance under the plan to ensure consumers with lived experience are well represented. The group comprises of statewide and peak bodies in key health areas, including VACCHO. Other ways to ensure Aboriginal voices are reflected in the plan include:

- Acknowledgement that the self-determined priorities of the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and Action Plan 2023–2025 must be aligned to the Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–2027.
- Aboriginal-led or informed health and wellbeing plans such as Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017–2027 must be embedded in health and wellbeing policies.
- Victoria's commitments to improving health outcomes under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap provide a focus for delivering sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Local Public Health Units

Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) respond to local notifiable communicable disease by managing population health catchment planning at a regional level to promote equity so that related programs are inclusive and responsive to the needs of their Aboriginal communities.

New LPHU engagement guidelines were developed by a working group with representatives from VACCHO, LPHUs, and the Department of Health. Endorsed in November 2024, the Guidelines for Engagement between LPHUs and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector provide principles, key stakeholders and structures. It also includes recommended actions to build, maintain and monitor culturally safe and sustainable engagement for population health across Victoria.

To enable regionally tailored approaches, LPHUs adopt various mechanisms to engage with Aboriginal-led organisations in their catchment. These include:

- Grants to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Your Community Health for catchment planning priorities, including self-determined ACCO priorities.

- Financial resources delivered via a Memorandum of Understanding with local ACCOs to provide culturally appropriate guidance and advice to mainstream health services around the needs of local Aboriginal communities.
- Agreements for strengthening Aboriginal engagement, signed by four ACCOs to support self-determined models of healthcare.
- Employment of an Aboriginal health lead or Koori Engagement Officer to support the development of relationships with ACCHOs or Aboriginal communities. This action has been adopted by two LPHUs.

Improving cancer outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians

Cancer disproportionately affects Aboriginal Victorians, with the five-year survival rate among Aboriginal Victorians to be 12 per cent lower than non-Aboriginal Victorians. To address this disparity, in 2023–24 the Victorian Government provided a total of \$2.2 million in funding to VACCHO for the following initiatives:

- Development and implementation of VACCHO's Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy 2023–2028, including funding support to VACCHO to lead the development of the Strategy and commencement of pilot initiatives, including a partnership with Echuca Regional Health (ERH) to pilot a new Aboriginal cancer journal.
- Funding support to VACCHO to implement the Victorian Cancer Screening Framework.
- Funding support to VACCHO to lead Framework Respect, a culturally responsive and safe framework to boost participation in cancer clinical trials. In partnership with local ACCOs, the framework will form part of the Cancer Clinical Trials Program 2024–2028. This will sit alongside a new culturally safe lung cancer screening pilot to be developed in partnership with the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance.

Additionally, the Department of Health has provided funding support for the Eastern Health and Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium to open a dedicated First Nations Cancer Clinic at Eastern Health's Healesville Hospital. The program will deliver free, culturally safe oncology services to the region's large Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal Women's Health Clinic

As part of a \$153 million package from the 2023–24 State Budget, ACCHOs were invited to submit applications to deliver a dedicated Aboriginal Women's Health Clinic from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2027. First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing (FPHW) has been appointed to deliver the care Aboriginal women need through its Thomastown and Frankston Clinics, providing referral pathways with other healthcare providers to ensure these women receive high quality and culturally safe healthcare

Bloodborne viruses and sexually transmitted infections

To support health equity in some blood borne virus (BBV) and sexually transmitted infections (STI), Aboriginal people are prioritised for public health follow up. Aboriginal people are disproportionately impacted and at higher risk of severe disease or complications due to a wide range of factors. These factors include a lack of tailored and culturally responsive BBV and STI services, complex social and medical factors, concerns around privacy and confidentiality, stigma and shame and over-representation in custodial settings.

The Department of Health's communicable disease protocols ensure that cases of BBV and STIs are notified through LPHUs who provide follow up as a priority. For example:

- Newly diagnosed cases of human immunodeficiency virus identified in First Peoples are referred to the Department of Health's Victorian Investigation of Complex STIs (VICS) team for immediate follow up.
- Pregnant Aboriginal women diagnosed with syphilis are considered a 'very' high priority for follow-up by the VICS team.
- The main goal of public health follow-up for this cohort is to ensure they receive culturally safe case management and supports, are connected with the most appropriate antenatal and post-natal services, and that all treatment and testing for the person, their partner/s, and the baby before and after birth is coordinated and carried out.

Victorian Virtual Emergency Department

Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) is led by Northern Health to provide statewide access to virtual consultations with emergency trained doctors and nurses for non-life-threatening conditions. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing virtual emergency care to the Victorian community wherever they are. More than \$235 million over four years is being invested to expand the VVED so that it can grow to support 1,000 patients every day.

The VVED is particularly valuable for Aboriginal Victorians living in rural and regional areas, where access to emergency care can be challenging. First Peoples are over-represented in VVED consultation with 2.4 per cent of all VVED presentations. A dedicated First Peoples nurse supports enhanced engagement with Aboriginal Victorians by raising awareness of the VVED to improve health literacy and follow up with patients post consultation.

VicHealth – Strong Young Mob

In 2024–25, VicHealth invested \$1 million in Strong Young Mob, a committee made up of members from ACCOs to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The committee has been working together with VicHealth to inform and oversee the design and development of VicHealth's priorities for Community. Strong Young Mob remains a priority for VicHealth as they continue to build meaningful, ongoing relationships with Aboriginal organisations and communities. The initiative will elevate the efforts of 19 ACCOs in working with Strong Young Mob clients (0–30 years) to strengthen leadership, healing and wellbeing, healthy eating, movement and cultural connection through music and arts.

Cultural safety

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's Culture + Kinship program

Good health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people requires a specific focus on preventing the onset of chronic health conditions using Aboriginal models of Care. One such program is VACCHO's Culture + Kinship project that focuses on creating, strengthening or restoring connections to Culture, Kinship, Community and Country, all of which are known protective factors for Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

- The model was piloted with four regional ACCOs to design their own programs, including Budja Budja's Gariwerd Youth Project to engage children in knowledge sharing and cultural practices, and Goolum Goolum's initiative to bring pregnant women and new mothers together in weekly gatherings to learn to make possum skin cloaks from their female Elders.
- The pilot was reviewed by external consultants and found to be highly effective with a 'social rate on return' for the investment, delivering \$8.29 for every dollar spent.
- Consequently, four-year funding was provided through the 2024–25 State Budget proposal for the Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands initiative, which will see an expansion of the Culture + Kinship program in up to 16 ACCOs.

Performance Monitoring Framework

The Department of Health reset its Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF) for public health services from 1 July 2024 so that health services' cultural safety performance can be assessed more effectively. One requirement is for health services to deliver mandatory cultural safety training as follows:

'Implement mandatory cultural safety training and assessment for all staff in alignment with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework, and developed and/or delivered by independent, expert, and community-controlled organisations, Kinaway or Supply Nation certified Aboriginal businesses.'

Other changes to the PMF include the following strategies:

- Setting minimum standards and expectations for health services to meet their cultural safety commitments, including more specific guidance to meet the requirement of 'high-quality' training, such as having this training delivered by independent community-controlled organisations.
- Specific measurement and analysis of leave event data, such as 'Did Not Wait' (DNW) and 'Leave/Discharge Against Medical Advice' (LAMA) in Emergency Department settings are to be reviewed by the Department of Health to inform discussions with health services about their cultural safety performance.

Culturally safe paediatric services

Improving access to culturally safe paediatric services has been enhanced with a funding commitment for ACCHOs to deliver specialist health services that support general developmental, autism and targeted assessments for Aboriginal children entering care.

The 2023–24 State Budget provided \$1 million annually to Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) to deliver specialist clinics that include paediatricians and allied health professionals. This builds on work VAHS had done to develop strong clinical capability and engagement with the community to deliver services that support an average of 300 children and families each year.

The 2023–24 State Budget also included \$37.7 million over four years to deliver statewide screening and assessment for all Victorian children who enter statutory out-of-home care due to child protection involvement. To support culturally safe health services for Aboriginal children in care, VACCHO worked with its members to design three demonstration pilots that will enable ACCHOs to deliver health care that Aboriginal children, their carers, and their families need. Funding of \$5.5 million over three years has been allocated for these self-determined demonstration pilots that will be supported by VACCHO to foster a strong collaborative partnership between VACCHO and the Department of Health.

Under the Victorian Autism Plan, \$0.27 million of fixed-term funding over two years was allocated to Wathaurong Aboriginal Health Service and VAHS to deliver autism assessments for Aboriginal children in their local areas. This funding supports the accessible delivery of services in community for children with lower complexity autism needs.

Victoria's LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022–32

In 2023–24, the Victorian Government continued to support culturally safe service delivery for First Peoples LGBTIQ+SB communities under the Strategy through targeted funding, partnerships and inclusive programming, including:

- \$33,000 provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) through the LGBTIQ+ Organisational Development Program. The funding supported VACCA to build staff capability and strengthen service delivery that is inclusive and affirming of LGBTIQ+ communities.

- \$100,000 provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to enhance its existing Rainbow Mob initiatives. The funding supported VACCHO to further build on their Rainbow Mob inclusion work by enabling ACCOs to undertake Rainbow Tick accreditation and join their Rainbow Mob Community of Practice.

Industry, Trade and Investment

Aboriginal workforce

- In 2024–25, 25 ACCHOs and two ACCOs continued to receive recurrent funding to build their social and emotional wellbeing workforce. This funding has also enabled ACCHOs to commission services to support the social and emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people. With this recurrent funding supporting self-determined social and emotional wellbeing services and programs, nearly 5,000 Aboriginal community members across Victoria were able to access the supports they need to heal, to be healthy and well.
- The Victorian Government continues to invest to deliver an Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Scholarship Program (the scholarship program). The scholarship program has awarded 49 scholarships to Aboriginal students studying an undergraduate or postgraduate mental health related discipline. The scholarship program is being delivered by the Department of Health in partnership with the Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing, together with Deakin, RMIT and La Trobe universities. The scholarship program is helping meet the growing demand for qualified and skilled Aboriginal staff to work in social and emotional wellbeing teams and in the mainstream mental health sector.
- The Victorian Government has funded 10 dedicated Koorie Mental Health Liaison Officer (KMHLO) positions in Infant, Child and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Services. As of January 2025, seven KMHLOs are employed across six health services. The Department of Health is working with other health services to fill current vacancies. Building the capacity of the Aboriginal Mental Health workforce is helping support more responsive and culturally safe mainstream mental health services.

- The Aboriginal Mental Health Traineeship program is a workforce program established in 2017 under the Balit Murrup Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework 2017–2027. The traineeship program provides Aboriginal trainees full-time employment in mental health services while concurrently undertaking a funded Bachelor of Health Sciences (Mental Health) through Charles Sturt University. Trainees are offered full-time ongoing employment with their health service employer upon graduation. Since the traineeship program was established, 12 trainees have graduated from the program as qualified Aboriginal Mental Health Clinicians and have entered full time employment in either a mental health service or within an ACCHO working in the field of social and emotional wellbeing.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference

Healthy environments are a fundamental prerequisite for good health. Environmental health is about relationships between people and the environment, both social and physical, aimed at preventing disease and creating health-supporting environments.

In May 2024, the Department of Health hosted the 14th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health (NATSIEH) conference, marking the first time it being held in Victoria since it began in 1998. The conference had more than 160 delegates that attended and included a strong focus on community-led initiatives, co-design, collaboration and engagement. Throughout a wide variety of presentations, the conference advocated the need for ongoing and further measures to monitor and act on the health and wellbeing of First Peoples with a clear purpose of reducing inequities.

Community-led Research - Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities to Conduct Research

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions has funded VACCHO to investigate First Peoples medical research priorities and foster community research skills. The project will engage with ACCOs and Community members across the State to ensure that research priorities align with the diverse values and needs of First Peoples in Victoria. Through workshops and networking opportunities, VACCHO will foster collaborative learning and knowledge exchange among ACCOs. This will empower ACCOs across the State to lead and conduct medical research projects that address Community priorities.

marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri: the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord

The 2024–25 State Budget included \$4.5 million to support VACCHO to implement marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri: the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord. The Accord was launched by VACCHO in October 2023 and aims to improve the ethical standards of First Peoples health, medical and wellbeing research in Victoria so that they align with First Peoples principles of self-determination.

The Victorian Government has endorsed the Accord and is working in partnership with VACCHO to support its implementation.

Support for marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri through mRNA Victoria Research Acceleration Fund (Round 4)

The mRNA Victoria Research Acceleration Fund Round 4 Guidelines strongly encouraged applications from organisations and collaborative partners that have endorsed marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri. Applicants were also encouraged to outline in their application how they and their organisation uphold the objectives and principles of the Accord. The Guidelines were updated following consultation with VACCHO.

2023–24 Premier’s Awards for Health and Medical Research – Aboriginal Researcher undertaking research in any field of health and medical research Award

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions runs the annual Premier’s Awards for Health and Medical Research. One category of award is the ‘Aboriginal Researcher undertaking research in any field of health and medical research’. Ms Joanne Luke from the University of Melbourne was announced as the winner of the award on 23 April 2024 and received a certificate and prize money of \$5,000 (excluding GST). Dr Petah Atkinson from Monash University was a finalist in the category and received a certificate.

Fostering Achievement in Research (FAIR) Fellowships

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions funded the FAIR Fellowships, to support 13 early and mid-career researchers who narrowly missed out on National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Investigator Grant funding in the Emerging Leaders 2 stream. Applications from First Peoples, among other under-represented cohorts, were prioritised. The FAIR Fellowships are an initiative that supports the Victorian Government to deliver a diverse, secure and highly skilled health and medical research workforce. The FAIR Fellowships were delivered by Veski.

Sport and Experience Economy

Surfing Victoria’s Indigenous Surfing Program

The Together More Active 2023–27 program is providing funding of \$200,000 over 4 years to Surfing Victoria to support its Indigenous Surfing Program. The Indigenous Surfing Program utilises surfing as a vehicle to connect Aboriginal Victorians with the ocean, their Community and nature whilst learning new skills, water safety knowledge and healthy habits. It aims to enrich First Peoples communities across the State through surfing and stand up paddleboarding; being physically active in a safe, fun environment, whilst building confidence, social cohesion and connection to community and reducing barriers to participation and teaching water safety skills.

Victorian Aboriginal Sporting Partnership

The Victorian Aboriginal Sporting Partnership (VASP) will provide a formal agreement to increase sport and active recreation participation opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians through a self-determined approach. The VASP will be a positive mechanism for Aboriginal sporting bodies to come together to share experiences, connect and have a voice on sport and recreation to the Victorian Government. In March 2024, the Victorian Aboriginal Sporting Partnership Working Group (the Working Group) was established by Sport and Recreation Victoria to design and develop the model, strategy/action plan for the VASP. In alignment with Aboriginal self-determination principles, the Working Group consists of 10 Aboriginal community leaders with roles across the sport, government and primary prevention sectors. The Working Group plays an important role in helping shape Sport and Recreation Victoria’s approach to policy, programs and projects.

Domain 5: Justice & Safety



Our shared commitment

Aboriginal people have access to an equitable justice system that is shaped by self-determination, and protects and upholds their human, civil, legal and cultural rights.

Most Aboriginal people will never be involved with the criminal justice system. Those who are, however, are more likely to experience ongoing involvement. Systemic and structural barriers lead to Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system and entrenched cycles of disadvantage. These barriers include inequality, racism, discrimination and unconscious bias, social and economic disadvantage and involvement with the child protection system. While the over-representation of Aboriginal people remains, community-led responses are going some way to address these underlying structural factors.





Goal 15: Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system is eliminated

Overview

Measures under Goal 15 have varied in performance

The latest year of data sees police cautioning youth more and sees less children, women and men in unsentenced detention. There are also less men in corrections supervision.

However, the number of youth and adult alleged offenders processed by police and the rates for women and men returning to prison within two years has worsened.

Goal 15 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcomes and Targets

Outcome 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

- **Target 10:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.

Outcome 11: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

- **Target 11:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 10: In 2023–24, the age standardised rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 2,304.4 per 100,000 adult population across Australia compared to 1,362.1 per 100,000 in Victoria. Victoria has seen positive progress with a 22 per cent decrease in the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult incarceration, against the target rate of 15 per cent reduction by 2031 (Closing the Gap Target 10).

Outcome 11: In 2023–24, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 10–17 years in detention across Australia was 26.1 per 10,000 children compared to 7.3 per 10,000 in Victoria. Victoria has continued to significantly exceed Closing the Gap Target 11, with a 52.3 per cent reduction in Aboriginal youth incarceration rates since 2019, against a target for a 30 per cent reduction by 2031.

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

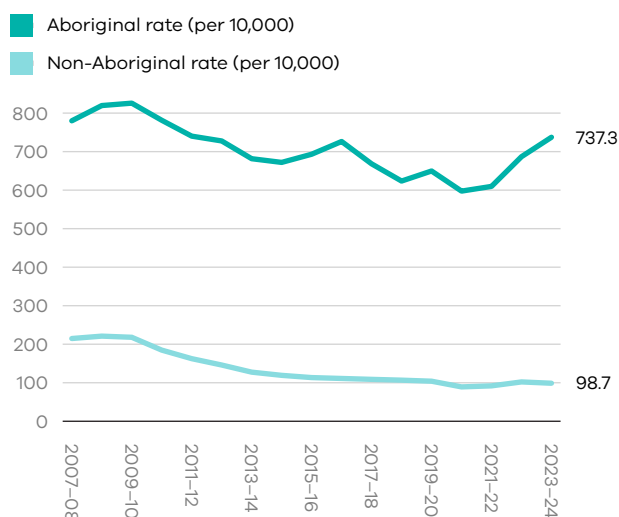
Measure 15.1.1 Number, rate, and age profile of unique youth (10–17 years) alleged offenders processed by police

The number and rate of Aboriginal unique youth alleged offenders has continued to increase since 2021. This includes young people who have been processed by way of a caution, arrest or summons. In 2023–24, there were 795 Aboriginal and 6,230 non-Aboriginal unique youth alleged offenders. This represents a rate of 737.3 per 10,000 Aboriginal young people and 98.7 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal young people. Since 2007–08, there has been an almost 50 per cent decline in the rate of non-Aboriginal unique youth alleged offenders. This historic decline has not taken place for Aboriginal unique youth alleged offenders, with an approximate reduction of 5 per cent over the same period.

When reviewing by age, in 2022–23, Aboriginal young people aged 15–17 years were recorded as alleged offenders at almost three times the rate of Aboriginal young people aged 10–14 years. This rate has not changed since 2018–19 and increased from 2.3 times since 2007–08. For the 15–17 age group, the rate of alleged offender incidents (1,277.3 per 10,000) is the highest it has been since 2010–11. For the 10–14 age group, the rate has also risen over the last five years.

Cautions, arrests and summons of Aboriginal children aged 10–17 years continue to increase to their highest point since 2009–10

Measure 15.1.1 Rate of unique youth (10–17 years) alleged offenders processed by police



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA).

Cautions, arrests and summons of Aboriginal children aged 10–17 years are at their highest rate in a decade

Measure 15.1.1b and 15.1.1c Rate of unique youth (10–14 and 15–17 years) alleged offenders processed by police



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 2023–24, the average daily number of Aboriginal children and young people in community-based supervision was 37.7. This is consistent with the average daily number in 2022–23 (38) and is significantly lower than a decade ago (97.9 in 2014–15). The average daily number has steadily decreased after an increase to 113.3 in 2015–16. In 2023–24, the rate of Aboriginal children and young people in community-based supervision was 27.2 per 10,000 Aboriginal children and young people. This is also consistent with the rate in 2022–23 (28.1) and significantly lower than a decade ago (102.2 per 10,000 Aboriginal children and young people in 2014–15). In 2023–24, the rate for Aboriginal children and young people was 9.8 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children and young people (2.8 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal children and young people). The 2023–24 rate for non-Aboriginal children and young people is consistent with the rate in 2022–23 (3.1) and is lower than the rate a decade ago (9.6 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal children and young people in 2014–15).

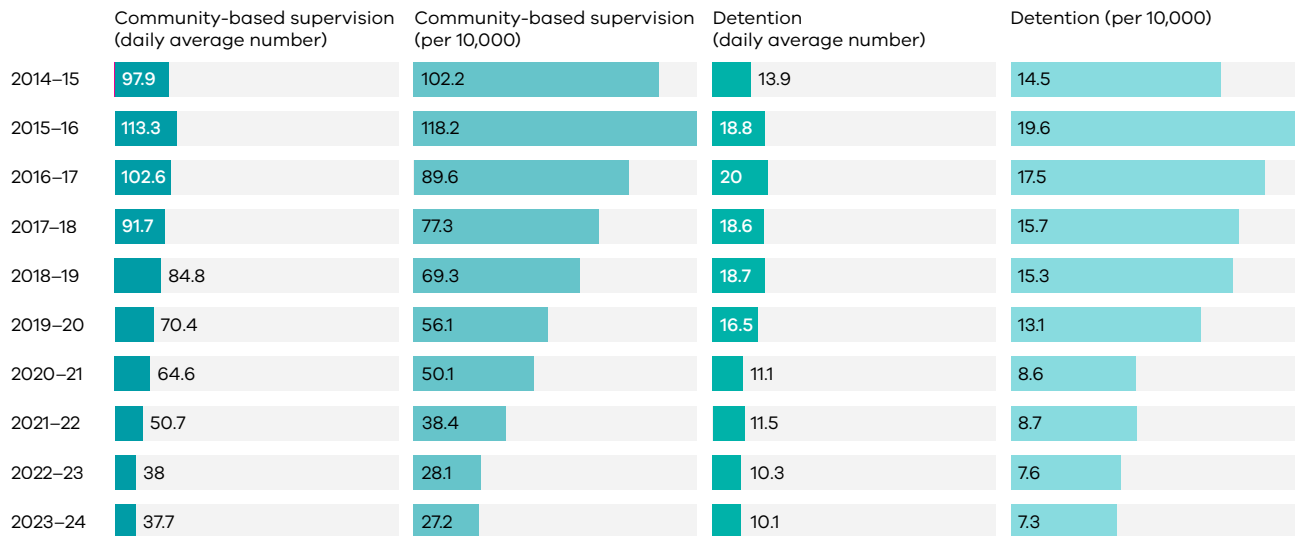
In 2023–24, the average daily number of Aboriginal children and young people in detention was 10.1. This is consistent with the average daily number in 2022–23 (10.3) and slightly lower than the average daily number a decade ago (13.9 in 2014–15). The highest average daily number recorded over the past decade was 20 in 2016–17. In 2023–24, the rate of Aboriginal children and young people in detention was 7.3 per 10,000 Aboriginal children and young people. This is consistent with the rate in 2022–23 (7.6) and is significantly lower than the rate a decade ago (14.5 per 10,000 Aboriginal children and young people in 2014–15). In 2023–24, the rate for Aboriginal children and young people was 6.6 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children and young people (0.7 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal children and young people). The rate for non-Aboriginal children is consistent with the rate in 2022–23 (1) and a decade ago (1.2 in 2014–15).



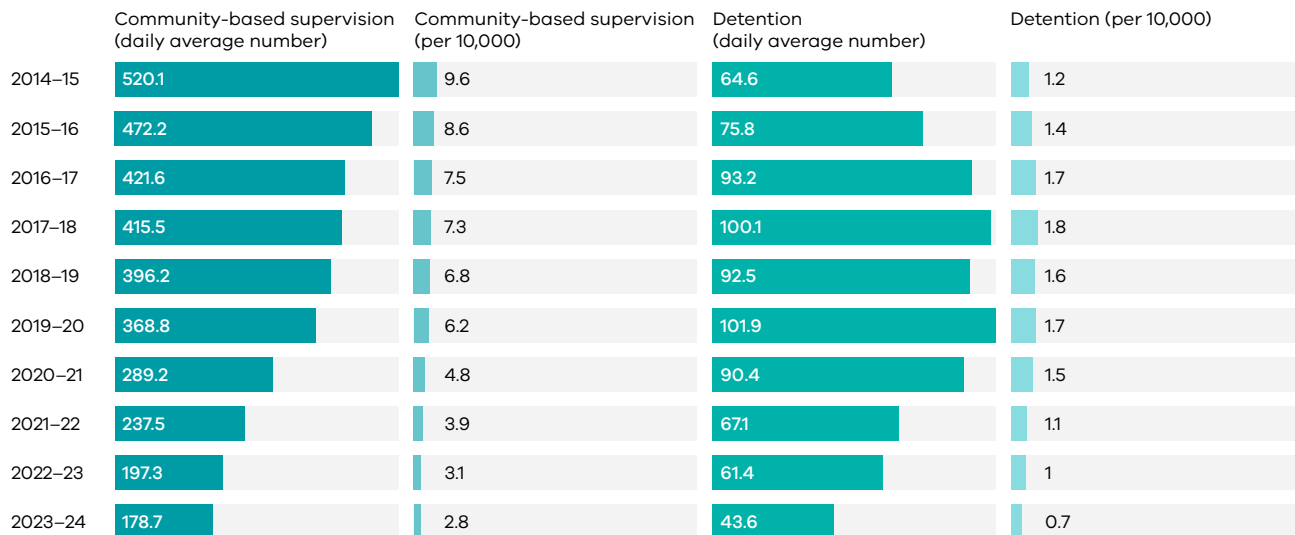
The number and rate of Aboriginal children and young people (10–17 years) in community-based supervision or detention have decreased over the long term

Measure 15.1.2a and 15.1.2b Young people (10–17 years) under youth justice community based supervision or detention, daily average number(a) and rate per 10,000 population

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Youth justice in Australia 2023–24.

Youth Justice Act 2024

The new *Youth Justice Act 2024* (the YJ Act) has a dedicated focus on supporting Aboriginal self-determination and reducing Aboriginal over-representation in the youth justice system.

The YJ Act includes a Statement of Recognition that expressly recognises the role that inequality, structural and institutional racism, caused by colonialism and laws, policies and systems which explicitly excluded and harmed Aboriginal people and culture, have played – and continue to play – in the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, and formalises a commitment to address this over-representation.

The new Act also introduces principles and considerations specific to Aboriginal children and young people, including Aboriginal-specific guiding principles, sentencing principles, custodial principles, and rights. Beyond

aspirational principles, the YJ Act supports concrete action, including by placing a positive duty on the DJCS Secretary to develop strategic partnerships with Aboriginal communities, providing for the development of an Aboriginal-led Early Diversion Group Conferencing model, embedding Aboriginal representation on the Youth Parole Board and establishing an Aboriginal division of the Board.

The YJ Act received Royal Assent on 10 September 2024 and reforms in the Act will commence progressively, by proclamation.

The Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) has worked closely with the Victorian Government on the YJ Act and have been instrumental in shaping key aspects designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. DJCS will continue to work closely with justice sector stakeholders, including the AJC, during the implementation of the YJ Act's major reforms.



Measure 15.1.3 Proportion of first-time youth alleged offenders (10–17 years) cautioned by police

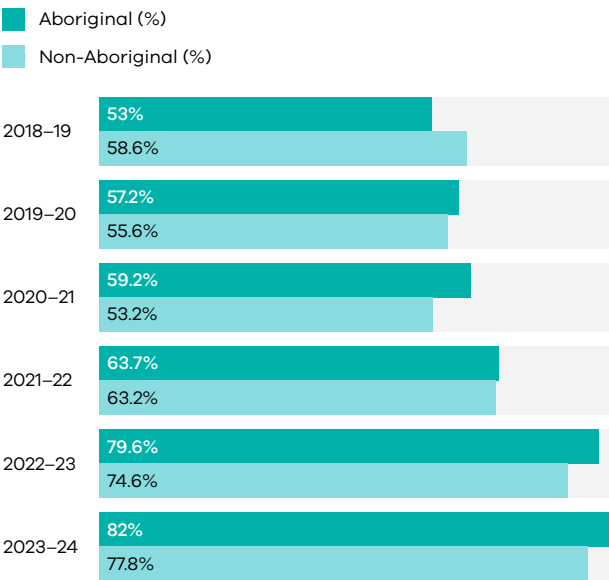
In 2023–24, Victoria Police cautioned 82 per cent of Aboriginal first-time alleged offenders aged 10–17, representing 273 out of 333 Aboriginal first-time alleged offenders. Cautions mean that a person will not go to court for their alleged offence and will not record a criminal conviction. This is the highest recorded percentage for this measure in the VAAF. Police cautioning of Aboriginal first-time alleged offenders continues to increase since 2018–19. This is a reversal of the trend before 2018–19. Now police are more likely to caution Aboriginal young people than their non-Aboriginal peers.

These results show the benefits of the Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program. Diverting young people away from formal courts systems leads to better outcomes. Victoria Police developed the Program along with other policy amendments to reduce barriers to police issuing cautions and to increase the number of cautions issued to Aboriginal youth. The program reflected feedback from Aboriginal community stakeholders, including the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, who strongly encouraged greater use of police cautions to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and other vulnerable children and young people in Victoria’s justice systems. The program was introduced in recognition that diverting young people away from formal courts system leads to better outcomes. For further information please visit <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/publications/youth-crime/the-cautious-approach-police-cautions-and-the>.

There remains a large volume of first-time youth alleged offenders whose Aboriginal status is unknown. Positive Aboriginal identification is an ongoing initiative that can ensure access to First Peoples’ alternative justice pathways.

Victoria Police caution Aboriginal children (10–17) first time alleged offenders at highest percentage

Measure 15.1.3 Proportion of first-time youth alleged offenders (10–17 years) cautioned by police



Source: Crime Statistics Agency.

Measure 15.1.4 Proportion of young people (10–17 years) in detention on remand

In 2023–24, eight Aboriginal children were in detention on an average night. This has remained steady since 2022–23. For non-Aboriginal children, there was a significant reduction in the number in detention in 2023–24. 35.2 non-Aboriginal children were in detention compared to 53.5 in 2022–23. When analysing long-term, the numbers of Aboriginal children in detention have declined. In the previous ten years, 2016–17 had the highest average number of Aboriginal children in detention on a given night with 20. There has been a similar decline with the number of non-Aboriginal children in detention.

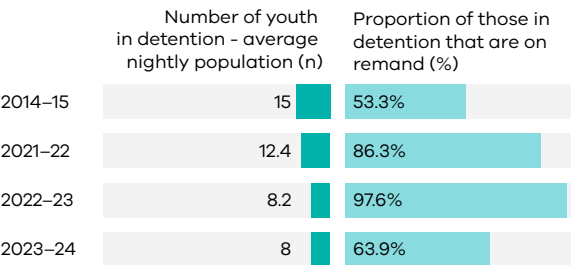
The major difference is in the number of Aboriginal children who are unsentenced in detention. In 2023–24, 5.1 Aboriginal children in detention were unsentenced. That means 63.9 per cent of children in detention had not been convicted of a crime. In 2022–23, 97.6 per cent of Aboriginal children in detention had not been convicted of a crime. For non-Aboriginal children there is a similar decline. 2022–23 had the highest proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in unsentenced detention for the time series. In 2023–24, the 5.1 Aboriginal children in detention represented 11.8 per cent of the total child population in detention in Victoria.

The *Bail Amendment Bill 2025* passed both houses of Parliament on 21 March 2025, and removed the requirement that bail be considered a ‘last resort’ for youth offenders. Future reporting on bail in this report will analyse the change in rates due to changes in the Bail Act.

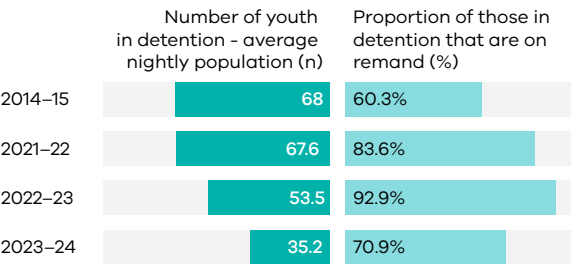
Proportion of Aboriginal children in detention on remand has decreased in 2023–24

Measure 15.1.4 Proportion of young people (10–17 years) in detention on remand

Aboriginal young people



Non-Aboriginal young people



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Youth detention population in Australia 2024, AIHW, Australian Government.

Youth Voice Model Implementation

Developed by Koorie Youth Council, the Youth Voice Model program seeks to engage the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the design and delivery of youth justice services. The Youth Voice Model includes a culturally responsive custodial program occurring monthly for Aboriginal children and young people to undertake cultural activities, yarn with community members, and engage in learning modules. Additionally, the Youth Voice Model includes an online resource hub comprising a website and mobile app which will provide accessibility to a comprehensive list of key services, youth groups, hotlines, campaigns, crossover services, and resources on Aboriginal young peoples' rights.

In 2020–21, the Department of Justice and Community Safety funded Koorie Youth Council, under the 'Amplifying the voice of Aboriginal children and young people' initiative, to design a model of Aboriginal youth engagement within Youth Justice. This resulted in the Youth Voice Model proposal, which was tabled at the Aboriginal Justice Forum and endorsed for implementation in tranche one of Wirkara Kulpa.

In June 2024, the Koorie Youth Council was commissioned to deliver the Youth Voice Model. Youth Justice will continue to support the Koorie Youth Council in implementing the Youth Voice Model, with an evaluation to follow in 2025–26.



Transfer power and resources to communities

Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs

As a priority project under Tranche 1 of Wirkara Kulpa, Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy, the Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs program was designed to enable self-determination at every stage. These hubs provide services for children and young people at risk of engaging with the youth justice system. Services range from intervention and diversion through to complex needs, and are provided in an accessible space where children and young people can engage in social and recreational activities.

In the program development phase, self-determination was supported through collaborative decision-making and engagement. A Sub-Working Group, including ACCOs, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, and the Department of Justice and Community Safety,

spent a year designing the program, shaping funding options, and determining key locations for the hubs project. Continuous consultation with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus ensured that the program aligned with community priorities.

In the participation and support phase, 16 organisations were funded through a staged approach, lowering barriers for smaller Aboriginal organisations. Resources were provided for financial literacy and co-design training, strengthening capacity and supporting organisations to deliver effective, culturally responsive services.

The next phase, co-designing the services with Aboriginal young people, will focus on empowering their voices in shaping service delivery. This approach will continue the program's commitment to building community-led solutions and advancing self-determination.

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

In 2023–24, Aboriginal women were 6.1 times more likely to receive a caution, arrest, or summons than their non-Aboriginal peers, this is the highest since the VAAF began recording this measure. There were 1,413 (699.4 per 10,000) First Peoples women recorded as alleged offenders in 2023–24. In the same year there were 14,487 (54.3 per 10,000) non-Aboriginal women recorded as alleged offenders. Outcomes for Aboriginal women have worsened over time. Small decreases in the rate of alleged offences involving non-Aboriginal women have come at the same time as the rate of Aboriginal women has increased since 2021–22. Successful progress for this measure is reducing the rate of police processing and arrest of Aboriginal women by Victoria Police.

Victoria Police committed in March 2024 to completing 79 actions to address injustice relating to policing by the end of 2025, following the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police's appearance before the Yoorrook Justice Commission in May 2023. This included identifying risks of systemic racism, embedding cultural awareness training and exploring the introduction of a cautioning program for adults, among other reforms. First Peoples led Truth-Telling and self-determination have created the environment whereby Victoria Police has made a genuine commitment to fundamentally reconsidering and reforming its operations to partner with and build trust with Aboriginal community members and organisations to realise better outcomes. These changes will impact a range of output measures but are focussed on reducing unnecessary and disproportionate interactions between First Peoples and the criminal justice system.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission made 18 recommendations on urgent reforms to the criminal justice system in its 2023 interim report, *Yoorrook for Justice*. As of October 2024, the Government has committed to supporting three recommendations, supporting eight recommendations in-principle, and to further considering five recommendations. Recommendations 30, 31 and 36 are supported by Government. Recommendation 30 relates to police conduct following the decriminalisation of public intoxication, and calls for the Chief Commissioner of Police to monitor police conduct and ensure members do not use existing powers to unnecessarily take intoxicated people into custody, for Government's planned independent evaluation to be First Peoples-led and for results to be publicly

available. Recommendation 31 is to introduce mandatory criteria, including in relation to ending systemic racism, for the selection, appointment and performance reviews of the Chief Commissioner of Police. Recommendation 36 calls for the Government to ensure the *Youth Justice Act 2024* embeds human rights, including the distinct cultural rights of First Peoples, in all aspects of the youth justice system and its administration.

The recommendations not supported by Government relate to a series of reforms to the *Bail Act 1977* (recommendation 32), and a proposal to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years, with a prohibition on the detention of children under 16 years (recommendation 35).

Victoria Police are 6.1 times more likely to process Aboriginal women alleged offenders than non-Aboriginal women alleged offenders (age 18+)

Measure 15.2.1 Number and rate of unique adult female alleged offenders processed by police

Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2014–15	958	583.2
2021–22	1,205	603.5
2022–23	1,291	628.4
2023–24	1,413	669.4

Non-Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2014–15	13,142	56.9
2021–22	14,643	56
2022–23	14,371	54.9
2023–24	14,487	54.3

Source: Crimes Statistics Agency.

Measure 15.2.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections

In 2023–24, less Aboriginal women were either in community-based corrections supervision or in supervision in prison than in 2022–23.

On an average day in 2023–24, there were 155 Aboriginal women under community-based corrections supervision. This represents a rate of 73.4 per 10,000 Aboriginal women. This is a lower average daily number (and rate) than the previous year, when Community Correctional Services managed 164 Aboriginal women under community-based corrections supervision (at a rate of 79.8 per 10,000 Aboriginal women). This is a part of a continuing long-term trend of the number and rate declining since 2017–18.

Over the same period (2022–23 to 2023–24), the number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prisons decreased.

On an average day in 2022–23, there were 36 Aboriginal women in prison compared to 41 women the previous year and 46 women in 2021–22. This represents a rate of 17.1 per 10,000 Aboriginal women, compared to a rate of 20.0 per 10,000 and 23.0 per 10,000 the previous years.

It is promising that the number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison has been decreasing year on year since 2018–19. Continuing to reduce over-representation 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 2023–24, Aboriginal women were 15.8 times more likely to be under community-based supervision than non-Aboriginal women. They were also 17.6 times more likely to be under corrections supervision in prison than non-Aboriginal women.

Number of Aboriginal women in both community corrections and prison have declined in 2023–24, however both remain higher than 2007–08 levels

Measure 15.2.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections

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
2021–22	137	68.6	46	23
2022–23	164	79.8	41	20
2023–24	155	73.4	36	17.1

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	6.1	226	1.1
2021–22	1,128	4.3	295	1.1
2022–23	1,217	4.6	284	1.1
2023–24	1,240	4.6	259	1

Source: Corrections Victoria.

Measure 15.2.3 Proportion of women who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

In 2023–24, 35.2 per cent of Aboriginal women who had left prison returned within two years. Prison recidivism rates have increased yearly since 2021–22.

This is a negative trend across the reporting period for both recidivism for Aboriginal women under measure 15.2.3 and the rate of Aboriginal women being held in prison under measure 15.2.2.

In 2023–24, 28.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal women leaving prison returned within two years. This percentage has remained stable over the past ten years. Although this does not represent a significant difference from Aboriginal women, it is concerning that increased recidivism rates among Aboriginal women have occurred during a period when recidivism rates for non-Aboriginal women have been stable.

When looking at longer-term trends, the proportion of Aboriginal women returning to custody has almost halved since 2010–11. In that year, 63.2 per cent of Aboriginal women returned to prison within two years of their release.

The proportion of Aboriginal women returning to prison in 2024 slightly increased while the proportion of non-Aboriginal women returning to prison remained steady

Measure 15.2.3 Proportion of women who return to prison under sentence within two years of release



Source: Corrections Victoria.



Measure 15.2.4 Proportion of women in prison on remand

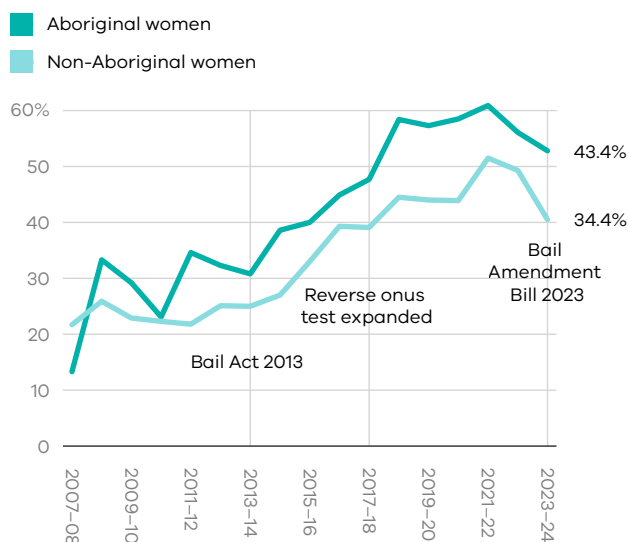
Between 2022–23 and 2023–24, the proportion of Aboriginal women on remand decreased from 56.1 to 52.8 per cent. During this time, the proportion of non-Aboriginal women on remand decreased from 49.3 to 40.5 per cent. In 2022–23, Aboriginal women represented 6.4 per cent of all women in prison. This is the lowest this rate has been since 2017–18. The slow decrease over the past three years in the proportion of Aboriginal women on remand show positive change is happening. This is a change in a long-term trend since 2011–12 of increasingly high proportion of Aboriginal women on remand.

In 2023, the Victorian Government amended the *Bail Act 1977 (Vic)* to remove provisions introduced in 2013 and 2017. This 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 1977 (Vic)* and gave 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 were expected to reduce rates of remand for people accused of low-level offending.

Further bail reforms were announced 12 March 2025. The *Bail Amendment Bill 2025* passed both houses of Parliament on 21 March 2025, and removed the requirement that bail be considered a ‘last resort’ for youth offenders, made community safety the overarching principle for bail consideration of all bail decision-makers, and delivered a range of other changes to strengthen existing laws.

Aboriginal women are disproportionately affected by changes to the Bail Act

Measure 15.2.4 Proportion of women on remand by Aboriginal status



Source: Corrections Victoria.

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

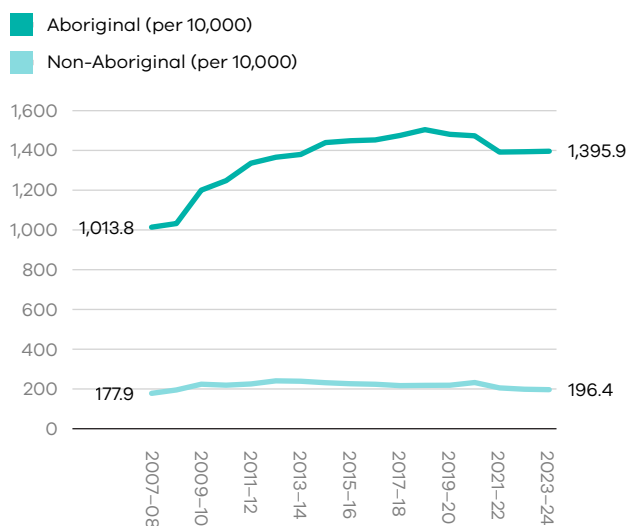
Aboriginal men were 7.1 times more likely to receive a caution, arrest, or summons in 2023–24 than non-Aboriginal men. The number of Aboriginal men who received a caution, arrest or summons continued to rise in 2023–24, to 3,032 men. In this year, Victoria Police processed Aboriginal men at a rate of 1,395.9 per 10,000. In contrast, the rate for non-Aboriginal men processed by police was 196.4 per 10,000.

When analysing the experience of Aboriginal men with police compared with non-Aboriginal men a different trend emerges. The rate of non-Aboriginal cautions, arrests, or summons have remained similar since 2007–08. Comparatively there has been a steady increase in the rate of Aboriginal men processed by police. This represents a deepening of existing over-representation of First Peoples in the criminal justice system and may be associated over-policing of Aboriginal communities.

Victoria Police committed in March 2024 to completing 79 actions to address injustice relating to policing by the end of 2025, as discussed at measure 15.2.1, following the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police's appearance before the Yoorrook Justice Commission in May 2023. These reforms will impact a range of output measures and work to reduce over-representation of Aboriginals in the criminal justice system.

Aboriginal men processed by police has steadily increased over the long term

Measure 15.3.1 Rate of unique adult male alleged offenders processed by police



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA).

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 2023–24, there were 728 Aboriginal men under community-based corrections and 760 Aboriginal men in prison. Over this year, Aboriginal men were 11.4 times more likely to be under community-based supervision than non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men were also 18.1 times more likely to be in prison than non-Aboriginal men.

The rate of Aboriginal men under community-based supervision has increased by 70 per cent since 2007–08. The rate of Aboriginal men in prison has more than doubled over the same period. This trend is not present in the non-Aboriginal population with the rate of men under community supervision rising by 3.5 per cent and prison by only 2.4 per cent in the same period.

Rate of First Peoples men in community based corrections is steadily increasing

Measure 15.3.2a and b Average daily number and rate of men under community-based corrections supervision and detention

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	203.3	221	166.4
2021–22	618	312.6	669	338.4
2022–23	680	333	759	371.7
2023–24	728	345.5	760	360.7

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	29.4	3,704	19.4
2021–22	6,825	27.3	5,506	22
2022–23	7,640	30.5	5,365	21.5
2023–24	7,745	30.4	5,066	19.9

Source: Corrections Victoria.

Measure 15.3.3 Proportion of men who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

In 2023–24 almost half (48.0 per cent) of all Aboriginal men who leave prison return within two years. Ten years ago (2014–15) 60.6 per cent returned to prison. While this reduction is progress for First Peoples there is still an over-representation of Aboriginal men returning to prison compared with their non-Aboriginal peers.

For non-Aboriginal men, rates have marginally decreased in recent years. In 2023–24, 38.7 per cent of non-Aboriginal men returned to prison within two years, compared to 39.4 per cent the previous year. Non-Aboriginal men returning to prison is declining from a peak of 42.8 per cent in 2014–15.

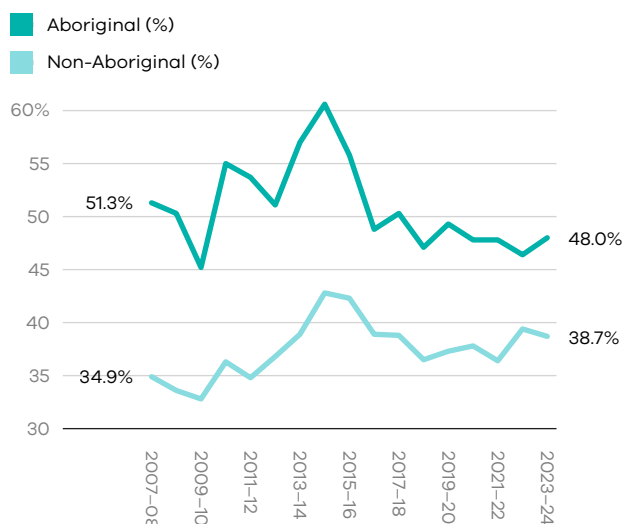
In the final report of the Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System the panel identified the lack of institutional reform in the corrections system as a major barrier to progress.

“Despite progress to elevate rehabilitation and reducing recidivism as primary objectives, cultural change across the Victorian adult custodial corrections system remains incomplete. There is a clear gap between the intention of policies and programs and their operational translation.”

Recommendation 43 of the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s *Yoorrook for Justice* report recommends that the Victorian Government must reform the prison system based on the recommendations of the Cultural Review. The Victorian Government is supporting these changes in principle and is monitoring progress through an established Cultural Review Implementation Subgroup.

Despite long term reductions, Aboriginal men are more likely to return to prison within 2 years

Measure 15.3.3 Men released from prison who return within 2 years (%)



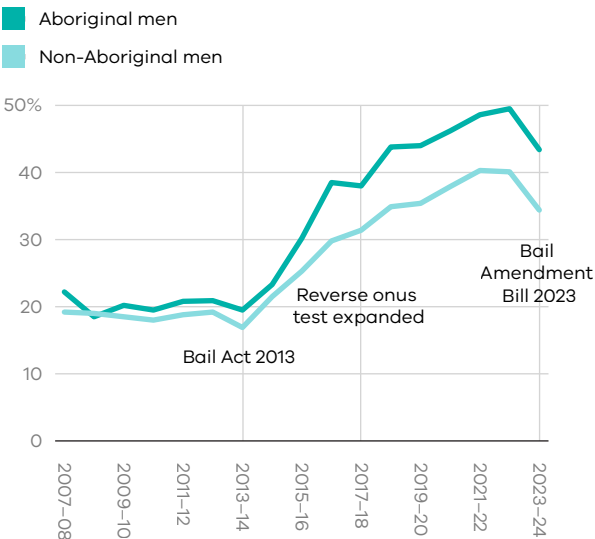
Source: Corrections Victoria.

Measure 15.3.4 Proportion of men in prison on remand

In 2023–24, 43.4 per cent of all Aboriginal men in prison were on remand and yet to have their case heard before a magistrate or judge. Between 2022–23 and 2023–24, rates of remand for Aboriginal men decreased from 49.5 to 43.4 per cent. The percentage of non-Aboriginal men on remand also decreased in the same period from 40.1 per cent in 2022–23 to 34.4 per cent in 2023–24. As discussed at Measure 15.2.4, changes made to Victoria’s bail laws in 2023 and 2025 have significantly shifted the legal framework around when an individual is likely to receive bail. Recent revisions removed the requirement that bail be considered a ‘last resort’ for youth offenders, made community safety the overarching principle for bail consideration of all bail decision-makers, and delivered a range of other changes to strengthen existing laws.

Aboriginal men are disproportionately affected by changes to the Bail Act

Measure 15.3.4 Proportion of men on remand by Aboriginal status



Source: Corrections Victoria.





Goal 16: Aboriginal Victorians have access to safe and effective justice services

Overview

Measures under Goal 16 varied in performance

Aboriginal children have received increased access to intensive bail support programs. Aboriginal adults on the other hand are being referred to bail support programs in high numbers but have been receiving these services at lower rates.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 16

The National Agreement does not have 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 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

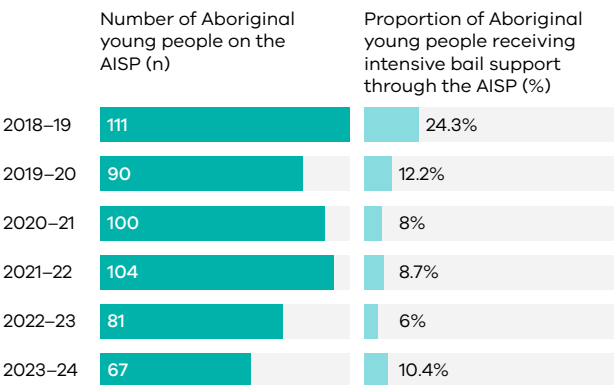
Measure 16.1.1 Number and proportion of Aboriginal young people receiving intensive bail support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP)

In 2023–24, 67 Aboriginal young people were allocated Youth Justice case management through the Aboriginal Intensive Support Program (AISP), formerly known as the Koorie Intensive Support Program. AISP is delivered across 5 regions and provides intensive support to young people on a range of youth justice orders, including supervised and intensive supervised bail. In 2023–24, 10.4 per cent of young people accessing AISP were provided intensive bail support while the remaining 89.6 per cent were provided other types of intensive supports dependent on their youth justice order type.

The AISP aims to reduce the number of Aboriginal young people who are on remand. 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.

The proportion of Aboriginal young people receiving intensive bail support through the Aboriginal Intensive Support Program (AISP) increased in 2024

Measure 16.1.1 Number and proportion of Aboriginal youth receiving intensive bail support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety.

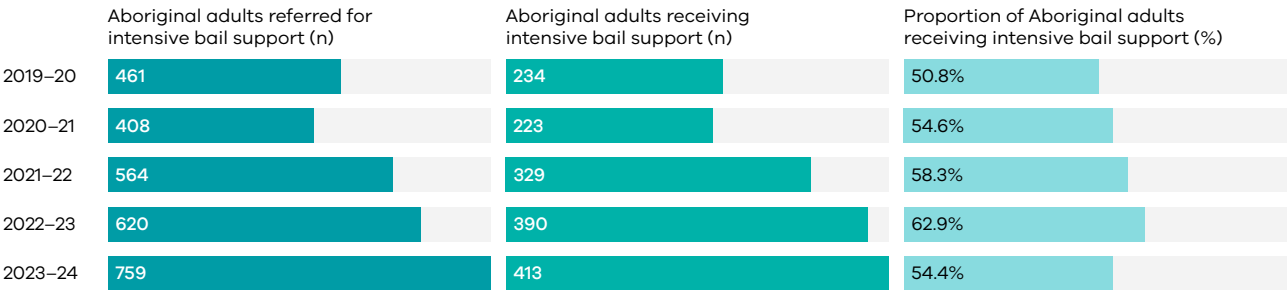


Measure 16.1.2 Number and proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support

In 2023–24, Victorian courts referred 759 Aboriginal adults for intensive bail support. From these referrals, 413 Aboriginal adults received intensive bail support. This represents a take-up rate of 54.4 per cent, a decline since 2022–23. There is a similar trend with the non-Aboriginal population. Intensive bail support provides an alternative to remand for bail applicants. Applicants need to be considered high risk by the court and who would not otherwise get 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.

Less Aboriginal adults referred for intensive bail support are receiving it

Measure 16.1.2 Number and proportion of Aboriginal adults referred for intensive bail support



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 services²⁵

In 2023–24, 451 Aboriginal children participated in community support programs through the youth justice community services pathway. This is 129 less children than the previous year (2022–23). It is also 33 less Aboriginal children since the pathway's initial year of operation in 2019–20. Alongside this reduction in the number of children receiving services through such programs, there has been a consistent number of Aboriginal children in community-based supervision or detention between 2022–23 and 2023–24 as outlined in Measure 15.1.2. This reflects a lower rate of Aboriginal children receiving support services through the community services pathway year-on-year, and a worsening of outcomes.

Youth Justice Community Support Services aim to reduce rates of re-offending by young people. The service does this by minimising 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 education.

Access to youth justice programs for Aboriginal youth continue to decline

Measure 16.1.3 Number of Aboriginal youth accessing community support programs through youth justice community services



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety.

25. Data collection for this measure commenced from 2020.

Aboriginal Justice Agreement - Transfer of Power and Resources to Aboriginal Communities

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) Community Grants Program provides approximately \$40 million per annum towards Aboriginal justice outcomes, with over 98 per cent of this funding going to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. In 2024, the AJA Community Grants Program enabled Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver 100 grant initiatives – which included a diverse range of self-determined programs that promote healing, cultural identity and create positive pathways that divert Aboriginal people from the justice system. The AJA Community Grants Program recognises that Victorian Aboriginal communities are best placed to design and deliver initiatives that effectively engage Aboriginal people and achieve positive and sustainable outcomes.

Programs developed for the Aboriginal community by the Aboriginal community achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians in contrast to programs run through government departments. This transfer of power to Aboriginal organisations enables greater benefits for the Aboriginal community whilst also reducing the financial costs and pressures on justice systems and services throughout the state.

Maintaining investment in effective Aboriginal community-based solutions to address over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system aligns with and upholds the Victorian Government's commitment to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) and self-determination for Aboriginal people – including by transferring resources to Aboriginal organisations.

The AJA is Victoria's primary strategy committed to driving systemic change to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system and deliver better justice outcomes for

Aboriginal communities by embedding self-determination through the justice system. The AJA is an enduring 25-year formal partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal community and is currently in its fourth phase, Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) works in partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC), Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC) and Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committee (LAJAC) chairpersons, Aboriginal Community Organisations, and senior Victorian Government members of the Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF). The governance structures of the AJA ensure the voices and experiences of Aboriginal communities are heard across the State, and Aboriginal communities and government work together to enable self-determination, collaborative development, and a problem-solving approach.

The development and implementation of the next phase of the AJA, Phase 5, will foster and develop Victoria's progress on reducing the rates of over-representation and ensure a culturally safe justice system for Aboriginal people that is shaped by self-determination. The need for initiatives and programs that improve Aboriginal justice outcomes remains of critical importance for DJCS.

The Aboriginal Justice Group works in close collaboration with leaders of the AJA governance structures to achieve improved Aboriginal justice outcomes. This includes through triannual Aboriginal Justice Forums, which include a community forum component open to Aboriginal community members of the host region; regular weekly meetings between the Koori Justice Unit executive and AJC Co-Chairs; and regular reporting and information-sharing between the Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Groups (CWGs) and wider AJF.



Transfer power and resources to communities

Aboriginal-Led Model of Health Care in Victorian Prisons

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Justice Health have partnered to design an Aboriginal-led model of care and develop measures to support the capacity building of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to deliver in-reach prison health services. Expanding the health services of ACCHOs into correctional settings will enable self-determined and culturally safe health service delivery for Aboriginal people in custody, with a focus on providing social and emotional wellbeing support that strengthens the continuity of health care.

VACCHO, ACCHOs and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus lead service design and provide strategic direction via project governance groups. These groups are working together to ensure that service design, resources and capability building strategies are guided by Aboriginal decision-making, leadership and strategic direction.

Aboriginal people in prison were consulted throughout 2024 and will continue to inform the model in 2025. Work is underway to identify Aboriginal people in community with lived experience to inform service design on a regular basis.

 Address trauma and support healing





Goal 17: Aboriginal Victorians feel safe and connected

Overview

Measures under Goal 17 have improved

Programs to make the justice system more culturally safe have improved. More police than ever are receiving cultural awareness training and more Aboriginal staff are employed with government in the justice system.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 17

The National Agreement does not have 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 17.1.2:** Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who feel safe/very safe walking alone at night in local area in the last 12 months.
- **Measure 17.1.3:** 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.

17.1 Increase community safety and trust in police and the justice system

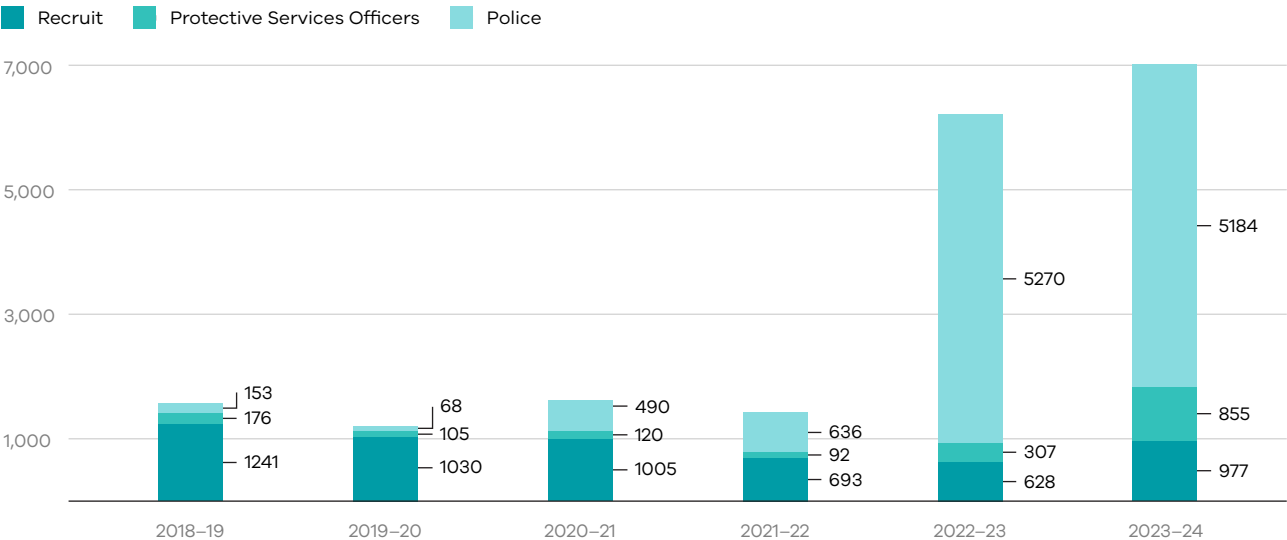
Measure 17.1.1 Proportion of police officers who have received Aboriginal cultural awareness training

In 2023–24, the number of police officers that had received Aboriginal cultural awareness training grew to 7,016 from 6,205 in 2022–23. As of 30 June 2024, 87.5 per cent of all current Victorian Police Officers have received cultural awareness training. The past two years of reporting on this measure have shown a large increase in rates of training, to assist member understanding of the history and culture of Aboriginal Victorians and strengthen their ability to provide culturally appropriate services. Four times the number of police officers received training in 2023–24 compared to 2021–22. Victoria Police has achieved an acquittal rate of 85 per cent of the designated cohorts for Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training, which is the acquittal rate generally used by the organisation for training requirements.

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 recommended 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. The Victorian Government supports the recommendations in principle. In May 2024, the Victoria Police Commissioner committed in his Statement of Commitment to the Yoorrook Justice Commission to ensuring that all Police, Protective Service Officers, Policy Custody Officers, and Victoria Police public servants complete Aboriginal cultural awareness training.

87.5 per cent of Victoria Police officers have completed Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training

Measure 17.1.1 Proportion of police officers who have received Aboriginal cultural awareness training



Source: Internal Victoria Police records.

Measure 17.1.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the justice system

In 2023–24, there were 461 Aboriginal staff employed in the Victorian justice system. This increased from 400 employees the previous year. Over the same period, the proportion of Aboriginal staff at the Department of Justice and Community Safety increased to 2.2 per cent of all staff. The proportion of Aboriginal staff at Court Services Victoria remained steady at 2.5 per cent. The proportion of Aboriginal staff at Victoria Police also remained steady at 0.7 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 First Peoples. Cultural reform of the justice system is imperative to improving outcomes for First Peoples.

Department of Justice and Community Safety's Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2024–2027

In October 2024, the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) launched its Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2024–2027 (the Strategy). The Strategy is part of an integrated approach to enhance the Department's cultural capability, support its Aboriginal workforce and benefit Aboriginal communities through improved policy making, well informed program design, implementation and evaluation. The Strategy addresses key actions from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement: Phase 4 and the Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System – Safer Prisons, Safer People, Safer Communities.

The Strategy is comprised of 3 key pillars that focus on attracting and retaining Aboriginal talent, creating culturally safe and supportive workplaces and creating employment pathways and building stronger careers. Key initiatives of the Strategy include: an annual scholarship for an Aboriginal staff member with executive aspirations to complete an ANZSOG Executive Master of Public Administration; connection

and cultural engagement opportunities for DJCS Aboriginal staff including an annual Statewide Aboriginal Staff Network Conference; and a range of targeted career development opportunities for Aboriginal staff.

The department's Aboriginal workforce has grown from 211 in August 2024 to 224 in April 2025, this represents a growth of 6.16% in less than 12 months.

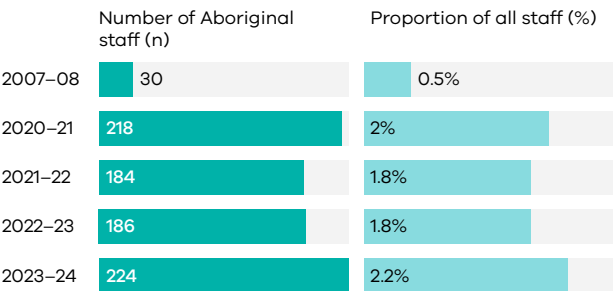
DJCS's Aboriginal Workforce Unit (AWU) developed the strategy and its initiatives in consultation with the Aboriginal Workforce Strategy Consultative Committee, made up of Aboriginal VPS staff, over eight weeks. Consultation with the Aboriginal workforce was crucial to ensure the Strategy is fit-for-purpose and meets the unique needs of the Aboriginal workforce within DJCS.

Certain areas of DJCS, such as within Corrections, require their own specific strategy to be developed that complement the existing strategy. An example of this is the Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

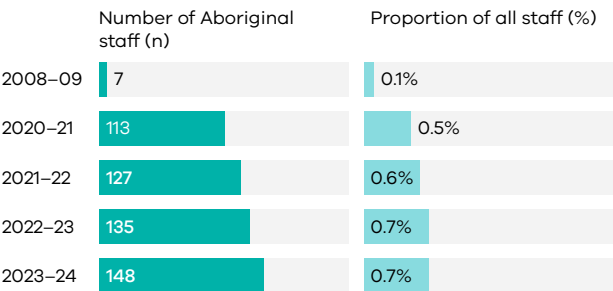
More Aboriginal people are working in the Justice system than ever before

Measure 17.1.4a, b and c Number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Police, and Court Services Victoria

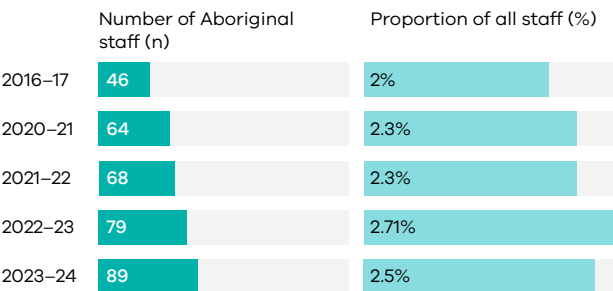
Department of Justice & Community Safety



Victoria Police



Court Services Victoria



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Police and Courts Services Victoria.

**Aboriginal Cultural Liaison Officers:
Statement of Commitment Actions 31 and 32**

Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) are VPS employees attached to Police Service Areas who perform liaison roles to foster trust, understanding and partnerships between Victoria Police and the Aboriginal Community.

In alignment with the Statement of Commitment, Victoria Police undertook actions to enhance the ACLO role. These include Action 31: Increase the number of ACLO positions across the state, and support areas that have a demonstrated need for an ACLO. To do so, two additional ACLO positions were created in Horsham and the City of Yarra.

As of December 2024, there were 17 ACLO positions across both regional and metropolitan areas in Victoria.

Additionally, to acquit the Statement of Commitment Action 32: Finalise the level of the position to reflect the importance and the expanded responsibilities of the role, Victoria Police ensured ACLO positions have been reclassified from a VPS-3 to a VPS-4 level. This action was undertaken following an independent review with both internal and external consultation. Notably, community consultation on this change occurred with the Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Aboriginal Portfolio Reference Group.

The following benefits are being delivered as a result of this change:

- Appropriate remuneration reflecting the importance and responsibilities of the role.
- Greater applicant pool due to higher classification of the position.
- Retention of the ACLO workforce.

 **Address racism and promote cultural safety**

Victoria Police Aboriginal Service Medal (VPASM)

Victoria Police recently introduced the Aboriginal Service Medal (VPASM) to recognise the dedication and contribution of Aboriginal employees for sustained or significant service.

The introduction of the VPASM is part of a wider effort to acknowledge the unique duality embodied by these employees who honour their heritage while serving within Victoria Police.

The medal's design process was led by the Dunguludja Yapaneyput Aboriginal Employee Network Council (DYAENC) with input from the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Caucus and staff from Melbourne Museum's First People, incorporating elements that symbolise the rich cultures of First Peoples and the values of Victoria Police.

The first 26 medals were presented by Shane Patton APM, Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police at an awards ceremony at the Victoria Police Academy on 16 October 2024.



Marra Yattakunar Pathway for Aboriginal Victims of Crime

The development of an Aboriginal Support Pathway for First Peoples victims of crime is a key focus of the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS). The Marra Yattakunar Pathway comprises of a dedicated phone line and assessment stream that is accessible by First Peoples who wish to apply for financial assistance. The Pathway is supported by staff in designated and prioritised positions across our Intake and Triage, and Assessment and Recognition functions.

Consultation with First Peoples victims of violent crime will ensure the implementation of a pathway is designed to fulfil their sensitive and complex needs.

FAS was launched on 18 November 2024 and Marra Yattakunar pathway has been well utilised by stakeholders. Positive feedback has been received to date about the engagement and response.

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 Forum

Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja - Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) is Victoria's primary strategy committed to driving systemic change to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. The agreement embeds self-determination to deliver better justice outcomes for Aboriginal Communities. The AJA is an enduring 25-year formal partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community, currently in its fourth phase, Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja. This agreement is the longest running Aboriginal justice agreement in Australia.

Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja (AJA4) takes an outcomes approach to organise and communicate its priorities through the Aboriginal Justice Outcomes Framework (the Framework). The Framework reflects Aboriginal justice partners' aspirations for change across a range of domains. These include strong and safe Aboriginal families and communities; fewer Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system; a more effective justice system with greater Aboriginal control; and greater self-determination in the justice system. The Department of Justice and Community Safety focuses on improving Aboriginal outcomes aligned under this framework, with key principles set out in AJA4 for how departments will work with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and other Aboriginal partners to realise Aboriginal aspirations for change.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) Community Grants Programs provided funding of nearly \$40 million in 2024 to enable the delivery of Aboriginal-led solutions to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, with over 98 per cent of this funding going to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. This transfer of power to Aboriginal organisations enables greater benefits for the Aboriginal Community.

Maintaining investment in effective Aboriginal community-based solutions to justice over-representation aligns with and upholds, government's commitment to the AJA and self-determination for Victoria's First Peoples – including by transferring resources to Aboriginal organisations.

The AJA4 sets out two specific goals for reducing the numbers of both Aboriginal adults and young people subject to justice supervision. These targets were more ambitious in both scale and timeframe than the National Closing the Gap targets, aiming to achieve reductions by 2023, rather than 2031.

Funding through the Aboriginal Justice Agreement to improve justice outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians include:

- In 2023–24 the Aboriginal Justice Agreement Community Grants Program administered \$38.74 million to community organisations, with most grants allocated to Aboriginal organisations.
- The 2024–25 Budget provided \$31.86 million over 4 years to support Aboriginal Organisations to continue successful self-determined programs that prevent Aboriginal interaction with the justice system, support transition from prison, and support Aboriginal people experiencing family violence.
- The 2024–25 investment will support continuation of the recent positive progress in reducing the rates of Aboriginal incarceration and violence by:
 - Continuing programs that offer specialist, gender-based support within Aboriginal Communities, to address the unique needs of perpetrators and victims of family violence, and their families.
 - Providing early intervention and culturally specific support for both Aboriginal men and women, and Aboriginal youth, in contact with the criminal justice system to reduce reoffending through healing and behaviour change.
 - Continuing support services for early intervention and prevention with cultural understanding of gendered roles within the community to reduce Aboriginal interaction with the justice system.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4 Evaluation and Monitoring

The evaluation of AJA4 sought to understand the performance of the AJA partnership over the past five years, progress against milestones to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal people in the Victorian justice system, and where focus and effort will be required under the next iteration of the Agreement (AJA5). This evaluation facilitates accountability of government and ensures the AJA is responsive to the needs of Aboriginal Victorians.

The framework for the evaluation was developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus in 2020 to ensure the evaluation was undertaken in a self-determined manner and to ensure accountability and oversight by Aboriginal stakeholders.

To measure and examine the impact of governance mechanisms under the AJA, on enabling greater Aboriginal involvement in justice decision-making, policy and legislative development, the Aboriginal Justice Partnership Survey was established in early 2021 and ran annually through to the end of 2024. The survey sought responses from Aboriginal Community leaders including Caucus members, to understand how the partnership is performing at both the statewide and regional level and how the structures are enabling Aboriginal self-determination in the justice system.

Youth Justice

Wirkara Kulpa- Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy

Wirkara Kulpa, Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, has continued efforts to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system. Wirkara Kulpa is a key initiative of Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja – 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'.

To support implementation of Wirkara Kulpa, the 2024–25 Budget provides continued funding for Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service's Balit Ngulu service, as part of the \$35.22m allocated over four years to the department for 'continuing to support a safe and stable Youth Justice system' initiative. This funding complements the 2023–24 Budget provision of \$50.92m over two years to continue critical initiatives in youth justice, including culturally responsive services to support Aboriginal young people in custody. Further, in 2022–23 and 2021–22, respectively, \$11.14m was awarded over two years to support diversion initiatives including Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs, whilst \$5.95m was awarded over three years 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 (the Plan) for Wirkara Kulpa, where all 75 actions within the Strategy are allocated in order of importance according to Aboriginal stakeholders. As per the Plan, the implementation of all 75 actions will commence within the first six years of the Strategy's launch in 2022. The allocation of actions is reviewed once a year (at a minimum) to ensure that the Plan

supports, and is consistent with, priorities identified by AJC. The first annual review of the Plan occurred on July 5, 2024, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Group (CWG).

All Tranche 1 actions and priority projects have commenced, with eight actions completed or completed and ongoing, supported by funding from the State Budget. Implementation of Tranche 2 actions commenced in late 2024.

Initiatives that have been completed and progressed to business as usual include:

- Boosting educational opportunities for Aboriginal children and young people in youth justice, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training.
- Improving after hours services and access to bail to keep Aboriginal children and young people out of remand.
- Developing a Wirkara Kulpa Performance Framework that sets Aboriginal-identified justice related targets and accountability measures to improve young people's outcomes.
- 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.
- Improving gender responsive services through the Aboriginal Youth Justice Worker expansion.
- 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 progressed on several Tranche 1 and 2 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 implement a mechanism which amplifies the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the design and delivery of youth justice services.
- Commencing Aboriginal led case management review panels, to ensure that care and supports address the strengths, risks and needs of Aboriginal children and young people, and issues contributing to their over-representation.

- Delivering early intervention family service and specialist family practitioners to support Aboriginal children aged 10 to 14 to stay in school and at home and actively engage with their communities.
- Developing an Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing strategy for Aboriginal children and young people involved in youth justice, which emphasises positive wellbeing, including as a prevention approach for suicide and self-harm.

Wirkara Kulpa Performance Framework

The Wirkara Kulpa Performance Framework (the framework) seeks to measure the outcomes and impact of Wirkara Kulpa, Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, as a key action under Tranche 1. The framework will also increase transparency and set justice-related targets and accountability measures to improve Aboriginal children and young people's outcomes. The framework will provide comprehensive data about the experiences of Aboriginal children and young people, with some data points dating back to the year 2000, when the Aboriginal Justice Agreement was first developed.

To respect Aboriginal self-determination of key decision making and advice for framework development, a Project Control Group (PCG) was devised and made up of self-nominated Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Group members. The PCG participated in workshops and one-on-one engagements focussed on advising on the scope, measures and indicators, methods and process for endorsement of the framework. The Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Group will guide implementation to ensure the Wirkara Kulpa Performance Framework best meets Aboriginal Community priorities. The framework received endorsement from the Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Group and Aboriginal Justice Caucus in late 2024.

The framework strengthens accountability towards achieving outcomes within Wirkara Kulpa and furthered transparency with Aboriginal stakeholders. The framework is now being implemented and will set justice-related targets and accountability measures to improve Aboriginal children and young people's outcomes, under guidance from the Aboriginal Youth Collaborative Working Group.

Corrections

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 2024–25 Budget, \$11.979 million was provided to support the continuation of existing programs focused on culturally safe supports for Aboriginal people in prison, including:

- \$5.263m over five years to continue Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers (AWO) roles and support for the AWO staffing model.
- \$3.127m over four years to continue the Statewide Indigenous Arts in Prison and Community Program delivered by The Torch.
- \$3.161m over four years to continue the Wadamba Prison to Work Program delivered by Wanyaari.
- \$0.428m over four years 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 \$3.28 million, \$13.7 million and \$15.8 million committed in the 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24 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.

Aboriginal-Led Model of Health Care in Victorian Prisons

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Justice Health have partnered to design an Aboriginal-led model of care and develop measures to support the capacity building of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to deliver in-reach prison health services. Expanding the health services of ACCHOs into correctional settings will enable Aboriginal people in custody to access culturally appropriate primary health care with a focus on providing social and emotional wellbeing support that strengthens the continuity of health care as Aboriginal people transition into the community.

The development of the model is governed by a Co-Sponsor Executive Group and Service Design Group, both consisting of members from VACCHO, the ACCHO sector, Aboriginal Justice Caucus and DJCS. These groups are working together to ensure that service design, resources and capability building strategies are guided by Aboriginal decision-making, leadership and strategic direction.

In October 2024, staff from VACCHO and DJCS worked together to develop a business case for funding to test the model's proof of concept at a Victorian adult prison. Members from Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Department of Health also informed the business case which was submitted in November 2024 and continues to progress through the State budget process.

This is in step with a key approach under the Government's Self-Determination Reform Framework to actively support the development of Aboriginal community-defined outcomes and ensure investment is directed to responses that work.

Domain 6: Culture & Country



Our shared commitment

The promotion of the rights and responsibilities under section 19(2) of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Victorian Aboriginal communities and peoples are culturally diverse, with rich and varied languages, traditions, and histories. Aboriginal Victorians hold distinct cultural rights, including the right to maintain their spiritual, material, and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters and continue to strengthen 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 varied in performance

Small 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 a more self-determined management of Country by Traditional Owners.

At the same time there are less new formal partnerships on cultural heritage, land and water management. Overall, there has been limited progress toward realisation of Goal 18 in 2023–24.

Goal 18 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Targets

Outcome 15: People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.

- **Target 15a:** By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's land mass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.
- **Target 15b:** By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 15a: In 2024, 4,314,744 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 16,068 square kilometres in 2023 to 16,351 square kilometres in 2024 based on data from the National Native Title Tribunal.

Outcome 15b: In 2024, 113,517 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 and is on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been an increase from 293 square kilometres in 2023 to 295 square kilometres in 2024 based on data from the National Native Title Tribunal.

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.

Historical data for the measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at 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

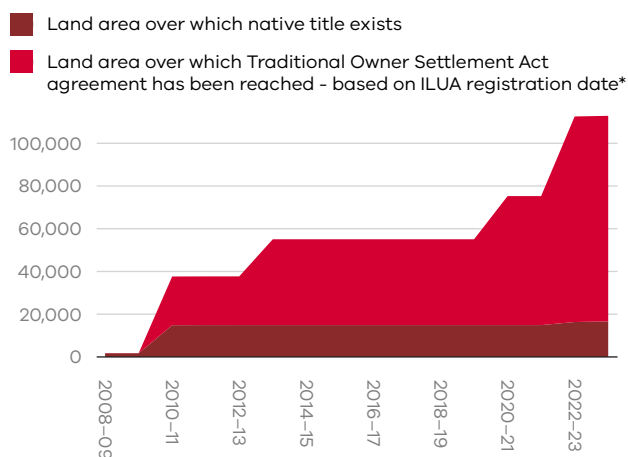
As of 30 June 2024, there are four Recognition and Settlement Agreements (RSA) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (TOS Act) in existence. No new RSAs commenced in 2023–24. The total area of Victoria covered by the RSAs is approximately 96,210 km², of which 34,920 km² is Crown land and waters.

As of 30 June 2024, the Federal Court has recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) that native title exists over 16,629 km² of Crown land and waters. This includes the Federal Court's second determination of the Eastern Maar People's native title claim (on 21 March 2024) which added 289.16 km² to the area where native title exists. This determination recognises and acknowledges the deep and ongoing connection of the Eastern Maar people to their Country.

This is the second year in a row where the area of native title in Victoria has grown. This is after a decade of no growth in native title (since 2012–13).

Eastern Maar determination increases native title area in Victoria by 289km²

Measure 18.1.1 Area of Crown land with native title determinations and/or Recognition and Settlement Agreements



Source: Department of Premier and Cabinet and National Native Title Tribunal.

Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework

In October 2024, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's (DEECA) First Peoples' Self-Determination Division launched the second edition of the Traditional Owner (TO) and Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework.

The updated Framework highlights the importance of listening to and acting in the best interests of TOs and Aboriginal Communities by embedding self-determination and TO rights and interests in the work that we do. It provides clear steps, advice, and refreshed guidance for all DEECA staff to engage with TOs (with and without formal recognition) and Aboriginal Communities across Victoria.

The following updates have been incorporated:

- Alignment with current context – what's happening in the broader landscape, the release of Pupangarli Marnmarnepu, the emergence of Treaty and the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

- A new 5-step process to ensure DEECA is coordinated and culturally competent when planning for and engaging with TOs and Aboriginal Communities. These 5 steps are: prepare, contextualise, plan, engage and evaluate.
- Revised engagement principles, including two new principles ('engage early' and 'resource TOs to participate in DEECA businesses'), providing 10 principles in total.
- A set of revised 'best practice considerations'.
- The addition of the Wamba Wamba Aboriginal Corporation as the most recent appointed Registered Aboriginal Party.
- Additional supporting materials such as a Traditional Owner Engagement Plan Template and Traditional Owner Corporation profiles, frequently asked questions, and case studies.
- Additional advice on engagement with formally and non-formally recognised TO groups.

Measure 18.1.2 Work of the State in advancing the Treaty process

Statewide Treaty negotiations with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria commenced in November 2024, marked by a ceremony at Darebin Parklands.

The first Statewide Treaty will be negotiated between the State of Victoria and the democratically elected body representing First Peoples, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, in line with Treaty legislation and the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

The Victorian Government has worked with First Peoples for the past eight years to lay the foundations for Treaty negotiations, including passing two acts of Parliament and delivering on policies across every level of government.

Treaty is about making a better and fairer state for every Victorian and coming up with practical solutions on key issues for First Peoples – from keeping culture strong to improving the way services are delivered.

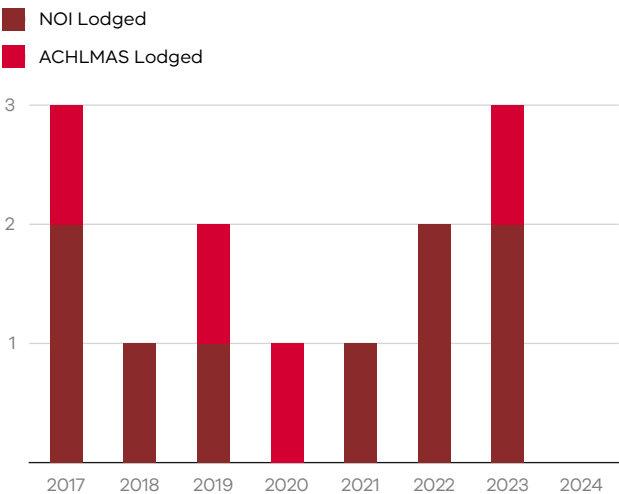
Measure 18.1.3 Number of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) that have entered into an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement

In 2024, no new notices of intention (NOI) or Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreements (ACHLMA) were entered into by the state with a Registered Aboriginal Party. In total there are 9 NOI and 4 ACHLMA since 2017.

ACHLMAs are a mutually agreed framework between government and First Peoples' organisations. The agreements detail how Aboriginal cultural heritage will be protected and managed during land management activities within a specified Agreement Area, over a specified period.

No new NOI or ACHLMAs were lodged in 2024

Measure 18.1.3 Number of Registered Aboriginal Parties that have submitted a notice of intention to enter into an Aboriginal cultural heritage land management agreement



Source: First Peoples - State Relations Group (Department of Premier and Cabinet).

Measure 18.1.5 Number of Joint Management Plans and area of land covered

In 2024, no new Victorian land was covered by a Joint Management Plan (JMP). There has not been an increase in JMPs since 2022. There are currently three JMPs with three Traditional Owner groups in Victoria, covering a total of 1,225.75 square kilometres and spanning 17 parks and reserves.

The Gunaikurnai people jointly manage 10 parks and reserves (approx. 470.7 km²) through the Gippsland region JMP.

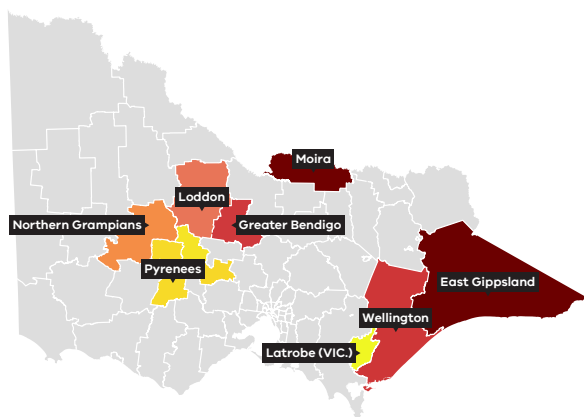
The Dja Dja Wurrung people jointly manage 6 parks and reserves (approx. 470 km²) through the Central Victoria JMP.

Lastly, the Yorta Yorta people jointly manage the Barmah National Park 1 (approx 285.1 km²).

East Gippsland and Moira has the largest area covered by Joint Management Plans

Measure 18.1.5 Number of Joint Management Plans and area of land covered

3.7  289



Source: Traditional Owner Agreement Unit - Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)
Map data: ABS.

Wadawurrung Urban Design Guidelines

With significant development occurring across Wadawurrung Country, Regional Development Victoria facilitated funding for Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) to prepare the Wadawurrung Urban Design Guidelines (WUDG). The WUDG supports WTOAC to set the terms of engagement and facilitate deeper partnerships with government, developers and design professionals to Koling Wada Nyaal (walk together) with Traditional Owners.

The WUDG supports greater cultural authority and economic development initiatives for WTOAC and recognises their rights to exercise their cultural obligation to care for Country in an urban context. The WUDG will provide guidance to ensure Wadawurrung culture and values are recognised and respected in the built environment and will guide how stakeholders work and interact with WTOAC in genuine partnerships to produce mutual benefit.

Wurrek-al 'Talking with Purpose' First Peoples Engagement Framework

The Wurrek-al 'Talking with Purpose' First Peoples Engagement Framework was launched in January 2024. Wurrek-al provides a coordinated whole-of-portfolio framework to guide engagement with First Peoples. Development of Wurrek-al was a commitment under the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Self-Determination Plan 2020–2023 (Action 5) (the Portfolio).

Wurrek-al aims to streamline and better coordinate engagement across the Portfolio whilst enabling Victorian Traditional Owners and First Peoples Community to have greater decision-making in activities on their Country. It equips staff with the necessary skills and tools to engage effectively and meaningfully with Traditional Owners and the First Peoples Community. To guide staff across the Portfolio, it includes:

- Eight fundamental principles of engagement.
- The Portfolio's engagement process.
- Best practice engagement case studies from across the Portfolio.

Implementation of Wurrek-al is facilitated via an online process map tool, accessed via the Department of Transport and Planning's (DTP) intranet. This tool allows project teams to track a project's progress through the engagement process. It also provides an automated data set that can be monitored centrally to track the level of engagement across the Portfolio, where engagement is focused and progress of individual projects.

Since its launch, 161 Wurrek-al engagements have been reported across DTP and the Portfolio, with the majority on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, Bunurong and Wadawurrung Country. Engagements primarily relate to capital project delivery, precincts and planning projects and aim to ensure compliance with Traditional Owner cultural heritage and other rights, and to incorporate recognition, respect and celebration of First Peoples' culture and history, during project delivery.

The First Peoples Self Determination and Reform Division oversees implementation of Wurrek-al, including developing training materials and delivering masterclasses for Portfolio staff, providing strategic advice to project teams on best practice engagement, facilitating communication with Registered Aboriginal Parties and First Peoples organisations, monitoring Portfolio-wide engagement, reporting, evaluation and continuous improvement.



Address racism and promote cultural safety

Measure 18.1.6 Number of cultural burns conducted

In 2023–24, Traditional Owners conducted 29 cultural burns with the support of Victorian Government agencies. This is an increase of 9 since 2022–23 and 19 since 2018–19. Cultural burning is an integral part of enabling Traditional Owners to heal Country and fulfil their rights and obligations to care for Country. As living knowledge, it has an emphasis on inter-generational learning, including healing and maintaining connection to Country. Cultural burning measures may include different measures to mainstream land management. For example, being on Country, observing Elders and learning cultural burning practice on Country, or burning at a scale or rate that enables small animals to move beyond danger or to heal the ecosystem over time. For Traditional Owners removing policy and operational barriers to reinstate cultural burning remains a priority. 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.

Number of cultural burns by Traditional Owners continue to increase

Measure 18.1.6 Number of cultural burns conducted by Traditional Owner groups



(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.



Measure 18.1.7 Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal Communities and key water and catchment agencies

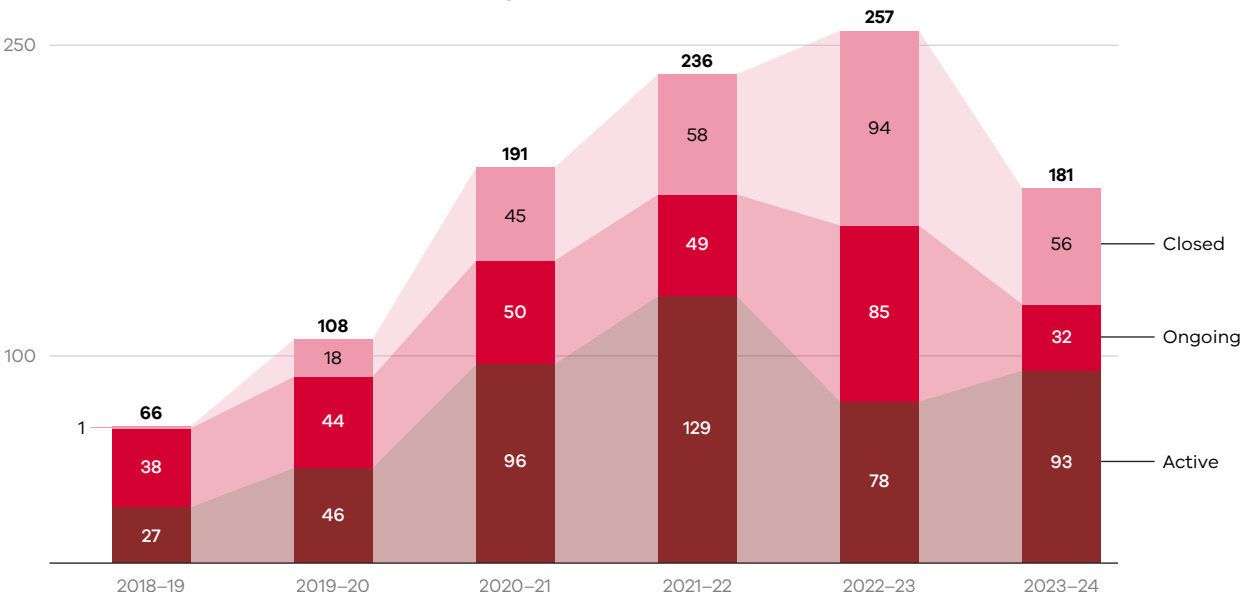
First Peoples and key water & catchment agencies were in 125 active and ongoing formal partnership agreements in 2023–24. This is lower than the previous three years. 69.1 per cent of all agreements are active and ongoing with 51.4 per cent active in 2023–24. This decrease is partly caused by the active efforts of some water corporations to consolidate partnership agreements with Aboriginal communities to streamline program funding arrangements and reduce administrative burden.

It is important that key water and catchment agencies are in partnership with Traditional Owners over the use of water. Self-determination of water flows are an important tool for caring for Country.

In June 2024, Joint Council on Closing the Gap agreed to develop state and territory specific approaches to giving back control over inland waters to Traditional Owners. In Victoria this means DEECA is working in partnership with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, the Federation of Victoria Traditional Owner Corporations, and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to develop a Victoria specific Inland Waters target.

Key water and catchment agencies are engaging in less formal partnership agreements in 2023–24

Measure 18.1.7a Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and key water and catchment agencies



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.



Partnership Agreement with the Taungurung Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

In June 2024, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) signed a Partnership Agreement with the Taungurung Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (TLaWC) on Taungurung Country. The Partnership Agreement provides the foundation for an enduring relationship which moves beyond merely complying with legal obligations, to pursuing mutually beneficial outcomes. Key elements of the agreement include:

- Delivery of requirements under the Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement.
- Identification of shared goals and aspirations.
- Facilitating the Transport and Planning Portfolio's support for initiatives that can enable revitalisation and celebration of Taungurung culture on Taungurung Country.
- Identifying procurement opportunities for TLaWC-nominated suppliers, including the development of a procurement strategy to engage TLaWC to undertake natural resource management.

To oversee implementation of the agreement, the DTP and TLaWC have established an Engagement Team which met for the first time in October 2024 on Taungurung Country.

DTP has also extended invitations to additional Registered Aboriginal Parties to begin partnership agreement discussions. Initial preparations to commence partnership agreement discussions have begun with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, with DTP providing funding in March 2024 to support its participation. The next tranche of partnership agreements will focus on Traditional Owner groups with a Recognition and Settlement Agreement, either in place or under negotiation, or with high level cultural heritage work on their Country. This includes Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council.

Partnership agreements will seek to maximise Traditional Owner outcomes, including under Recognition and Settlement Agreements, by:

- Early, open engagement and greater transparency about Portfolio projects and activities on Country, including activities under Land Use Activity Agreements or under Cultural Heritage Management Plans.
- Proactively identify opportunities to procure natural resource management services, to deliver on minimum spend requirements.
- Exploring other commercial opportunities beyond natural resource management.

Returning water to Wadawurrung Country: a learning-by-doing watering trial for cultural outcomes in the Moorabool catchment

In February and March 2024, the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) led a project delivering water to the Moorabool Yaluk (Moorabool River) and Durdidwarrah Wetland from Lal Lal and Bostock reservoirs and the Upper Stony Creek reservoirs. The water (300 ML in total) was made available by Central Highlands Water and Barwon Water, and WTOAC worked collaboratively with many partner organisations.

The project aimed to provide WTOAC with hands-on learning in water management and delivery, focusing on cultural outcomes by returning water to Country. Insights from the watering trial will inform the transfer of permanent water rights for self-determined use, as outlined in the State Government's Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy.

Wadawurrung's Country Plan, Paleert Tjaara Dja – Let's make Country good together 2020–2030, aims to ensure that by 2030, the Barre Warre Yulluk waterways have clean, drinkable water flowing without barriers.

Claire, a Wadawurrung woman and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Water Project Officer, said, "I believe our Ancestors would be proud of what we've accomplished. We continue their legacy by nurturing our waterways, just as they did."

WTOAC acknowledges the work of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, Southern Rural Water, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Clear Advice and Strategy and Environmental Justice Australia, who supported WTOAC releasing water on Country.



Sea Country Partnership and Saltwater Council

The Sea Country Partnership was established in 2021 as the foundation on which to develop the Marine and Coastal Strategy. The Sea Country Partnership comprises six Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) with marine and coastal country:

- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC).
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC).
- Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC).
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC).
- WTOAC.
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWWCHAC).

The Sea Country Partnership meet monthly to discuss projects funded through Sea Country Grants and policy reforms that affect the groups. Collectively, the Partnership members have agreed to implement ten Activities of the Marine and Coastal Strategy and partner in the delivery of a further 34 activities with other land managers like Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and Local Governments.

The Sea Country grants program provides resources and support to enable Traditional Owners to self-determine their priority projects to implement their obligations under the Marine and Coastal Strategy, and how their rights and obligations are embedded into planning and management of the marine and coastal environment. In 2024, the grants have funded the following activities:

- Developing sea ranger programs (Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation with support from GLaWAC to understand coastal values).
- Developing a biocultural land strategy (Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation).

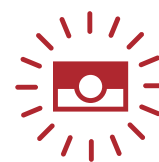
- Facilitating cultural exchanges and cultural heritage recording (Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation).
- Undertaking cultural mapping and incorporating marine and coastal knowledge in Country Plans (Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, and Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation).

Also in 2024, five of the six RAP groups agreed to form the Saltwater Council, with Gunditj Mirring holding observer status. The Saltwater Council will advise governments and their agencies of marine and coastal issues that concern Aboriginal people. It offers the opportunity for coastal Traditional Owners to:

- Self-determine their future.
- Create strategic partnerships.
- Identify links and pathways to address capacity issues.
- Work collaboratively together to shape our collective future.
- Be better planned and strategic and less reactionary.
- Participate in decisions that affect Sea Country.

Constituting a Saltwater Council will enable RAP Groups to facilitate a greater understanding by governments of the funding and projects required to address the issues deemed important to protect sea country and all its biocultural values, and to fulfil their obligations to country while implementing the Marine and Coastal Strategy.





Goal 19: Aboriginal culture and language are supported and celebrated

Overview

Measures under Goal 19 have improved

Victoria continues to fund language revitalisation programs.

Language is not just a tool for communication it is crucial for land justice, health and every aspect of life. Colonial practices punished First Peoples for speaking their language. Through the strength of First Peoples' that wrong is being overturned.

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

Outcome 16: 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.

No new data was available at the time of reporting for:

- **Measure 19.1.1:** Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture.

Historical data for the measure is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report.

19.1 Support the preservation, promotion and practice of culture and languages

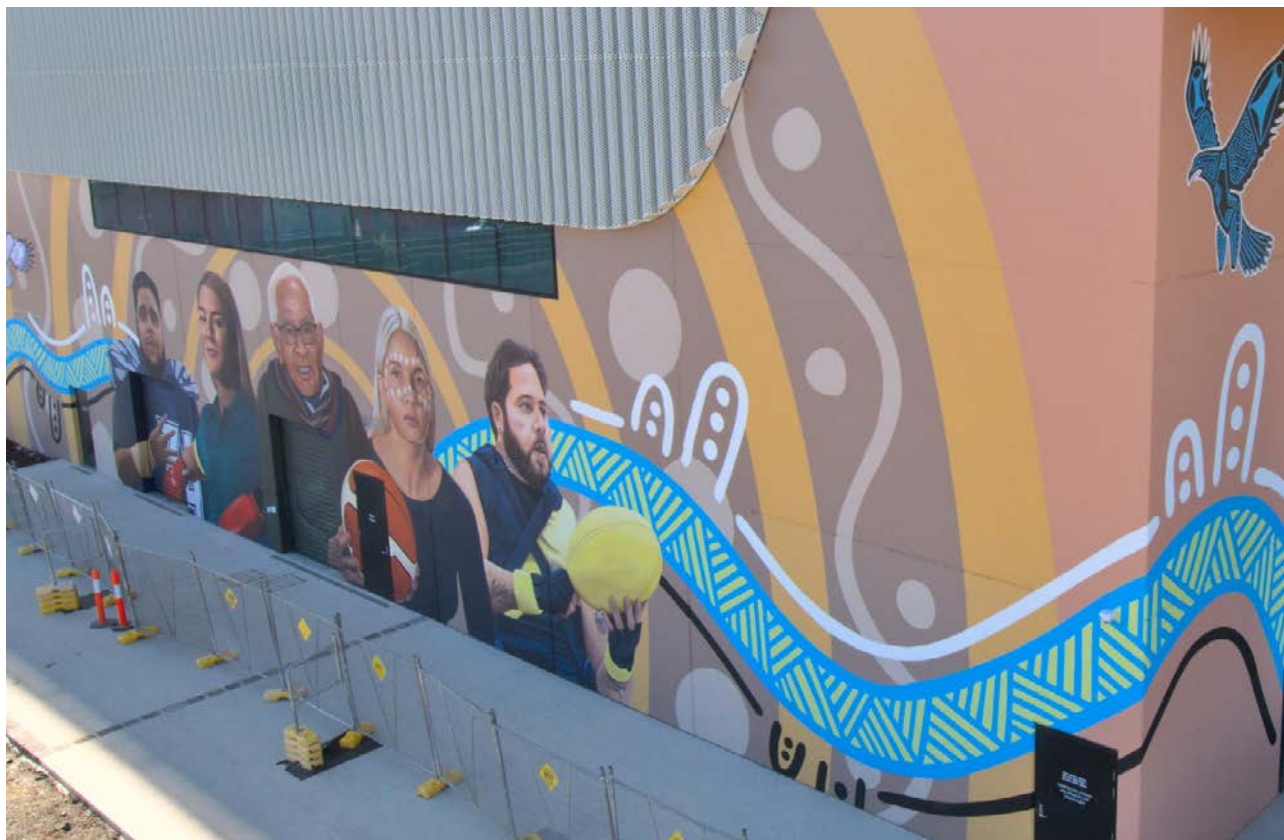
Measure 19.1.2 Investment in Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation programs

Connectedness to culture and community strengthens individual and collective identities, and 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. Traditional Owner Corporations are crucial partners to support these activities and ensure the preservation, promotion and practice of culture and language revitalisation, enacting and enabling these programs and realising their intended benefits.

Initiative / organisation	Description
1. Koorie Heritage Trust	The Victorian Government funds the Koorie Heritage Trust to support its operations and deliver the Koorie Family History Service for members of the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal Victorians in custody and members of the Koorie Community. Funding also supports the retention and revival of Victorian Aboriginal history and language through the Koorie Oral History Project.
2. Connecting Home Limited	The Victorian Government funds Connecting Home Limited to support its operations and provide case management services, counselling and healing initiatives for members of the Stolen Generations and their families.
3. Koorie Youth Council	The Victorian Government funds the Koorie Youth Council to support its operations and deliver activities that engage with, and advance the rights and representation of, Aboriginal young people, including the annual Koorie Youth Summit.
4. Reconciliation Victoria	The Victorian Government funds Reconciliation Victoria to support its operations and deliver a range of programs and services that promote and support reconciliation initiatives within the education and local government sectors and the broader Victorian community.
5. Lake Tyers and Framlingham Aboriginal Trusts	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.



Bundha Sports Centre

Construction of the Bundha Sports Centre was completed in August 2024, with landscaping works and the installation of public art continuing into 2025.

The project was delivered by Development Victoria in partnership with the Department of Transport and Planning, Sport and Recreation Victoria and Yarra City Council, in close collaboration with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

This new state-of-the-art vertically designed sports centre in the heart of Fitzroy presented a significant opportunity to partner with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners to incorporate language and artwork within the project, while also achieving social procurement outcomes through project spend.

The Bundha Sports Centre was gifted its official name by Aunty Gail Smith and supported by Aunty Di Kerr, Aunty Julieanne Axford and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The name 'Bundha' means 'unity' and captures how the venue will unite the community by supporting local sports clubs and by encouraging the community to get active.

"Proudly using Woi-wurrung language is central to our identity and our culture. For too long, our language has been denied, and it is great to be able to reclaim our language and bring it back to life for all to enjoy." - Wurundjeri Elders, Aunty Gail Smith and Aunty Diane Kerr

Wurundjeri Country and identity are also showcased through a mural on Bundha's exterior wall, which was designed by proud Wurundjeri man, Alex Kerr, and celebrates First Peoples community sporting heroes.

Several Victorian Aboriginal-owned businesses were engaged throughout the project, including Pathway Plumbing and Little Rocket.

Through language, artwork, and social procurement, the Bundha Sports Centre is a flagship project for Development Victoria, and models an approach which can be adopted across the portfolio to deliver positive outcomes for First Peoples and recognition of Country.

Flexible Local Transport Solutions Program (FLTSP)

The Department of Transport and Planning's Flexible Local Transport Solutions Program (FLTSP) funded a series of localised First Peoples community initiatives in 2024:

- A partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated to encourage participation at Koorie pathway events by supporting safe transport options. These pathway events are aimed at inspiring First Peoples students to dream big and achieve their aspirations.
- A partnership with Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited to provide safe transport options, equitable access and encourage participation for First Peoples in a calendar of sporting programs.
- A partnership with Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (in collaboration with DJANDAK) to undertake a 10-month project to integrate Indigenous art and culture into bus stop designs across Bendigo. The project aims to transform bus shelters into cultural landmarks that preserve and celebrate First Peoples heritage, support cultural tourism and make public transportation more inviting and inclusive.
- A partnership with Cooinda Aboriginal Corporation to provide a 12-month pilot project to improve access to a Cultural Centre, with culturally safe and welcoming spaces and programs for First Peoples in the western suburbs. The centre offers services including cultural studies and art classes, homework classes for the youth, and job-ready services such as assistance with resumes and job applications.

New schools opened in 2024 and 2025 have First Nations language names

In March 2023, the Victorian Government committed that First Nations language names would be preferenced in new school naming activities. All new schools opened in 2024 and 2025 have First Nations language names. This commitment gives staff, students, families, and the public an understanding of each school's connection to land, history and culture.

 **Prioritise culture**

Goal 20: Racism is eliminated



Overview

Measures under Goal 20 have improved

Over short term First Peoples' experiences of racism have slightly decreased. However, over the long term their experiences remained consistent. First Peoples are vastly over-represented when it comes to experiencing racism. First Peoples' day to day lives are heavily impacted by racist cultures and structures implemented and maintained by colonisation.

One of the difficulties in understanding the totality of racism in Victoria is inconsistent data collection and reporting. There currently is only one survey that consistently asks and publishes racism experienced by First Peoples in Victoria.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 20

The National Agreement Priority Reform 3 requires that government institutions and agencies identify and eliminate racism. 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.

No new data was available at the time of reporting for:

- **Measure 20.1.1a:** Number and proportion of Aboriginal and All persons who report having experienced at least 1 form of racial prejudice in the previous 6 months.
- **Measure 20.1.1b:** Number of complaints made by an Aboriginal person to the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission.
- **Measure 20.1.2:** Prevalence of racist attitudes against Aboriginal Victorians held by the Victorian community.

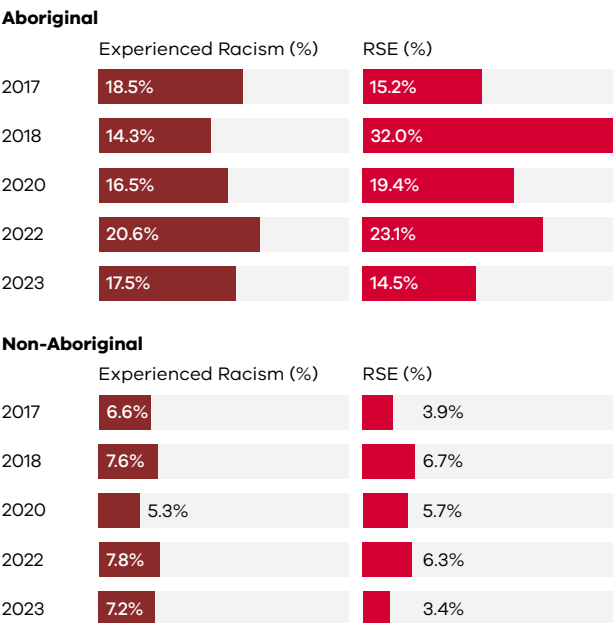
20.1 Address and eliminate racism

Measure 20.1.1 Proportion of Aboriginal people who report having experienced racism in the previous 6 months

In 2023, 17.5 per cent of First Peoples responders to the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) reported that they had experienced any form of racism in the past 12 months. This is a decrease from the 2022 survey with 20.6 per cent reporting experiencing racism. Over the long-term experiences of racism have remained relatively steady with 18.5 per cent of First Peoples respondents experiencing racism in 2017.

First Peoples are subjected to racism at far higher rates than non-Aboriginal people

Measure 20.1.1c Estimate and Relative Standard Error of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons who report having experienced at least 1 form of racial prejudice in the previous 12 months



* RSE between 25 and 50% — estimate should be interpreted with caution.
** RSE is 50% or more — estimate is unreliable hence not reported.

Source: The Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS).

These results do not reflect the full lived experience of First Peoples in Victoria over this period. 2023 was notably when Australia voted on the Indigenous Voice Referendum. The If You Don't Think Racism Exists Come Take a Walk With Us report published by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research analysed 453 incidents of racism recorded on the Call It Out register from 21 March 2023 to 20 March 2024. Over this period 18 per cent of racism reports were directly related to the Voice referendum. 20 per cent of all registrations were recorded in Victoria, a significant overrepresentation compared with other jurisdictions²⁶.

Victoria's Anti-racism Strategy

Victoria's Anti-racism Strategy (Strategy) was launched on 27 November 2024 and is 5-year plan to tackle racism and discrimination so we can build a safer, fairer and more inclusive state. The Strategy elevates the experiences of First Peoples and identifies systemic causes of racism directed at First Peoples.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet's First Peoples – State Relations Group and Multicultural Affairs Portfolio worked together throughout all phases of the Strategy's development, including developing a communication and engagement plan to engage First Peoples stakeholders and address feedback, and providing support for the Anti-Racism Taskforce (Taskforce) to guide the Strategy.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet continues to support the work of the Taskforce, including work to increase First Peoples representation to ensure that the experiences and voices of First Peoples contribute to the development of anti-racism initiatives.



Address racism and promote cultural safety

26. 'If you don't think racism exists come take a walk with us': The Call It Out Racism Register 2023–2024, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney < <https://callitout.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Jumbunna-Call-It-Out-Annual-Report-2023-2024-Final.pdf> >

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.

Renewable Energy Grants program

The Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program (TOREP) for Traditional Owner Corporations continued in 2024 through the First Peoples' Adoption of Renewable Energy (FPARE) program. The FPARE program provided \$960,000 in funding to build greater capacity and capability in Traditional Owner Corporations and their communities to engage with the renewable energy sector in an empowered and self-determined way.

The program focuses on enabling capacity building and capability uplift in the renewable energy transition. All applicants that applied were successful, with 9 grant projects funded during this reporting period. Traditional Owners Corporations decided to focus on piloting an energy generation agreement with a host business site; supporting the transition to an electric vehicle fleet; developing a renewable energy statement; and providing dedicated staff to lead on renewable energy initiatives.

In addition to providing grants \$60,000 (of the \$960,000) was allocated to develop guidance material and templates for Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) to accelerate their understanding of and participation in the renewable energy transition.

Streamlined funding

During the June 2022 Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum, DEECA made a commitment with the Traditional Owner Corporations Caucus comprising the 11 (now 12) 'formally recognised' Traditional Owner Corporations: "To explore future funding models that focus on building base funding to support organisational governance structures and capacity, rather than just FTE funding, and to look at opportunities to influence budget bids and incoming government that supports an improved funding model".

In March 2023, the then Minister for Environment made a commitment to the Traditional Owner Corporations Caucus to identify an alternate 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 the department. Following this, the Executive Board endorsed proposals to reform funding with Victoria's formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations. This response addresses the barriers to self-determination in DEECA's current funding model for Traditional Owners.

There were two pathways proposed to achieve this reform. The first would involve simplifying and streamlining funding agreements with Traditional Owner Corporations to reduce duplication and administrative burden on organisations. DEECA has a pilot project with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), exploring options for the reform of DEECA's funding agreements. The pilot will inform best practice guidance to create a replicable streamlined funding agreement process between DEECA and Traditional Owner Corporations.

The second pathway would improve budget bid submission processes. This will build Traditional Owner Corporation organisational governance structures and capacity and their ability to advance self-determination. DEECA worked with Traditional Owner Corporations to identify baseline funding for these organisations to partner with government, and then worked with the Department of Treasury and Finance to develop budget submissions as part of the 2024–25 State Budget process.

Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and shared decision-making Victorian actions

The Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF) is DEECA's primary accountability mechanism to Traditional Owners under Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning our Future', the department's Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy. The SCfCPF is a Traditional Owner-led mechanism to hold DEECA accountable to the implementation of Pupangarli Marnmarnepu, DEECA's commitments to systemic and structural reform and the Victorian Government Self-Determination reform agenda. The SCfCPF develops strategies that enable the transfer of relevant decision-making powers and resources to Traditional Owners, and enable decision making, leadership and self-governance in statewide matters across DEECA's portfolios as determined by them, to ultimately progress self-determination. The SCfCPF was established in 2020, with ten forums having been held since then, three of which have been held on-Country and in person.

During the 2023–24 financial year, two Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forums were held. The first of these, the ninth Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF), was held on 6th and 7th of September 2023. It was hosted by Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and co-chaired by Daniel Miller, GLaWAC Chief Executive Officer and DEECA Secretary John Bradley in Lakes Entrance.

The meeting provided an opportunity for GLaWAC to showcase their organisation, Country, and priorities with a particular highlight of this SCfCPF being that it ran parallel to GLaWAC's Gweraeil Quaranoook 'Great Meeting' Conference to allow Traditional Owners from across the state to come together and share learnings, projects, cultural exchange and build collective capability and capacity to care for and heal Country.

During the two-day SCfCPF members discussed progressing Traditional Owner priorities, aspirations and assertions and how state government can enhance their support for Aboriginal self-determination in practice, projects and policy.

During the multiday event, members discussed:

- State government progress towards self-determination reform and the transfer of power and resources back to Traditional Owners, including progress on Pupangarli Marnmarnepu and Parks Victoria's Managing Country Together Framework.
- Traditional Owner funding reform to better support and empower Traditional Owners to self-determine their funding needs reflective of their priorities and organisational capacity.
- Climate Action and Biodiversity market opportunities including exploring cultural credits and offsets.
- Mapping of mineral resources across Country.
- Building collective understanding of Traditional Owners to equitably engage and partner in the large volume of renewable energy works underway and upcoming including the partnership and engagement approach with Traditional Owners.
- Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus desire to engage in the Climate Action, Energy, Water-as-life giving and Cultural Fire policy reform agenda.

SCfCPF members also welcomed the then Minister for Environment, Ingrid Stitt who spoke of her commitments towards empowering and supporting Traditional Owner voice and self-determination in the Environment portfolio including through Public Land Act reforms and reforms to end Native Timber Harvesting.

The second day included a tour across Gunaikurnai Country. The tour visited sites of Cultural significance and heritage to Gunaikurnai peoples at Raymond Island and Eagle Point Lookout, with Katherine Mullett, GLaWAC On-Country General Manager, sharing Gunaikurnai history, stories, knowledge, and culture with the group.

Partnership Agreements with Registered Aboriginal Parties

In June 2024, the Department of Transport and Planning entered into the first agreement with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TLaWC). The Department of Transport and Planning has also had initial communication with further Registered Aboriginal Parties in preparation for commencing partnership agreement discussions in 2025. This includes with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council. In March 2024, funding was provided to Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to support its participation in partnership agreement discussions.

Local Government

Maggolee local government website

The Maggolee website was developed to support engagement and partnerships between local government and Aboriginal communities. Maggolee was developed by Reconciliation Victoria, with funding from the Department of Government Services. Maggolee in Woi wurrung, the language of the Wurundjeri people, means 'here in this place'. Maggolee provides information in a centralised resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities.

The Maggolee website is a resource that promotes cultural awareness and includes information on policy and programs, protocols, key contacts, relevant local data, news and events. It contains 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 communities and to progress reconciliation. 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 communities.

Records relating to First Peoples

Koorie Records Unit

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) has a dedicated Koorie Records Unit (KRU) that 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 tailored 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. This includes a Koorie Reference Service delivered in collaboration with the National Archives of Australia's Victorian office, as Victorian Aboriginal Affairs records are held in both collections.

The 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 and provides free copies of relevant records to clients and First Nations organisations and groups. The KRU provides information, training and workshops for Stolen Generations service providers and First Nations groups to support access to records. The KRU also hosts community groups visiting the Victorian Archives Centre to view records and undertake research.

As part of PROV's ongoing commitment to address legacy issues of description and increase the accessibility of records of high interest to First Peoples, several projects were completed including:

- Publication of item level descriptions in the PROV online catalogue for all record series relating to the Aboriginal Protectorate and Guardian of Aborigines (1838–1860), which is a significant part of PROV's collection.
- A project in collaboration with PROV's volunteer program to transcribe a volume of correspondence relating to Coranderrk (1898–1924).
- Digitisation of records relating to the Victorian government's administration of Aboriginal affairs.
- Implementation of a cultural sensitivity pop-up notice for all visitors to the PROV website, and webpages with information about cultural sensitivity and re-use of records relating to First Peoples, as well as Stolen Generations and other support services.

The KRU is also active across the archives sector through the Council for Australasian Archives and Records Authorities First Nations Special Interest Group to respond to recordkeeping recommendations in the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration and the Healing Foundation Historical Records Taskforce Principles for Nationally consistent approaches to accessing records.

Koorie Index of Names

Much of the PROV collection is open for public access, but records can be difficult to locate due to a lack of description or metadata to enable keyword searches. PROV's Koorie Index of Names (KIN) is an ongoing project to create a searchable index to locate records relating to First Peoples in the collection, undertaken with support from the PROV Volunteer Program.

During 2023–24, the Koorie Reference Service received 185 requests for Aboriginal family history research assistance, resulting in 1,359 names searched and 2,961 name results located in PROV records using the KIN database. A total of 4,946 copies of records were provided, free of charge, to Koorie Reference Service clients.

In 2023–24 PROV commenced a project to redesign the KIN platform, which is no longer fit for purpose, to support increased accessibility, improve functionality and implement improvements to service delivery.

Support for the Yoorrook Justice Commission

PROV is working with the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the Department of Premier and Cabinet to determine how to continue to uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty in respect to evidence provided by First Peoples, once the permanent value records are transferred to PROV custody.

The reforms enacted in the *Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Act 2025* amend the *Inquiries Act 2014* and *Public Records Act 1973* to empower the Commission to make closure or restriction orders over records of First Peoples' evidence provided to the Commission. Records which are subject to these orders will be protected from public access both in the PROV database and via Freedom of Information requests for 99 years.

PROV has provided instructions and held workshops with agencies to assist them to identify the historical records they need from the State Archival Collection to respond to Notices to Produce and other requests.

PROV has hosted Yoorrook Justice Commissioners and staff at the Victorian Archives Centre on several occasions, as well as responding to questions directly from the Commission.

Rights in Records Action Plan

The State Archival Collection held by PROV contains historical evidence of the controls and injustices experienced by First Peoples due to government policy and practices. There is a growing demand by First Peoples for greater control of the records created about them and their communities by government. Indigenous Data Governance (IDG) and Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) are key to these demands.

To begin to address this, PROV has developed a Rights in Records Action Plan in consultation with a range of stakeholder organisations. The aim of the Action Plan is to increase accessibility of relevant records, improve researcher experience and consider how to increase people's rights in public records, within the confines of the *Public Records Act 1973*.

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

The Victorian Government Library Service has initiated a program of work to ensure Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) is appropriately classified within the library collection. This includes building transparent processes to uphold the rights of Australia's First Nations' communities regarding ICIP and responding retrospectively to instances where library collections have not been acquired or managed with informed consent; defining and classifying ICIP material in the collection; providing access to ICIP classified materials only where certain conditions are met (i.e. permission is sought by holders of ICIP materials, or where consultation may be required with First Nations communities to access the materials); and, ensuring researchers and Victorian Public Sector are made aware of obligations under ICIP to acknowledge the relevant materials and the respective rights holders of the ICIP materials, if known.

First Peoples Culture

NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week Events

A series of events were held across the Transport and Planning Portfolio celebrating First Peoples culture and fostering ongoing cultural learning throughout the year. The Department of Transport and Planning hosted an event for Reconciliation Week in June 2024, which aligned with the national Reconciliation Week theme of 'Now More Than Ever'. The event included a keynote address from the Secretary and a Q&A panel featuring senior leaders from the Department of Transport and Planning, V/Line and Development Victoria.

In August 2024, the Department of Transport and Planning coordinated a hybrid NAIDOC Week event themed 'Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud.' Highlights from the event included the presentation of Yani Bangal Scholarships, a keynote speech from Reuben Berg – Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and a panel discussion with Yani Bangal Tertiary Scholarship recipients. This event was held in August, rather than during NAIDOC Week itself, to provide the Department of Transport and Planning employees a better opportunity to engage in Community organised activities.

Incorporating First Peoples culture into transport infrastructure

The Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority is incorporating Aboriginal art and design into project infrastructure. As part of the Metro Tunnel Creative Program, the Metro Tunnel Project engaged nine First Peoples artists in 2024:

- Yirramboi (Akin) - six artists collaborated on this piece, featuring a series of photographs shown on the Federation Square screens. For more details, see: <https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/metro-tunnel/community/art/creative-program/town-hall/yirramboi-akin>.
- Vandal (budyabudya and budyaan) artwork at Scott Alley. For more details, see: <https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/metro-tunnel/community/art/creative-program/town-hall/vandal-budyabudya-and-budyaan>.
- Aunty Kim and Kent Morris for the South Yarra Siding Reserve artist talk. For more details see: <https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/metro-tunnel/community/art/creative-program/artworks-at-the-tunnel-entrances/south-yarra-siding-reserve-artist-talk>.

Protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and values

In 2023–24, the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) piloted new approaches to understanding and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and values on several Housing Statement projects. For example, VPA tested the use of planning tools for the protection of heritage in the Officer South Employment Precinct Structure Plan and also engaged the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to deliver Cultural Values Assessments to inform strategic planning.

The VPA also focused on implementation of Wurrek-al and strengthening relationships with Registered Aboriginal Parties. This included attending community events and sharing knowledge about the planning system, holding workshops for staff to reflect on how self-determination can be embedded in its work and inviting guest speakers.

Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACAT	Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training
ACAC	Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACF	Aboriginal Children's Forum
ACHLMA	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement
ACIP	Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program
ACLO	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
AHWP	Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership
AJA	Aboriginal Justice Advisory
AJC	Aboriginal Justice Caucus
AJF	Aboriginal Justice Forum
AJG	Aboriginal Justice Group
ASGF	Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum
ASN	Aboriginal Staff Network
ASPG	Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant
AWF	Aboriginal Workforce Fund
AYCP	Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program
AYJ	Aboriginal Youth Justice
CPP	COVID Positive Pathways Program
CISP	Court Integrated Services Program
CUST	Community Understanding and Safety Training
DDACL	Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (formally Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)

DE	Department of Education (formally Department of Education and Training)
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DH	Department of Health
DJCS	Department of Justice and Community Safety
DJSIR	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (formally Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions)
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning (formerly Department of Transport)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
First Peoples' Assembly	First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria
FVTOC	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
GLaWAC	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
GNV	Geographic Names Victoria
HfAVR	Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round
HPV	Human papillomavirus
IWG	Implementation Working Group
KFFE	Koorie Families as First Educators
KMS	Koori Maternity Services
KSN	Koorie Staff Network
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Intersex and Queer
LPHU	Local Public Health Unit
MCGC	Marrung Central Governance Committee
MDAS	Mallee District Aboriginal Services
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MPAS	Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIKERI	National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Institute
NILFET	Not in Labour Force, Education or Training
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PALO	Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer
PwC	Pricewaterhouse Coopers
QLD	Queensland
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RCDVS	Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicides
REDS	Regional Economic Development Strategies
SCFCPF	State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
SDRF	Self-Determination Reform Framework
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TMA	Together More Active

TO	Traditional Owner
TOC	Traditional Owner Corporation
TOS Act	<i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (VIC)</i>
The Report	Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOREP	Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program
VAAF	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VAEEC	Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council
VAHHF	Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education Training
VIC	Victoria
VIT	Victorian Institute of Technology
VPC	Victorian Pathways Certificate
VPHS	Victorian Population Health Survey
VPS	Victorian Public Sector
VSBA	Victorian Schools Building Authority
VPSC	Victorian Public Sector Commission
WA	Western Australia
YBFS	Year Before Full-Time Schooling

To receive the publication in an accessible format, please phone 1800 762 003 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email First Peoples – State Relations, Department of Premier and Cabinet, at secretariat.aa@dpc.vic.gov.au.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this document may include photos, quotations and/or names of people who are deceased.

Authorised and published by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

©State of Victoria, June 2025.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international licence (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

It is a condition of this licence that you credit the State of Victoria as author.

ISSN 2206-0154 (Print)
ISSN 2206-0162 (Online).

Available at www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalaffairsreport

