

Discussion Guide

Closing the Gap: what's next for Victoria?

National Closing the Gap Agenda and the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework Refresh 2018

2 Purpose of this document

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

3 Introduction

3 Victoria's Aboriginal community

4 What is the national Closing the Gap agenda?

4 What is the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF)?

5 Performance against the targets in Closing the Gap

5 Performance against the Strategic Action Areas in the VAAF

6 What the Victorian Government has heard from community so far

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

7 What is next for Victoria?

7 A commitment to self-determination

8 Have Your say

9 Timelines

11 Appendix A – VAAF Strategic Action Areas, Indicators, Targets and Measures

13 Appendix B – Self-determination work underway in Victoria

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Purpose of this document

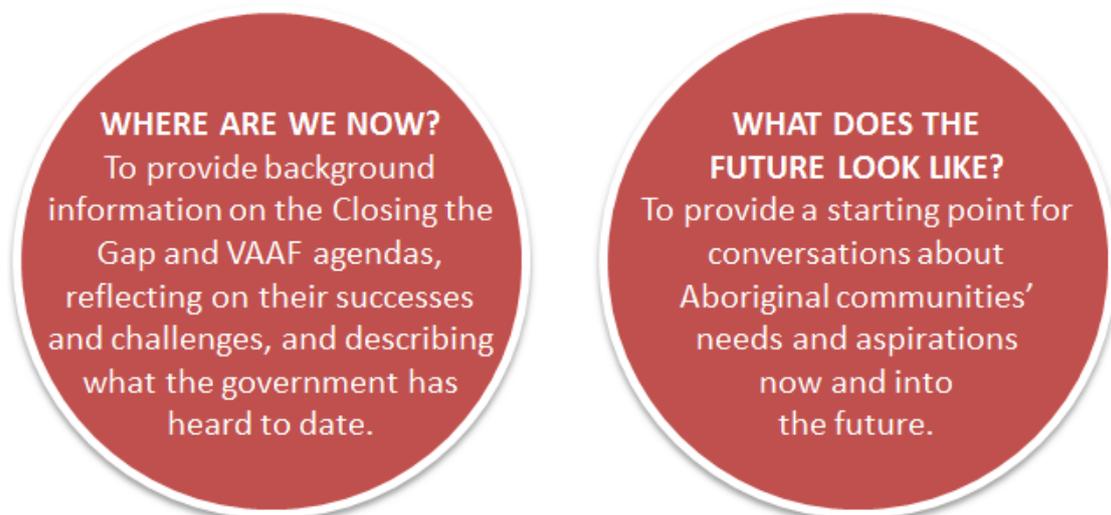
The national Closing the Gap agenda and the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) are being refreshed in 2018 to refocus the national and state frameworks for Aboriginal affairs.

Broad community engagement will occur throughout Victoria on what these agendas should look like in the future.

The Victorian Government is working in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians to progress its commitment to treaty and a greater voice for Aboriginal communities. In line with this commitment, the Victorian Government will continue to advocate at a national level for Aboriginal ownership of the Closing the Gap agenda.

All actions taken under the Closing the Gap agenda must meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal Victorians. The Victorian Government is committed to self-determination and working with Aboriginal Victorians to ensure that the refreshed agendas reflect the voice, knowledge and priorities of Victorian Aboriginal communities.

This Discussion Guide has been prepared to support the initial engagement period (January to April 2018), and has two main objectives:



Following this initial conversation, the Victorian Government will report back on what it has heard to make sure that the priorities of the Victorian Aboriginal community have been properly reflected.

The second period of engagement (April to August 2018) will be used to confirm the future priority areas and inform discussions about measures, targets and outcomes to be included in the new Closing the Gap and VAAF agendas.

Every aspect of the new agendas is open for the Victorian Aboriginal community to negotiate, and every step of this process is open to feedback and change. The content and proposed questions in this guide are provided as conversation-starters and are not intended to limit the discussion in any way.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Introduction

Australian governments agreed to 'refresh' the Closing the Gap agenda in 2018 by establishing new priority areas and targets, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. At the same time, the current five-year VAAF is due to expire in 2018.

While the current agendas have been instrumental in focusing the nation's attention on the stark inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, their scope does not adequately reflect the diversity of Aboriginal communities, the complexity of disadvantage or the aspirations of communities.

Going forward, the new agendas *must be led by and reflect the needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal community, not Australian governments alone.*

Throughout the refresh process, the Victorian Government is committed to a self-determination approach, led by the knowledge and expertise of the Victorian Aboriginal community.

Victoria's Aboriginal community

Aboriginal Victorians have distinct population characteristics:

- Population growth for Aboriginal Victorians has far outpaced the general Victorian population. In 2016, the population of Aboriginal Victorians was 47,000, almost double the 2001 population of 25,000.
- Just over half of the Victorian Aboriginal population currently lives in greater Melbourne (approximately 51 per cent), whilst 49 per cent live in regional Victoria.
- Aboriginal Victorians have a much younger population profile than the non-Aboriginal Victorian population, with a median age of 23 years compared to 37 years for the non-Aboriginal Victorian population.
- Aboriginal households have a unique composition, with a third of Aboriginal households consisting of a couple with children; almost a third consisting of one-parent families; and almost a third consisting of extended family and non-family members.

We still have a long way to go in achieving social, political, cultural and economic equality in Victoria. Despite significant gains in early childhood and education over the past few years, Aboriginal Victorians continue to be over-represented in nearly all measures of inequality and disadvantage.

In refreshing the Closing the Gap and VAAF agendas and ultimately achieving positive outcomes, we need to improve data collection and transparency to better understand the diversity and strengths of Victoria's Aboriginal communities.

What is the national Closing the Gap agenda?

In November 2008, the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments signed the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, committing to six national targets in the areas of health, education and employment. A seventh target was added in 2014. The priority areas for Closing the Gap are:

1. Life expectancy
2. Infant mortality rates
3. Children's reading, writing and numeracy
4. School attendance
5. Employment
6. Year 12 attainment
7. Early childhood education (added in 2014)

This agenda was governments' response to the Close the Gap social justice campaign, which called on the Commonwealth Government to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians within a generation.

When the Closing the Gap agenda was signed, it was the first high level commitment ever made by governments to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. By signing the agreement, all governments committed to being accountable for reaching these goals within specific timeframes. 2018 marks the 10th anniversary of the Closing the Gap agenda, and the expiry of four of the seven targets.

What is the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF)?

In response to Closing the Gap, Victoria developed the VAAF as an overarching strategic framework for working with Aboriginal Victorians to drive action and improve outcomes.

While the current VAAF (2013-18) adopts a similar framework to Closing the Gap, the VAAF was developed to reflect the Victorian context and to set accountability targets for improving the quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians. The current VAAF includes additional targets and measures which are not included in Closing the Gap, such as for child protection and youth justice.

The current six Strategic Action Areas to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians are:

1. Maternal and early childhood health and development
2. Education and training
3. Economic participation
4. Health, housing and wellbeing
5. Safe families and communities, and equitable justice outcomes
6. Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities.

There are 12 headline indicators in total, each with specific targets and measures. A full list of VAAF indicators, targets and measures is at [Appendix A](#).

Performance against the targets in Closing the Gap

While much progress has been made, the 2017 Closing the Gap report demonstrates that only one of the seven national targets is on track to being met. It is clear from the results below, that the Closing the Gap agenda is not having the desired impact.

Progress has been made on the Closing the Gap targets, but only one is on track		
Target	Progress	Status
Close the gap in life expectancy by 2031	Mortality decreased by 15 per cent	Target is not on track
Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018	Child mortality decreased by 33 per cent	Target is not on track
Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018	NAPLAN – Improvements in reading and numeracy	Target is not on track
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018	School attendance is improving	Target is not on track
Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018	Employment remains unchanged	Target is not on track
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020	Year 12 attainment up from 45 per cent to 62 per cent	Target is on track
95 per cent of all Indigenous four year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025	Early childhood education 87 per cent enrolment	Revised target
Many areas are not measured: economic, social and environment		

Performance against the Strategic Action Areas in the VAAF

The Victorian Government reports annually on progress against the headline indicators, key targets and measures under the VAAF through the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Report (the Report).

The latest Report was released in November 2017 and overall demonstrates variable performance. For example, Victoria has made significant gains since 2008 across indicators in the areas of education and maternal and early childhood health, including:

- the gap in four-year-old kindergarten participation narrowed by 80 per cent, placing Aboriginal kindergarten participation at near parity
- the gap in Year 10 apparent retention has closed and the gap in Year 12 attainment is narrowing
- the gap in perinatal mortality and low birth weight has been reduced by more than half
- the participation gap in Maternal Child Health Key Ages and Stages consults has narrowed by a third since 2010.

However, the Report identifies and acknowledges uneven achievements and shortfalls.

- While more Aboriginal students are staying in school longer than ever before, lower school attendance and NAPLAN achievement rates indicate ongoing challenges to improving education outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- Aboriginal children and young people are still grossly over-represented in the child protection system, and Aboriginal Victorians continue to remain under-represented in the Victorian workforce, over-represented in the justice system, and experience poorer health outcomes.

What the Victorian Government has heard from community so far

As we reach the expiry of Closing the Gap and VAAF, it is time to reflect on the successes and failings of frameworks for Aboriginal affairs.

The Victorian Government has heard feedback and expert advice from numerous stakeholders across Aboriginal affairs, including the Premier's Gathering on Aboriginal Affairs, the Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Executive Council and the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group. This is in addition to extensive engagement on the development of the Victorian Government Affairs Report 2017.

Some of the key areas of feedback include:

❖ *Self-determination is essential*

- Self-determination is the key enabler of meaningful change and is central to improving agency and achieving equality for all Victorians.
- Government must continue to transfer decision-making, ownership and resources to Aboriginal communities in recognition that self-determination is a human right, not a mode of consultation.
- A refresh of Closing the Gap and the VAAF should not only take a 'self-determination approach' in forming the direction of the Aboriginal affairs agenda, but must also make government accountable for progressing self-determination and the transfer of decision-making and control.

❖ *The deficit approach to Aboriginal affairs must be addressed*

- Targets and measures described in the VAAF and Closing the Gap are mostly deficit-based, and can be viewed as a narrative of blame and stigmatisation. While it is important for inequality to be accurately measured, it must be made clear that targets are designed to hold government accountable for structural deficits and systemic racism.
- A refreshed VAAF and Closing the Gap must be framed by the aspirations and strengths of Aboriginal Victorians.

❖ *Gaps in outcomes are a result of colonisation and trauma*

- Gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians are a result of the historical and ongoing trauma of colonisation and past policies. These policies include child removal practices, banning language and cultural practices, as well as policies of assimilation. The impact of these policies and practises is ongoing and is borne out in the current disparity in outcomes.

❖ *Data transparency and data sovereignty is required*

- Access to data, evidence and evaluations better enables Aboriginal Victorian communities and organisations to direct and manage responses to complex social issues. Data and the measurement of outcomes should be more transparent and owned by community. More accessible ways of engaging with the data should also be considered.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

What's next for Victoria?

The Victorian Government is committed to a meaningful and collaborative process of refreshing Closing the Gap and VAAF that is led by Aboriginal Victorians. Broad community engagement will occur throughout the first half of 2018 to guide the government on what is next and to ensure there are ongoing opportunities to provide feedback and propose changes.

Government will be asking community:

- ❖ **What are the needs and aspirations of Victoria's Aboriginal communities?**
- ❖ **What should stay the same and what should be different?**

A commitment to self-determination

Advancing Aboriginal self-determination is a key Victorian Government priority. This commitment acknowledges the strong link between self-determination and improved outcomes. It recognises that Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise as to what is best for themselves, their families and their communities.

The Victorian Government recognises that self-determination is not a new concept, nor did government initiate this conversation. Victorian Aboriginal communities have long been advocating for self-determination, and have been leading the way in demonstrating sustainable self-determination approaches.

As a human right, self-determination is based on the notion of people having control over their own destiny, including their social, economic, and cultural future, and political systems.

Appendix B includes an overview of a number of self-determination activities, reforms and programs underway across Victoria. These activities have given momentum to advancing and embedding self-determination, and reflect the growing ambition within the community and government about what a commitment to self-determination can achieve.

In refreshing the VAAF and Closing the Gap, the Victorian Government will:

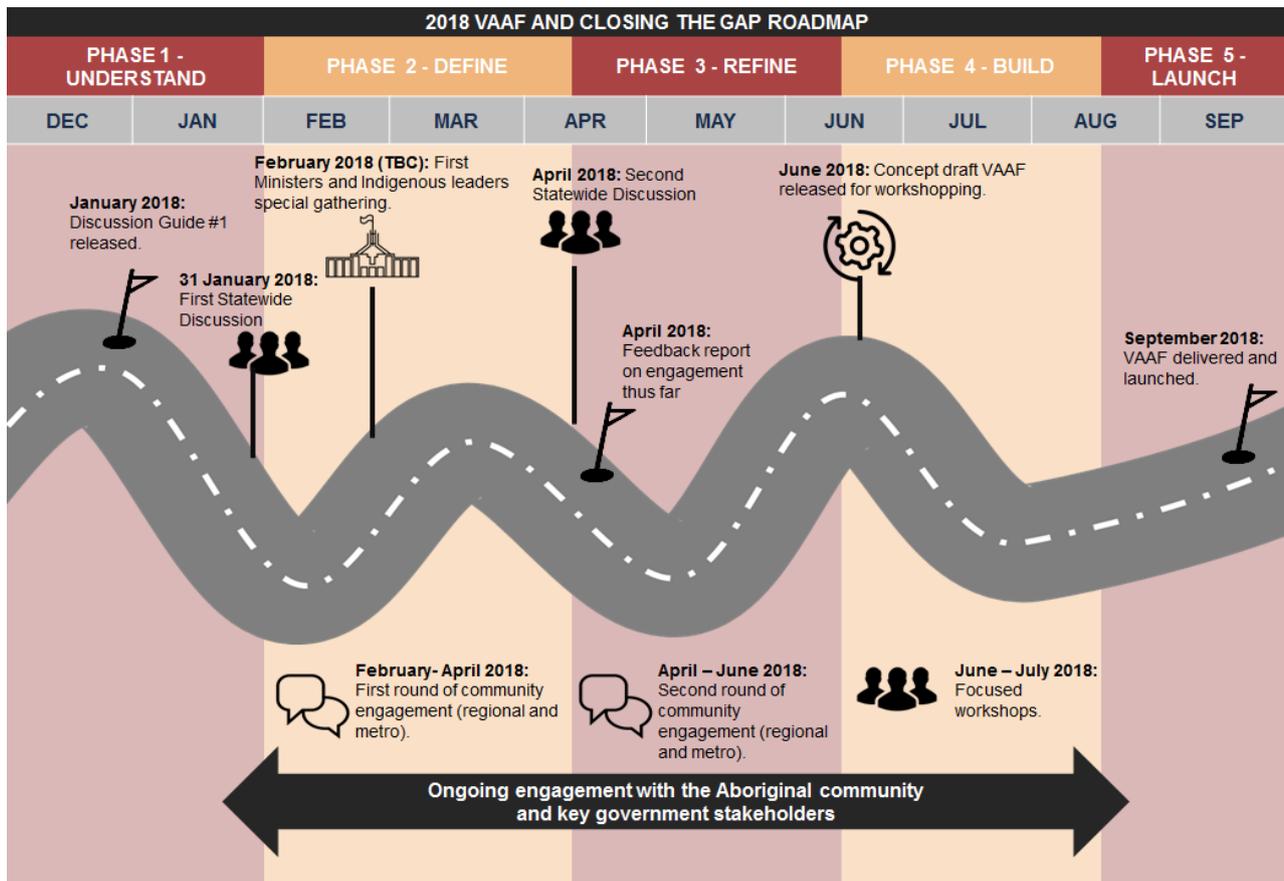
- ❖ **Listen to and work alongside Victorian Aboriginal communities** – to be led by the expertise, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal Victorians to ensure Aboriginal ownership and control of state and national agendas.
- ❖ **Measure and track self-determination** – to hold government accountable for change and to embed Aboriginal self-determination as a foundational part of the policy design and program delivery, including sharing power and resources.

Have Your Say

There are a range of opportunities for Aboriginal community members, organisations, services and government departments to inform and shape the development of the refreshed VAAF and Closing the Gap frameworks.

- ❖ **Statewide Discussion – Closing the Gap: What’s next for Victoria? (metro-based):** Open to all members of the Victorian Aboriginal community and key government representatives. The first Statewide Discussion is scheduled for 31 January 2018 at the Richmond Football Club (Maurice Rioli Room).
 - There will also be a second Statewide Discussion in April 2018, pending community feedback, to report back on what has been said.
- ❖ **Open community forums (regionally-based):** Community forums will be held between February and August 2018 across five regions (Barwon South West, Grampians, Loddon Mallee, Hume and Gippsland). All community forums will be open to Aboriginal community members, representatives, agencies and other stakeholders.
- ❖ **Facilitated Workshops:** Representatives of the Aboriginal Victorian community can express their interest in participating in focused workshops, to be held in June and July 2018.
- ❖ **Arrange a meeting:** You can arrange to meet with staff from the Aboriginal Affairs Policy Branch (Department of Premier and Cabinet). Meetings can be formal or informal, one-on-one or group-based. They can be held in the department’s offices, community-based offices, community members’ homes, or any other setting that is convenient and comfortable for you.
- ❖ **Written submissions:** You can also have your say in writing at any time. Submissions can be sent by email to the following contacts in the Aboriginal Affairs Policy Branch (Department of Premier and Cabinet):
 - Elly Patira, Manager - elly.patira@dpc.vic.gov.au
 - David McAuley, Manager - david.mcauley@dpc.vic.gov.auPostal submissions can be sent to:
 - Attention: Elly Patira, Manager, Aboriginal Affairs Policy
 - Department of Premier and Cabinet
 - Level 3, 1 Treasury Place,
 - East Melbourne Victoria 3002
- ❖ **Telephone:** You can call the following contacts in the Aboriginal Affairs Policy Branch (Department of Premier and Cabinet):
 - Elly Patira - (03) 8392 5387
 - David McAuley - (03) 9651 5949

Timelines



PHASE 1 – UNDERSTAND (December 2017 – January 2018)

- Release a Discussion Guide and commence communications with Aboriginal leaders, community members, organisations and government departments so that as many Aboriginal community members as possible are made aware of the Closing the Gap and VAAF refresh and know how they can have their say.

PHASE 2 – DEFINE (February – April 2018)

- Community engagement period for all Aboriginal Victorians to have their say about their aspirations and priorities for a refreshed Closing the Gap and VAAF.
- Statewide Discussion held in Melbourne on 31 January 2018. The purpose of the Statewide Discussion is to start the conversation with Aboriginal Victorians about their aspirations and priorities for the refreshed agendas.
- First Ministers and Indigenous leaders to meet and agree the Closing the Gap agenda and priority areas.
- Regional roadshow commences, with open community forums held in five regions.
- To support the regional roadshows, Aboriginal Affairs Policy Branch staff will be available in each region to meet with elders, families, individual community members and Aboriginal organisations who would like to have their say.

PHASE 3 – REFINE (April – June 2018)

- Provide a feedback report, which will:
 - summarise what has been said so far
 - confirm priority areas, as identified by the community, for a refreshed Closing the Gap and VAAF
 - inform discussions about measurements and indicators for tracking progress in those priority areas.
- Community engagement period to determine priority area indicators and measurements, including a possible second Statewide Discussion held in the Melbourne metro area, pending community feedback.
- Second round of community forums across the five regions.

PHASE 4 – BUILD (June – August 2018)

- Concept draft VAAF released to key stakeholders.
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting to agree and finalise all aspects of the Closing the Gap agenda.
- Focused workshops with key stakeholders (including Victorian Aboriginal community representatives and Government departments) to review and finalise the refreshed VAAF.

PHASE 5 – LAUNCH (September 2018)

- VAAF delivered and launched.

Council of Australian Government (COAG) and Commonwealth timeframes

In February 2018, the Commonwealth Government is hosting a 'First Ministers and Indigenous leaders special gathering' to discuss the refresh of the current Closing the Gap agenda.

It must be noted that, at the time of writing, the engagement timelines for the national Closing the Gap refresh have not been finalised.

Appendix A – VAAF Strategic Action Areas, Indicators, Targets and Measures

Strategic Action Area 1: Maternal and early childhood health and development		
Headline Indicator	Target	Other measures to be reported
H1: Improve Aboriginal infant survival and health	By 2023, close the gap in the perinatal mortality rate	The rate of reported smoking use in pregnancy by mothers of Aboriginal babies
	By 2023, close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies with a birth weight below 2,500 grams	The proportion of Aboriginal children attending Maternal and Child Health services at key age milestones
H2: Increase Aboriginal kindergarten participation	By 2014, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 4 year old children having access to a high quality kindergarten program will be closed	The number of Aboriginal 3 year old children participating in a kindergarten program
H3: Reduce the rate of Aboriginal child protection substantiations	By 2023, the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection substantiations will be reduced by 75%	
Strategic Action Area 2: Education and training		
Headline Indicator	Target	Additional measures
H4: Improve literacy and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for Aboriginal students	By 2018, halve the gap for Aboriginal students in reading, writing and numeracy	Retention of Aboriginal students to Year 10. School attendance rates for Aboriginal students
H5: Increase the proportion of Aboriginal young people aged 20–24 who have completed at least Year 12 or equivalent	By 2020, halve the gap between the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 20–24 year olds	The rate of transition of Aboriginal young people aged 18–24 years to employment and/or further education The number of Aboriginal people aged 20–65 with or working towards post school qualifications in Certificate III or above
Strategic Action Area 3: Economic participation		
Headline Indicator	Target	Additional measures
H6: Increase Aboriginal labour force participation	By 2018, halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians, as measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment to population ratio, for 15 to 64 year olds • Unemployment rate • Labour force participation rate 	The proportion of Aboriginal people in various income bands The representation of Aboriginal people on boards and committees
H7: Increase workforce participation by Aboriginal people in the public sector	By 2018, employment of Aboriginal people in the Victorian public service will increase to 1% of total employees	

Strategic Action Area 4: Health, housing and wellbeing		
Headline Indicator	Target	Additional measures
H8. Improve the health status of Aboriginal Victorians	<p>By 2031, close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians that report their health status as 'excellent' or 'very good'</p> <p>By 2031, close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults reporting 'high' or 'very high' levels of psychological distress</p> <p>By 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal adults who are current smokers will reduce by 21%</p>	<p>The proportion of Aboriginal adults who are obese</p> <p>The rate of self-harm among Aboriginal people</p> <p>The rate of harmful alcohol consumption among Aboriginal Victorians</p> <p>The proportion of Aboriginal people with a disability receiving disability services</p> <p>The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who are homeless</p>
Strategic Action Area 5: Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes		
Headline Indicator	Target	Additional measures
H9. Reduce the incidence of Aboriginal family violence		The rate of reporting (Family Incident Reporting) of Aboriginal family violence to police
H10. Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people under justice supervision	<p>By 2031, close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth justice supervision</p> <p>By 2031, close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under adult justice supervision</p>	<p>The rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people (10–17 years) processed by police</p> <p>The proportion of Aboriginal young people (aged 10–17 years) cautioned when processed by police</p>
H11. Reduce the proportion of Aboriginal people who return to prison within two years of release	By 2031, close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are convicted within two years of their previous conviction	The proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving a prison sentence compared with those receiving a community corrections order
Strategic Action Area 6: Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities		
Headline Indicator	Target	Additional measures
H12. Strengthen Aboriginal culture and support Aboriginal people's engagement with community and society		<p>The rate of access by Aboriginal Victorians to their traditional lands</p> <p>Participation by Aboriginal people in community related arrangements and events (ie. LINs, RAPs, NAIDOC activities, Youth Forums)</p> <p>The proportion of Aboriginal people who felt that there are opportunities for them to have a real say on issues which are important to them</p> <p>Options for all Victorians to be engaged with Aboriginal culture</p>

Appendix B – Self-determination work underway in Victoria

Aboriginal communities, organisations and the government are working together to develop and implement a variety of culturally-responsive, place-based and Aboriginal-specific initiatives across Victoria. A snapshot of these include:

- **The Aboriginal Justice Agreement** – a formal agreement established in 2000 between the Aboriginal Victorian community and the government to improve justice outcomes and increase community safety.
- **Korin Korin Balit-Djak – The Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan** – developed through extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities across Victoria, this plan embeds self-determination across all strategic directions and actions to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.
- **Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)** – as the peak health advocate for Victorian Aboriginal communities, VACCHO leads research and policy development on behalf of the Victorian health service membership in a coordinated and collaborative way.
- **Marrung – Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026** – articulating the vision and strategy for improving Koorie educational outcomes, this Plan seeks to ensure that all Koorie Victorians achieve their learning aspirations.
- **Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS)** – providing social, cultural, economic, and justice services to Aboriginal families through program initiatives that demonstrate inclusive self-determination approaches. MDAS uses inclusive community engagement in all aspects of the organisation's program design.
- **The Water for Victoria Plan (2016)** – the first comprehensive state-wide water plan in over 10 years, which established an Aboriginal Water Program to help identify Aboriginal values and uses of water, and help build the capacity of the sector to ensure the involvement of Traditional Owners.
- **Commencement of the transfer of 1,448 properties from the Director of Housing to Aboriginal Housing Victoria** – homes are owned and managed by an Aboriginal organisation for the benefit of Aboriginal people.
- **Amendments to section 18 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)** – supports Aboriginal guardianship for vulnerable children.
- **The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)** – working to protect the rights of vulnerable Aboriginal families and children, VACCA plays a critical part in a number of self-determination reforms. This includes the formalisation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle Policy within the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and progression of Aboriginal children on guardianship orders being case managed within an ACCO.
- **Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020** – leveraging the strengths of Aboriginal Victorians and the State economy to build opportunity and economic prosperity and deliver better life outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians
- **The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board** – in the spirit of the self-determination, the Board brings together Aboriginal community members, businesses, the corporate sector and government and is responsible for championing the state's Aboriginal economic development initiatives and advising the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on new projects to be delivered.
- **Tharamba Bugheen: Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy 2017-2020** – focusing on: improving the accessibility of business support; improving the visibility and networks of Aboriginal businesses; and strengthening the entrepreneurial culture and business experience of Aboriginal Victorians

- **DEDJTR's Aboriginal Inclusion Plan** – outlines the Department's commitment to working alongside Aboriginal Victorians to support inclusive economic participation, progress reconciliation and contribute to state and national efforts to 'Close the Gap'.
- **DELWP's Aboriginal Inclusion Plan 2016-2020** – recognises the need to build and strengthen the Department's relationship with Victorian Traditional Owners, and to work with Aboriginal communities to provide employment, training and business opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians.
- **Ensuring Aboriginal voices guide the development of family violence reforms** for the Victorian Aboriginal community, including the refresh of the 10 year plan to address family violence experienced by Aboriginal Victorians.
- **Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service** – a purpose built Aboriginal Healing Centre providing programs and services that support and empower East Gippsland Aboriginal communities to respond and prevent family violence.
- **Barring Djinang Aboriginal Employment Strategy for the Victorian Public Service** – a five year strategy actively building a public sector that benefits from the unique skills and experience that Aboriginal employees bring to workplaces.