



## Report back on the Statewide Discussion – 31 January 2018

*This report is a summary of knowledge and expertise shared by Aboriginal Victorians with the Victorian Government at the Statewide Discussion on 31 January 2018 in Melbourne. At this event, 158 people from community, Aboriginal organisations and government gathered to provide advice on the future of the national Closing the Gap agenda and the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF). We acknowledge these contributions and have endeavoured to represent them here as accurately as possible.*

### About the day

The day was MC'd by Associate Professor Gregory Phillips. It included:

**An opening address by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs**, the Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, who reaffirmed the Victorian Government's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and ensuring Aboriginal people lead the way in making decisions about Aboriginal people and communities.

**A presentation by Professor Ian Anderson from the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet** on the past 10 years of Closing the Gap including the lessons learnt, and the Commonwealth's consultation process to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda.

**A presentation by Taryn Lee from the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet** on the history of VAAF, the importance of a self-determining approach in developing the new agendas, and details of how to have your say and be involved in Victoria's refresh process.

**A panel discussion** with Professor Muriel Bamblett (CEO of Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency), Ian Hamm (CEO of Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation), Angela Singh (Executive Director at Department of Training and Education) and Indi Clarke (Manager at Koorie Youth Council), igniting conversation about past failings, as well as future targets and aspirations, of the Closing the Gap and VAAF agendas.

**Table discussions** based on the following questions, which were set by participants:

- What should the targets be?
- What strategies are needed to meet the targets?
- Who should set the targets and who should implement them?
- What should the relationship be between the federal and state governments?
- What should the relationship be between the Aboriginal community and government?
- How do we keep government accountable (including addressing racism and structural barriers)?

### What we heard

The **importance of Aboriginal culture** was repeatedly raised by panellists and participants, including strengthening of cultural confidence, identity and safety. The responsibility and accountability of non-Aboriginal Victorians in **addressing racism** was also raised, alongside the importance of Aboriginal culture and perspectives being broadly embraced and celebrated across society. **Aboriginal languages** was another common topic, with panellists calling for targets around language and greater support for language programs within schools. The **importance of education** was a shared view, including the need for non-Aboriginal children to learn about Aboriginal culture, history and language.

Panellists reiterated that **Victoria is leading the nation** in this work, including with the development of a pathway to treaty, and that this work needs to continue and be led by Aboriginal Victorians. The future VAAF needs to be more ambitious by **going beyond identifying problems**, and not being limited to what can currently be measured.

Participants suggested the future agendas adopt a **strengths-based approach**, which recognises the diversity of Aboriginal Victorians and their ambitions, and a focus on **local, place-based solutions**. This sparked discussion about Aboriginal Victorians' role as being more than just advisors to government, but rather playing a key role in setting and monitoring targets and holding governments to account. **Data sovereignty** was a key topic of discussion, with participants advising that community-owned and controlled data is a key mechanism for community decision-making. Participants also spoke strongly about the need for an **independent Aboriginal-led accountability mechanism overseeing government spending and performance** within Aboriginal affairs.

The following 11 strong and consistent themes were identified via the table discussions and the day more broadly:

<b>Key theme</b>	<b>What was said</b>
<b>Upholding community decisions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Uluru Statement from the Heart, including Makaratta and a constitutionally-enshrined Indigenous Voice to Parliament, should be accepted</li> <li>▪ Victoria's path to Treaty should be recognised</li> </ul>
<b>Self-determination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community should set and deliver targets</li> <li>▪ Decision-making across policy and program funding, design, delivery and accountability should be community-led and place-based</li> <li>▪ Self-determination should be a target, as well as an approach</li> <li>▪ The approach must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal communities</li> <li>▪ Local decision-making (for example based on language or clan groups) on how resources are used within local communities, and local reporting to ensure relevance</li> </ul>
<b>Aboriginal-led accountability of government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greater transparency of government spending and government actions is needed</li> <li>▪ Independent advising and oversight should occur, such as through the establishment of an Aboriginal Productivity Commission / Ombudsman, report to Parliament and Truth and Reconciliation Council</li> <li>▪ Key performance indicators should be set for senior government officials and ministers across whole of government</li> <li>▪ A review of the Closing the Gap Statement of Intent is needed</li> <li>▪ State and Commonwealth governments must work together</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths-based approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The current deficit-based approach and measures need to be replaced with strengths-based approaches and measures. For example, measuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ quality of life and aspirations, instead of life expectancy</li> <li>○ Aboriginal cultural languages and perspectives taught in schools, rather than school attendance rates</li> <li>○ Aboriginal business ownership and economic participation, instead of unemployment rates</li> <li>○ cultural awareness and safety of mainstream services</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Cultural confidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Culture should be embedded across targets</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal languages, knowledge and perspectives should be taught in schools and communities</li> <li>▪ Connection to culture and cultural strengthening initiatives must be supported, for example Aboriginal gathering places</li> </ul>
<b>Data sovereignty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data should be community-owned and controlled</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable resourcing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long-term, flexible funding of Aboriginal organisations</li> <li>▪ Capacity building made available for Aboriginal organisations and communities to design, deliver and evaluate programs and services</li> </ul>
<b>Structural racism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Broader community and organisations held accountable for structural barriers</li> <li>▪ There are many issues with the tendency to use non-Aboriginal Australians as a benchmark to measure Aboriginal social and economic outcomes</li> <li>▪ Cultural safety education and training</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous and genuine dialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ongoing and representative consultation and engagement, including with traditional owner groups, peak organisations and other community representative structures</li> </ul>
<b>Human rights based approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A human rights-based approach, including the respect, protection, promotion and fulfilment of the rights of Aboriginal people</li> </ul>
<b>Land rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management and control of land by Aboriginal people is essential, not just access</li> </ul>

## What's next?

The conversation at the Statewide Discussion informed the key themes that six Victorian Aboriginal leaders took to Canberra on 7 and 8 February 2018 for the Commonwealth-hosted Special Gathering of Indigenous leaders on the refresh of Closing the Gap. Victoria will continue to advocate at the national level for Aboriginal ownership of the Closing the Gap agenda

The Victorian Government will now undertake six months of engagement with Aboriginal Victorians across the state to shape the next VAAF and Closing the Gap agendas. This will include open community forums in the Barwon South West, Grampians, Loddon Mallee, Hume and Gippsland regions. Dates and locations of these forums will be announced via our website [engage.vic.gov.au/closingthegapvic](https://engage.vic.gov.au/closingthegapvic)

At our website, you can complete a survey based on the table questions at the Statewide Discussion. You can also upload a written submission.

If you would like to contact us about a future meeting or workshop, or if you feel like we have not properly captured your views in this report, please contact the Aboriginal Affairs Policy team at the Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet.

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