

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir

Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement

A partnership between the
Victorian Government, Victorian
Aboriginal communities and the
child and family services sector

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir (strong families)

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir are the Latji Latji words for 'strong' and 'family'. The Latji Latji nation is centred in Mildura, north-western Victoria. We offer our sincere thanks to the Latji Latji Elders and community for allowing the use of their language in the naming of this *Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*.

Artist statement

Possum skin cloaks

Possum skin cloaks are one of the most sacred cultural expressions of Victorian Aboriginal peoples. The cloak had many uses, including: providing warmth, cradling babies, bedding, ceremony, drumming, burial and the sharing of stories.

Continuing the practice of making and wearing possum skin cloaks is an important part of reviving cultural practice in today's society. Understanding the stories behind the possum skin, and the significant meaning of symbols and design, allows participants to connect on a cultural level with Country and ancestors.



Biganga (possum skin cloak), 2017

**Lee Darroch, Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti,
Boon Wurrung**

Biganga (possum skin cloak) pays homage to the two historic possum skin cloaks from the 1800's that are held in the Melbourne Museum. These are two of a total of only seven historic cloaks left in the world.

The pastel drawing depicts various symbols representing Victorian Aboriginal cultural knowledge such as stone fish traps, edible plants, fish nets, river life and shield markings.

Biganga recognises the cultural knowledge and wisdom of the Old People who have gone before us and light our way, so that we may follow them.

Lee Darroch is a Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti and Boon Wurrung woman, who has lived on Raymond Island in the Gippsland Lakes with her partner and two children for the past 30 years. She is an artist and community cultural worker. Her artwork is inspired by the need to continue cultural, spiritual and artistic practices. Lee has run her own business, Gurranyin Arts, for over 23 years. She feels guided in her artwork by the Old People who have gone before us and by her Elders today. Lee hopes to leave behind a rich legacy for her children and children's children to follow, so that the Dreaming will continue in an unbroken line.



To receive this publication in an accessible format, phone Child and Family Services 03 9096 7899 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, April 2018.

Except where otherwise indicated, the images in this publication show models and illustrative settings only, and do not necessarily depict actual services, facilities or recipients of services. This publication may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement

ISBN 978-1-76069-279-7 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-76069-280-3 (Pdf/online)

Available at Wungurilwil Gapgapduir

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/wungurilwil-gapgapduir>>

Printed by Metro Printing, Airport West (1710007)



Acknowledgement of Country

'We are part of the Dreaming. We have been in the Dreaming for a long time before we are born on this earth and we will return to the vast landscape at the end of our days. It provides for us during our time on earth, a place to heal, to restore purpose and hope, and to continue our destiny.'¹

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we rely. We celebrate that Australia is rich in living Aboriginal culture, based on the values of reciprocity and respect for Elders and Country.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community in creating services and supports to ensure that all Aboriginal children are raised in safe, healthy and culturally rich families and communities, and have every opportunity for a bright future.

We pay our respects to ancestors of this Country, Elders, knowledge holders and leaders – past, present and emerging. We give our gratitude to the many Aboriginal people who generously contributed their wisdom, experience, expertise and cultural authority during the development of this agreement and strategic action plan. We also acknowledge the valuable input of the many non-Aboriginal people who very generously contributed to the development of this agreement.

Language statement

Throughout this document we may use different terms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We acknowledge that the terms 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous' and 'Koori/e' do not capture the entire diversity and complexity of Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. Our intent is always to use terms that are respectful, inclusive and accurate.

The use of the words 'our' and 'we' throughout this document are used to reflect the voices of children and young people, Elders, families, communities, the child and family services sector and the Victorian Government who jointly led, contributed to and developed this agreement. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that Aboriginal people should be leading Aboriginal initiatives.

This report is prepared within the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities living in Victoria, and there is no suggestion or assumption that it is relevant or appropriate for any other context.

Contents

Part 1: Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement _____	1
Signatories _____	1
Contributing partners _____	1
Minister's foreword _____	2
Statements _____	4
Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance _____	4
Child and family services sector _____	5
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency _____	5
Always was always will be Aboriginal land _____	6
Agreement principles _____	7
Agreement aims _____	8
Agreement objectives _____	8
The journey to the agreement _____	9
The journey to Wungurilwil Gaggapduir _____	11
Self-determination: the overarching principle of this agreement _____	13
Self-determination as the means to better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families _____	15
Case study: Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (Section 18) _____	16
Aboriginal self-determination: voices from Aboriginal young people _____	17
Aboriginal children and families in Victoria _____	18
Aboriginal children and families are over-represented in the statutory child protection system _____	19
Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement _____	20
Governance and accountability _____	21
Outcomes framework _____	22
Shared responsibility _____	22

Objective 1: Aboriginal children and families are strong in culture and proud of their unique identity _____	24
Case study: Return to Country for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care _____	27
Objective 2: Resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for their children, families and communities _____	28
Case study: Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative _____	30
Case study: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency _____	32
Objective 3: Commit to culturally competent and culturally safe services for staff, children and families _____	34
Case study: Koorie Family Court Marram-Ngala Ganbu _____	37
Objective 4: Capture, build and share Aboriginal knowledge, learning and evidence to drive children and family services' investment and to inform practice _____	38
Case study: Culturally safe family healing with a focus on prevention _____	40
Objective 5: Prioritise Aboriginal workforce capability _____	42
Case study: The Indigenous program at the Bouverie Centre _____	44
Glossary _____	47
Endnotes _____	48
Figures	
Figure 1: The journey to Wungurilwil Gaggapduir _____	11
Figure 2: Aboriginal self-determination: voices from Aboriginal young people _____	17
Figure 3: Strengths of Aboriginal culture _____	26

Part 1: Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement

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

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement (the agreement) establishes the aims, objectives and suite of actions based on seven principles, including the guiding principle of Aboriginal self-determination.

The agreement will operate as a dynamic and iterative plan for action, within an enduring commitment by the parties to the agreement.

The parties to the agreement are:

- Victorian Aboriginal communities, families and children, as represented by the **Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance** and the **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**
- the child and family services sector, as represented by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc.
- the Victorian Government, as represented and coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services.

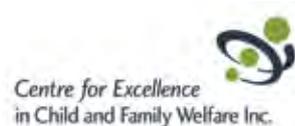
Signatories

The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Families and Children

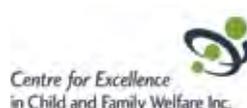
Professor Muriel Bamblett
CEO
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

Karen Heap
Chairperson
Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance

Deb Tsorbaris
CEO
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc.



Contributing partners



Minister's foreword

Victoria is leading the way with Aboriginal self-determination, particularly when it comes to ensuring the safety and protection of vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people.

We are focused on addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care and progressing self-determination for Aboriginal people through a range of initiatives.

With this, it is my privilege to launch *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* and *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal children and families strategic action plan*.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir, which means 'strong families' in Latji Latji language, represents the formal commitment by the Victorian Government, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal child and family services, to deliver a strategic action plan to improve the lives of all vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria.

This agreement builds on the commitments made in the recently released *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027* to progress Aboriginal self-determination in child and family services.

The 10-year plan, which was launched alongside a \$7.1 million funding boost to Aboriginal services, takes a holistic approach to improving Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety through flexible, place-based solutions at a local level.

As many of you are aware, the agreement was not something that was created overnight. It is the culmination of many years of hard work, dedication and partnership between the Aboriginal community, the child and family services sector and the Victorian Government.

It builds on the release of the *Bringing Them Home* report almost 20 years ago, which highlighted the need for Aboriginal people to be involved in the development of policies and practices that affected their communities. This has since been followed by the release of the *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture* report in 2013, the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Children's Forum in 2015 and, just last year, the launch of the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program – the first execution of Section 18 of the *Children and Youth Families Act 2005* – which was accompanied by \$1.1 million in funding for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to case manage 120 Aboriginal children living in kinship care. Most recently, in December 2017, I announced the new kinship care model along with an investment of \$33.5 million to ensure kinship carers receive more services and more support. The model includes a focus on strengthening connections for Aboriginal children and young people with family, culture and community.

These initiatives all support the Victorian Government's \$168 million *Roadmap for Reform*, to give Aboriginal people responsibility for the care and decision making of Aboriginal children and families. *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* will help provide a pathway for this, as well as outline best practice for improving the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people.

This all would not have been possible without the commitment, passion and leadership of the Victorian Aboriginal community in wanting a better future for their children and I personally thank them for their unwavering support and contribution.

I would also like to thank the working group members, who worked tirelessly to deliver this comprehensive and important strategy: the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance; the Koorie Youth Council; the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency; the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Children and Family Centre; Yappera Children's Services and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated as representatives of the Aboriginal community; and the Victorian Council of Social Services and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare as representatives of the child and family services sector.

I look forward to seeing many positive results as we work together under the first Aboriginal children and families agreement.



Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Families and Children

Statements

Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance

The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance embrace *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*.

The alliance, with our co-signatories, have an ambition to celebrate safe, resilient and culturally confident Aboriginal children and young people, and this is at the forefront of the alliance vision.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir, the shared agreement, embraces the intensive work done with the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and is true testament to the Victorian Government's commitment to Aboriginal communities' achieving the crucial state of self-determination.

The alliance's vision for this agreement is to continue challenging the sector to take greater responsibility for Aboriginal children and young people, whilst embedding connection to culture, which plays a vital role as a protective factor.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir outlines our collective responsibility to further develop a strong service system. We will create service models based on the social determinants of health to strengthen Aboriginal families and build resilient communities at local, regional and statewide levels.

The alliance has a serious responsibility to ensure government and key stakeholders hear the voice of not only Aboriginal children and young people, but the inclusion of local Aboriginal communities in policy and program design and delivery to improve safety and well being for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

The alliance (together with our partners) have collectively, with vision, determination and passion, established the Aboriginal Children's Forum. *Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care* began the journey of returning our children back home, and as a result we've seen the growth of Aboriginal services being delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Through continued strong leadership from the alliance and the commitment of our sector partners to implement and make a difference, we are confident about seeing a generational change. This is the beginning of our journey for Aboriginal children and young people, our families and our communities.



Child and family services sector

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare proudly supports *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*.

On behalf of Victoria's child and family services sector, we recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original owners of this land and accordingly we recognise their inalienable right to self-determination.

Connection to culture, family, community and Country is fundamental to building a strong Aboriginal community, a strong Aboriginal family and a strong Aboriginal child – which benefits us all.

We recognise the damage done over many generations by mainstream policies and practices, and the critical importance of working closely with our Aboriginal and mainstream colleagues to ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people are safe, resilient, thriving and living in culturally rich, strong Aboriginal families and communities.

The *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* has only been possible through building relationships between our sector and Aboriginal people. We would like to particularly acknowledge Andrew Jackomos. His work as the inaugural Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in Victoria, completing two landmark inquiries into the Victorian child protection system, has been instrumental in holding both government and our sector to account.

As recognised in *Beyond Good Intentions*, well-intended statements and agreements must be supported by specific commitments and resource allocation. Only firm commitments and subsequent resource allocation, will enable the transferral and transformation of support programs that work towards better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Our sector welcomes *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* as a powerful statement of commitment – by government, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and child and family services – to ensure that all Aboriginal children are raised in safe, healthy and culturally rich families and communities, and have every opportunity for a bright future.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is proud to be a party to *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*. This agreement and strategic action plan is a generational marker of change in our long journey for justice in relation to our rights to our children. It also signifies the establishment of a new relationship between government and us, the Victorian Aboriginal community. It embodies our aspirations for our children, based on the seven principles, including self-determination, culture and community, and respect amongst others. *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* will be a stepping stone that we need to use, to propel us forward in our urgent work to address the high rates of our children in care, and towards building and strengthening our families and communities so that we end the intervention in their lives. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency is strongly committed to *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* and will strive to ensure it is a success.

Always was always will be Aboriginal land

Our vision

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

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir marks the first tripartite agreement between the Aboriginal community, the child and family services sector, and the Victorian Government.

The agreement is a shared commitment between the three parties to improve outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal children and families, and those residing in Victoria, with aims and objectives based on the overarching principle of Aboriginal self-determination. When children and families are referred to in this agreement, it is inclusive of the early years (conception to three years of age) as well as young Aboriginal people, so that every Aboriginal child participates in early years services from birth through to school.

Agreement principles

The following seven principles outline the way in which the Aboriginal community, the Victorian Government and the child and family services sector, will work together to implement the agreement for the benefit of Aboriginal children and families.

1. Aboriginal self-determination

Aboriginal self-determination is the overarching principle of the agreement. This involves government and mainstream organisations relinquishing power, control and resources to Aboriginal organisations.

2. Aboriginal culture and community

Aboriginal communities have choice, control, authority and responsibility for determining the priorities and delivering services for Aboriginal communities. Culture, self-determination and self-management sit at the heart of all policies, practices and decisions.

3. Families are at the centre of raising children

Families and Aboriginal child-rearing practices are fundamental to raising strong Aboriginal children and young people.

4. Respect

Aboriginal culture is respected and the perspectives and strengths of Aboriginal communities are valued, heard and influential.

5. Acknowledge strengths and celebrate success

Aboriginal communities, government and the child and family services sector collaborate to develop, celebrate and share what works well to keep Aboriginal families safe and strong.

6. Trusted relationships driven by accountability

Active, honest and respectful partnerships operate where Aboriginal communities participate equitably and with confidence alongside government and the child and family services sector. Accountability and ownership for just and equitable outcomes rests with all parties, starting at the highest levels.

7. Investment and resource equity

A shared commitment and responsiveness to address the current and historical funding inequities and barriers so Aboriginal organisations and communities are fully resourced to deliver a continuum of services.

Agreement aims

The signatories make an enduring commitment to work together to:

- acknowledge and celebrate the survival, resilience and success of Aboriginal families and communities in the face of the devastating impacts of colonisation, dispossession and assimilation policies
- build the self-determining capability of Aboriginal families, children and young people
- eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and out-of-home care, and reduce the number of those who progress to the youth justice system
- successfully transition the authority and services for all Aboriginal children in care to Aboriginal organisations, and commit to the expanded implementation of Aboriginal guardianship – ‘Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care’ – across the state
- commit to timely family reunification and ensure that Aboriginal children and young people leaving statutory systems are supported to reconnect with family and community
- provide a sustained Aboriginal community-based prevention and early intervention system to respond to vulnerability as and when it arises
- apply Aboriginal ways of responding to child and family issues, including family violence
- reform the child and family services system to address systemic racism and individual and institutional bias, and build culturally sensitive practice within mainstream services.

Agreement objectives

The signatories to the agreement commit to achieving the following five objectives through the implementation of the rolling action plans:

1. Ensure all Aboriginal children and families are strong in culture and proud of their unique identity.
2. Resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for their children, families and communities.
3. Commit to culturally competent and culturally safe services for staff, children and families.
4. Capture, build and share Aboriginal knowledge, learning and evidence, to drive children and family services’ investment and to inform practice.
5. Prioritise Aboriginal workforce capability.

The journey to the agreement



Wungurilwil Gaggapduir adopts a long-term, return-on-investment approach that focuses on generational change through prevention, early intervention and holistic policy and practice responses for Aboriginal children and families.

The Aboriginal children and families agreement is founded on the robust and comprehensive 'call to action' of many foundational documents as listed below.

In 1997 the *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* made a number of recommendations into the then-current practices and policies of child removal and advised on 'changes required taking into account the principle of self-determination'.

In the 20 years since *Bringing Them Home*, numerous reports by successive state governments have spoken to the failure of existing policy and program responses, to effectively address the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children and families involved with the child protection and out-of-home care systems. Of note, the May 2014 Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Accessibility of Mainstream Services for Aboriginal Victorians*, identified the failure of mainstream organisations to deliver change for Aboriginal children and families.

The idea for the agreement was initiated by Victoria's Aboriginal community, back in 2013, in the form of *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture*. The concept for the strategy was developed by the Aboriginal community and presented to government. This proposal was supported by the Aboriginal Children and Young Peoples' Alliance, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture was a joint submission made to the Victorian Government in 2013 by Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and child and family services delivering out-of-home care services in Victoria. The submission called for all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to be in placements provided by or contracted by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture* included specific recommendations of policy and practice principles, priorities, supporting actions and immediate funding priorities. It was updated in 2014 to reflect the preliminary findings of the Taskforce 1000 project and further advocate for Aboriginal self-determination.



In August 2015, the Aboriginal Children's Summit brought together Aboriginal community leaders and experts involved in the delivery of child protection and out-of-home care services for Aboriginal children and young people. It has since continued in its present form, the Aboriginal Children's Forum, which is held quarterly at different locations around the state, in the spirit of cooperation and partnership building, to address issues facing Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

The child and family services sector has also recognised its role in addressing the over-representation of Victorian Aboriginal children and families in the child protection system. In 2015 *Beyond Good Intentions* was developed by Berry Street, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, MacKillop Family Services and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to outline how child and family services organisations will support, assist and partner with Aboriginal organisations in Victoria to meet particular responsibilities, and ensure the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Independent reports also speak to the Aboriginal community being disproportionately burdened by causal factors that drive contact with the child protection system. The Royal Commission into Family Violence report was delivered in March 2016, with 227 recommendations aimed at improving the system and the way services respond to family violence. Recommendation 145 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence called for the Victorian Government to work on partnerships with Aboriginal communities to develop a statewide strategic response to improving the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people.

On 13 April 2016, the Victorian Government officially launched the *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children* as one of its key platforms to respond to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Ensuring Aboriginal self-determination around decision making and care for Aboriginal children and families is one of the underpinning principles of the roadmap.

The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People also published two reports in 2016 about Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

In the Child's Best Interests from the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, reported on compliance with the intent of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle over a two-year period (1 January 2013 to 31 December 2014) during a staggering and disproportionate increase in Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Victoria.

Always was, always will be Koori children: a systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria from the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, is also known as the *Taskforce 1000* report. *Taskforce 1000* findings clearly describe that family violence and substance misuse are present in the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, and that most Aboriginal children in care are not having their cultural needs met or their Aboriginal family and community connections honoured. *Taskforce 1000* was also an example of successful systemic reform: as a process, it predicated a new way of shared responsibilities between the Aboriginal community and the Department of Health and Human Services, tasking both parties with clear goals of Aboriginal self-determination and ongoing accountability and enshrining the cultural rights of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

Figure 1:

The journey to *Wungurilwil Gappgapduir*

Bringing Them Home
report 1997

*Koorie Kids: Growing
Strong in their Culture*
2013 and update in 2014

Aboriginal Children's
Summit, establishing
the Aboriginal Children's
Forum 2015

*Beyond Good
Intentions* 2015

*Roadmap for
Reform* 2016

Royal Commission into
Family Violence 2016

*Always was, always
will be Koori
children* 2016

*In the Child's Best
Interests* 2016

*Korin Korin Balit-Djak:
Aboriginal health, wellbeing
and safety strategic plan*
2017–2027

*Wungurilwil Gappgapduir:
Aboriginal Children and
Families Agreement* 2018



Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027 is the overarching framework for action to advance Aboriginal self-determination and improve outcomes in health, wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal Victorians over the next 10 years.²

Korin Korin Balit-Djak sets the vision and direction to improve outcomes for all Aboriginal Victorians across the health and human services sector. It was developed closely with Aboriginal communities across Victoria, and reflects a strong commitment to working towards Aboriginal self-determination.

Korin Korin Balit-Djak and the agreement both acknowledge the lived experience of Victorian Aboriginal children and families and their wellbeing, and the underlying importance of family, community, culture and self-determination to improving health, wellbeing and safety outcomes.

The Aboriginal children and families agreement provides a focus on delivering actions within *Domain 4 of Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Safe, secure and strong families and individuals*, through the reform of child and family services, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. The implementation of the agreement is committed to as an action in *Korin Korin Balit-Djak's* Priority Focus 4.2: Aboriginal children and families are thriving and empowered, including a commitment to oversight and tracking through the Aboriginal Children's Forum.



Self-determination: the overarching principle of this agreement

'Self-determination is an ongoing process that ensures the continuance of choice, participation, decision making and control over one's destiny: it involves the freedom to live well, humanly and respectfully according to values and beliefs. It includes the notion of a collective identity for Aboriginal peoples. It requires recognition and support with appropriate representation at all levels of society.'³

Aboriginal history is recorded at least 60,000 years prior to European contact, and encompasses many diverse communities of First Peoples who not only survived, but thrived on the land now known as Australia.

However, the processes of colonisation are responsible for a lasting and deeply impactful legacy, one that continues to affect Aboriginal people today.

'This lived experience is the essential, perennial, excruciating, exhilarating, burdensome, volatile, dramatic source of prejudice and pride that sets us apart. It refers to that specialness in identity, the experiential existence of Aboriginal people accrued through the living of our daily lives, from "womb to tombs" as it were, in which our individual and shared feelings, fears, desires, initiatives, hostilities, learning, actions, reactions, behaviours and relationships exist in a unique and specific attachment to us, individually and collectively, because and only because, we are Aboriginal people(s).'

⁴

The powerlessness associated with colonisation has been experienced by Victorian Aboriginal people and leaders,⁵ as they fought for their human and civil rights, and spoke out about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal communities across the state. Victorian Aboriginal people have always fought for justice in the face of discrimination and marginalisation, and this spirit and conviction remains strong to this day, embedded in the fabric of Aboriginal communities.

'Without self-determination it is not possible for Indigenous Australians to fully overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession.'

⁶

There should be recognition of the great range of factors that are at play for Aboriginal children and families, and which encompass the historical, cultural, political, economic, and social determinants of health and wellbeing.⁷ These determinants are now understood to be causal factors for a range of poor outcomes for Aboriginal people and speak to a continued unequal relationship between Aboriginal people and the dominant population, including inequities in policy, lack of political will and persistent marginalisation in society. This requires honest and courageous acknowledgment of the history of our nation.



'Being able to make decisions and be responsible for oneself, family and community, having choice and being able to participate effectively in society, is important for development and wellbeing.'⁸

There is so much to learn from the Aboriginal leaders of the past, Aboriginal control of the Aborigines Advancement League in the late 1960s, the courage of Aboriginal men and women, land rights marches, and the growth of specialised Aboriginal organisations from the 1970s. These were the signs of self-determination and empowerment of the Victorian Aboriginal people.

'It is not for government to define self-determination – it is up to the Aboriginal community.'

Local communities should have control of the issues that directly affect their community, and determine and control the pace, shape and manner of change and decision making appropriately depending on the level: local, regional, state and national.⁹ Accordingly, self-determination can and will look different in different communities – there is no single approach to achieving self-determination.

Aboriginal community control makes service providers more accountable to community members, increases the likelihood that service offerings will be tailored to the community's particular priorities, and improves client satisfaction and health outcomes.¹⁰ Importantly, current models exist of how Aboriginal Victorians have enacted self-determination with their communities.

'Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'¹¹

Empowerment of Aboriginal communities and individuals ensures that their voice is heard and they feel confident to speak up. Empowerment means that an Aboriginal mother can confront racism when her child is being discriminated or bullied. Empowerment means having the confidence to confront racism and wrongdoing.

Professor Larissa Behrendt writes that self-determination is the most fundamental of all human rights and is predicated on the idea that peoples are entitled to control their own destiny.¹² Self-determination also highlights the positives, the good news stories and best practices that Aboriginal communities aspire to. These are evidenced throughout the case studies in this agreement.



Self-determination as the means to better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families

'Self-determination is returning our Aboriginal children back home.'

Aboriginal communities have an intimate understanding of where child and family services are working well, and where there is opportunity for reform. The Aboriginal children and families agreement acknowledges and formalises the need to listen to the Aboriginal community as the primary guide for improved services and outcomes for Aboriginal families.

Self-determination is a central strategy to address the overall lower standards of health, education and economic conditions being experienced by Victorian Aboriginal people. Self-determination works to create the conditions for Aboriginal families to be safe, strong and together. Reforms should be built on the strong foundations and leadership of previous generations, who tirelessly advocated for the establishment of culturally appropriate services and programs.

It is vital that programs and services respect and understand the broader impact of history, so that practitioners see child and family needs holistically and as interrelated, not in isolation. The focus on the individual child is paramount; but it should be matched with consideration of the broader impact of historical policies on Aboriginal families and communities.¹³ It is also important to seek from the family, their definition of who should be involved in particular assessments, services and planning activities, rather than practitioners making assumptions about who is 'family' or who forms 'community' for an Aboriginal client.¹⁴ This is only one part to ensuring that mainstream services are delivered in a culturally responsive manner.

Services delivered to Aboriginal children and families by Aboriginal organisations benefit from the inherent cultural safety and knowledge of community support networks. Aboriginal children who are cared for by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, have a greater connection to culture and community compared with Aboriginal children who are managed by a child and family services sector organisation. This can lead to better health and wellbeing outcomes.¹⁵ Aboriginal self-determination is the core principle of *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir*, and in signing the agreement, the parties commit to the implementation of 'Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care' across the state.

Case study:

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (Section 18)

In November 2017, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency launched and implemented Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, known as *Nugel* (belong in Woi Wurrung language) as part of the *Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care* (formerly Section 18) reforms.

This initiative is based on Aboriginal self-determination and heralds a new era for those working with the most vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people and their families. The findings and indicators from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative pilots provide hope that culturally-informed and culturally-led interventions will strengthen and reunite Aboriginal families. The transition and reforms are designed to meet the best interests of Aboriginal children, so that they grow up strong and connected to their culture.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care underpins the Victorian Government's commitment to the principles of self-determination for Aboriginal people, and the increased capacity for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to take greater responsibility for the authority and care of Aboriginal children and young people.

The Section 18 As If project was designed to test the operationalisation of Section 18 of the Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act and to prepare for its implementation in the context of current legislative constraints and Aboriginal children.

The first Section 18 As If pilot was delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency in 2015. The second pilot is currently delivered by the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative with full authorisation anticipated for 2018–19. The As If pilots have provided the opportunity to conduct case practice with a small group of Aboriginal children and young people subject to a Children's Court protection order As If they were subject to an authorisation under Section 18, as well as testing and refining required arrangements.

The evaluation of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency pilot noted that of the 13 children and young people who participated, six were reunified with family or kin. The evaluation of the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative pilot noted that through the culturally attuned practice evident in the model, high-risk families have remained engaged in the pilot and have been willing to work toward and for some, achieve family reunification.

Muriel Bamblett, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Chief Executive Officer, spoke at the launch of *Korin Korin Balit-Djak* at Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum about how the enactment of *Nugel* would improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children, by allowing for a greater connection to their community and culture.

Figure 2:

Aboriginal self-determination: voices from Aboriginal young people

Source: Koorie Youth Council

'Intergenerational connection to me is knowing where you come from to understand where you belong, where you're going and what you will pass on to future generations.'

'Sovereignty was never ceded, we demand the right to govern our own affairs, a sovereign treaty now. Heal our past, build our future.'

'We demand justice under our own lore. How can we have justice in an unjust system?'

'We demand full and total control of our own affairs, future, communities and lives without government intervention.'

'We demand validation and respect of our knowledge.'

'The way I connect to culture is being spiritually aware and that people have gone before us and always around us. They're always guiding us. Here to help us on our journeys.'

'Without self-determination it is not possible for Indigenous Australians to fully overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession.'

'Self determination means true freedom without grief, tension and racism.'



Aboriginal children and families in Victoria

Victoria has the fastest growing Aboriginal population of all Australian jurisdictions, with a 26 per cent increase between the 2011 and 2016 census. The 2016 census showed the Aboriginal population had grown to 47,786, with 57 per cent of those under the age of 25 years.¹⁶

It is important to acknowledge that most Aboriginal children and families living in Victoria experience a great start to life.

Their early years are enriched by culture, language and connection to community and a deep spiritual connection to their Country; they grow in strong families, supported by extended family and kinship networks and Elders. Grandparents hold a special place in Aboriginal families, and continue to be involved in the child rearing of their grandchildren, that includes cultural traditions, storytelling and rituals. The oral tradition of passing on stories to young people is an important part of Aboriginal family life.

Aboriginal families and the Aboriginal community understand the critical role of culture on children's identity, health and wellbeing as they grow up.

Aboriginal Elders, leaders and communities have worked tirelessly to ensure that the languages of each national and clan group are restored, preserved and taught to the next generation.¹⁷ They have advocated to ensure that culturally safe and effective services are available for Aboriginal children and families, such as health, housing and legal services.¹⁸

There is also a rich history of celebrating the diverse cultures of Victorian Aboriginal communities, with festivals and community events that elevate and inspire the broader Victorian community.¹⁹

Aboriginal people have led this work. The collective effort and contribution is vast and deep, and there is much to celebrate.

There are also challenges. We know that for some Aboriginal children and families there are persistent poor outcomes, and lifelong difficulties and hardship. The causal factors including transgenerational trauma are complex and multifaceted, and stressors can be compounded when service responses are delayed, poorly delivered or culturally unsafe.



Aboriginal children and families are over-represented in the statutory child protection system

Regrettably, the rate of Aboriginal child removal in Victoria now exceeds that seen during the Stolen Generation era. The implications for this generation of Aboriginal children are potentially as profound as the Stolen Generation – lost culture, lost family, lost community.²⁰

Too many Aboriginal children and young people continue to follow a trajectory that contributes to and compounds poor outcomes: from limited support and connection in early childhood; experiences of family violence; removal from the family home to reside in state care; to exposure to crime and involvement in youth justice and criminal justice systems.

Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in the Victorian out-of-home care system, and the numbers are continuing to grow at a more significant rate than non-Aboriginal children and young people.

It is important to consider the drivers for these high numbers across child protection and out-of-home care. The Taskforce 1000 project delivered by the Commission for Children and Young People, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services, found that the majority of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care experienced family violence, substance abuse and mental health problems within their family.²¹

For instance, there were 2,091 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2017. This represents an 11.5 per cent increase from 30 June 2016, when there were 1,876 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Almost one in ten Aboriginal children are in out-of-home care in Victoria, nearly 16 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children.

- In 2017, 63.6 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care were placed with kin (as opposed to foster or residential care).
- High rates of kinship care in Victoria are a reflection of the success of self-determination initiatives, that enable Aboriginal organisations to play a great role in decision making and support for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Aboriginal children in out-of-home care

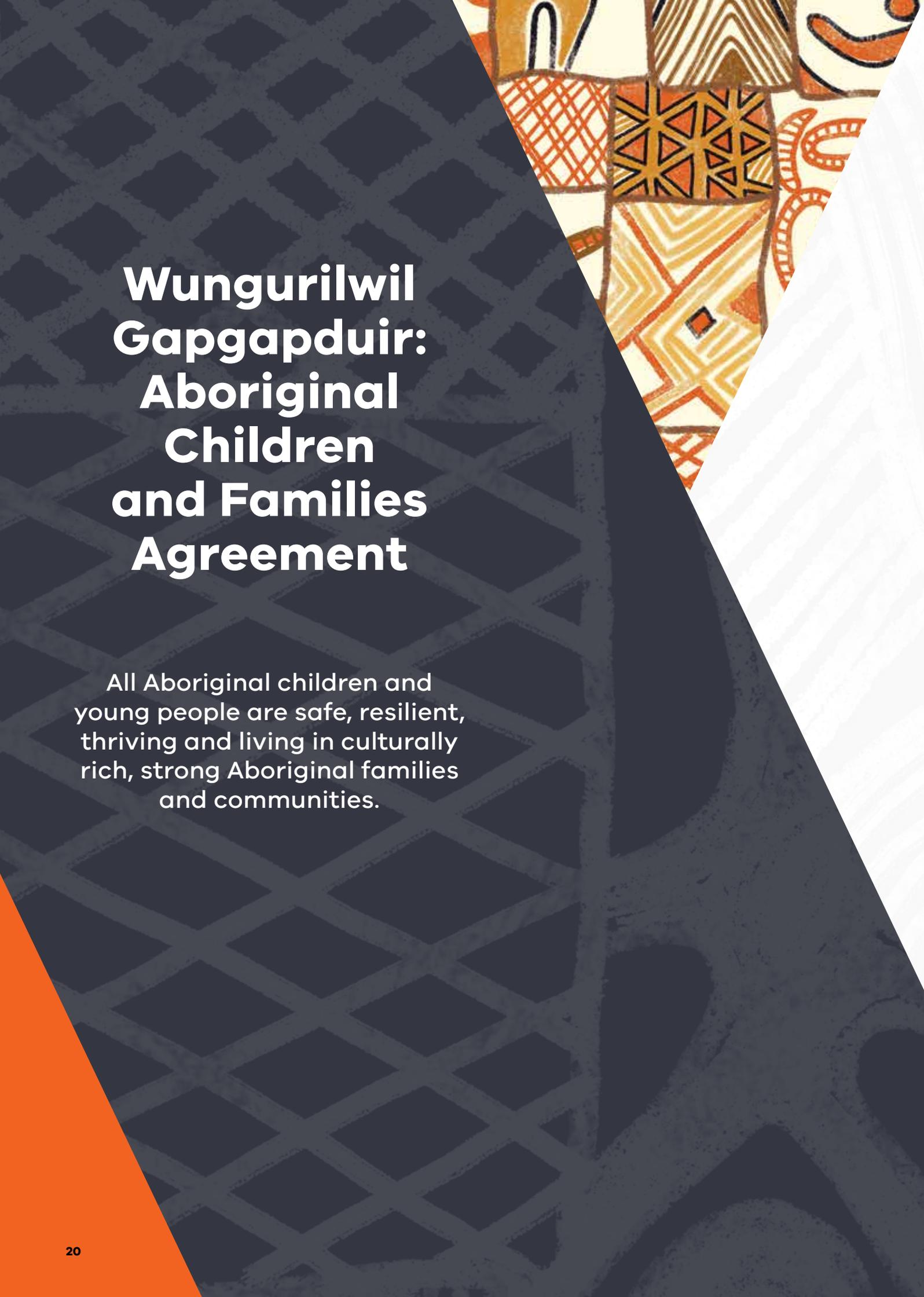
- Victoria has the highest rate of any jurisdiction for the rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.
- As at 30 June 2017, Victoria has a rate of 95.9 per 1,000 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care compared to the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of 6.1 children per 1,000.
- In the last five years the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care has more than doubled, from 922 at 30 June 2012 to 2,091 at 30 June, 2017.

Aboriginal children on care and protection orders

- Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal children being placed on care and protection orders of any jurisdiction in Australia.
- As at 30 June 2017, there were 2,423 Aboriginal children on care and protection orders in Victoria, compared to 1,982 in 2015, an increase of 22 per cent in 12 months.
- Care and protection orders include family preservation and family reunification orders, meaning that children on orders can be in out-of-home care or remain at home.²²

For those children and their siblings living in out-of-home care, it is important that they remain together.

This data reinforces the need for improving the lives of Aboriginal children and families, according to the priorities set by community, including opportunities for cultural strengthening and family-focused healing.



Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement

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

Wungurilwil Gaggapduir sits at the interface of other significant policy pieces across the Victorian Government, which are complementary to the actions of the agreement. It shares the government's common goals of improving outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal children and families.

While the focus of the Aboriginal children and families agreement and the Aboriginal Children's Forum is the reform of the child and family services system, there are interdependencies and relationships to the objectives and actions developed for, or contained in the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement, Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan* and the *Marrung-Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026*.

Governance and accountability

The parties to the Aboriginal children and families agreement will monitor and assess the effectiveness of the actions detailed in the agreement and strategic action plan.

The Aboriginal Children's Forum will provide oversight of the agreement and the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress against the objectives. The forum includes representatives of Victorian Aboriginal organisations, the child and family services sector and government agencies. It is acknowledged that it will be necessary to coordinate work with other government departments and agencies to deliver outcomes.

The Aboriginal Children's Forum is an important governance platform to ensure that Aboriginal Elders, leaders and communities, are equal partners with government and the sector in determining the future of child and family services. The forum is intended to be representative of those who deliver child and family services for Aboriginal children and families across Victoria, and has high-level representation from Aboriginal organisations, the child and family services sector and government.

The aim of the forum is to advance self-determination for Aboriginal communities, and address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. It will also provide the setting for transparent and rigorous acquittal of responsibilities, and reflect differing priorities as they change over time.

A departmental Aboriginal governance and accountability framework will be established to underpin *Korin Korin Balit-Djak*. This, plus specific key performance measures identified by the Aboriginal Children's Forum, will be used to monitor progress against the *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal children and families strategic action plan* on a quarterly basis. The forum will review progress against the agreement, and the department will incorporate an annual summary of progress as part of the department's annual report tabled in parliament.



Outcomes framework

A robust accountability framework will be developed to measure the effectiveness of the agreement in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

The framework will be informed by, and build on the foundations of:

- the Department of Health and Human Service's *Strategic plan* outcomes and key results
- key performance indicators identified by the Aboriginal Children's Forum
- priorities identified in *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture; Always was, always will be Koorie children* and *In the Child's Best Interests*.

A further opportunity is developing an accountability framework, that remains focused on progress towards outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, and also captures Aboriginal-defined measures of success regarding:

- self-determination for Aboriginal organisations and clients
- partnership working and collaboration; and funding and resource equity.

Shared responsibility

Victorian government agencies, Aboriginal organisations and the child and family services sector, will work in partnership on all aspects of the design, priority setting and implementation of actions delivered under the Aboriginal children and families agreement. The action plan will be self-determined and targeted to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities and driven by evidence and learning by what works.

All parties will share the following roles and responsibilities:

- aligning and embedding actions into their respective plans and core business
- coordinating and overseeing the implementation of the agreement in line with Aboriginal self-determination
- working in partnership with members of the Aboriginal Children's Forum to implement the agreed actions
- monitoring and evaluating progress against the agreement and strategic action plans; led primarily by Aboriginal communities in line with the principles of self-determination
- supporting the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and findings relating to the outputs and outcomes under the agreement
- actively supporting and promoting the agreement and strategic action plan through participation in the Aboriginal Children's Forum and other opportunities
- providing advice on issues and priorities to successfully implement the agreement
- Reviewing and updating the agreement
- supporting the long-term development of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation sector across Victoria
- embedding cultural strengthening as a core feature of how Aboriginal children and families experience and engage with supports
- designing, implementing and prioritising the policies, strategies, programs and services that impact Aboriginal families and communities.



Progress reports against the Aboriginal children and families agreement will be prepared by the department on behalf of the Aboriginal Children's Forum. The department will incorporate an annual summary of progress, as part of the department's annual report tabled in parliament.

Aboriginal organisations will be responsible for facilitating active participation of Aboriginal communities and people in the decision-making process for policies and programs for Aboriginal children and families delivered under the agreement.

The Department of Health and Human Services as the lead government agency, will be responsible for:

- supporting Victoria-wide system and funding reforms to support the objectives
- transitioning authorities and the continuum of services to Aboriginal organisations
- transferring the care, case management and guardianship for all Aboriginal children in care to Aboriginal organisations
- supporting Aboriginal children and families to access services from Aboriginal agencies
- ensuring funding and service agreements for agencies providing services to children and families are consistent with the aims and principles of the agreement
- commitment to ensuring formal cultural awareness training, and ongoing professional development to increase cultural safety among staff at all levels through the cultural safety framework.

The child and family services sector will be responsible for:

- implementing government policy on devolving decisions and services to Aboriginal organisations, including working actively with Aboriginal organisations
- supporting the transition of children to Aboriginal organisations
- commitment to ensuring formal cultural awareness training, and ongoing professional development to increase cultural safety among staff at all levels.

Objective 1:

Aboriginal children and families are strong in culture and proud of their unique identity

Culture is not a 'perk' for an Aboriginal child – it is a lifeline... For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Indigenous peoples, First Nations peoples, for Koories, this human right is crucial to our wellbeing, it is crucial to our sense of pride, to our sense of belonging. Culture is the most resilient factor protecting our children. Culture links us to our past, so we can navigate our future.²³

Aboriginal culture and identity is a protective factor and a source of resilience and strength for Aboriginal children, families and communities.²⁴

Research in Australia has shown that culture is reparative, and offers a path to healing for Aboriginal people and families.²⁵ Being Aboriginal is about pride, and occupying a unique place within Australian society. The greatest asset we have for the future is our children. For the First Peoples of Australia, the next generation provides continuity to rich and profound cultures, that have thrived on this continent for over 60,000 years.²⁶

*'Family is important because it holds for you the past and the future.'*²⁷

Cultural identity and cultural strengthening are vital for Aboriginal peoples' health and wellbeing. Participation in cultural practice provides a 'safe haven', promotes social and emotional wellbeing and strengthens pride in Aboriginal identity.²⁸ Aboriginal cultural practices vary widely across the 38 language groups in Victoria, and incorporate both traditional and modern-day practices. Child and family services must be

delivered in a culturally appropriate way, that responds to, reflects and celebrates this diversity. Critically, evaluation shows that Aboriginal children who are cared for by Aboriginal organisations have a greater connection to culture, which can lead to better health and wellbeing outcomes in the future.²⁹

It is vital that any policy that relates to Aboriginal communities understands the holistic, strengths-based model of Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety. It is defined by the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989) as:

*'...not just the physical well being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well being of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well being of their community.'*³⁰

Aboriginal culture connects, empowers, and promotes pride and identity and strengthens Aboriginal children and families.³¹

Figure 3:

Strengths of Aboriginal culture

Family connections

- kinship networks
- unique contribution of Elders
- connection to ancestors

Traditional activities

- language
- cultural knowledge
- cultural practice

Country

- connection to Country
- caring for Country
- time on Country

Activism

- social justice
- human rights
- choice and control (individual or through Aboriginal organisations)

Community/mob

- involvement in activities
- responsibilities
- leadership in action
- collective development

Aboriginal culture connects, empowers, and promotes pride and identity and strengthens Aboriginal children and families.

Across the child and family services sector, it is critical to recognise the significant role of the Aboriginal Elder voice in strengthening and maintaining culture for children and families. Respect and reverence for ancestors and Elders represents one aspect of Aboriginal culture, but remains a vital part of modern cultural practice.

'My daughter and son caught their first fish where one thousand five hundred generations of their grandmothers and grandfathers caught their first fish. This is forever business. My children's sons and daughters, and their grandchildren will catch their first fish here on this Country, this link in this chain that physically, spiritually and emotionally connects us to the past, to our ancestors, to our grandfathers and grandmothers and to our land and waters and can never be broken.'
Richard J Frankland.³²

Significant reform is required to create a child and family services sector that operates to strengthen culture across the continuum of services, prioritising the ongoing connection to family and mob; to land and Country; and to practice and ceremony. For example, historically, there has been a failure to recognise the critical importance of Country for Aboriginal people. Country is land with which Aboriginal people share a spiritual and cultural connection, and goes beyond Western constructions of place. We know the positive impact that caring for Country and spending time on Country has on Aboriginal peoples' health and wellbeing.^{33, 34}

Case study:

Return to Country for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care



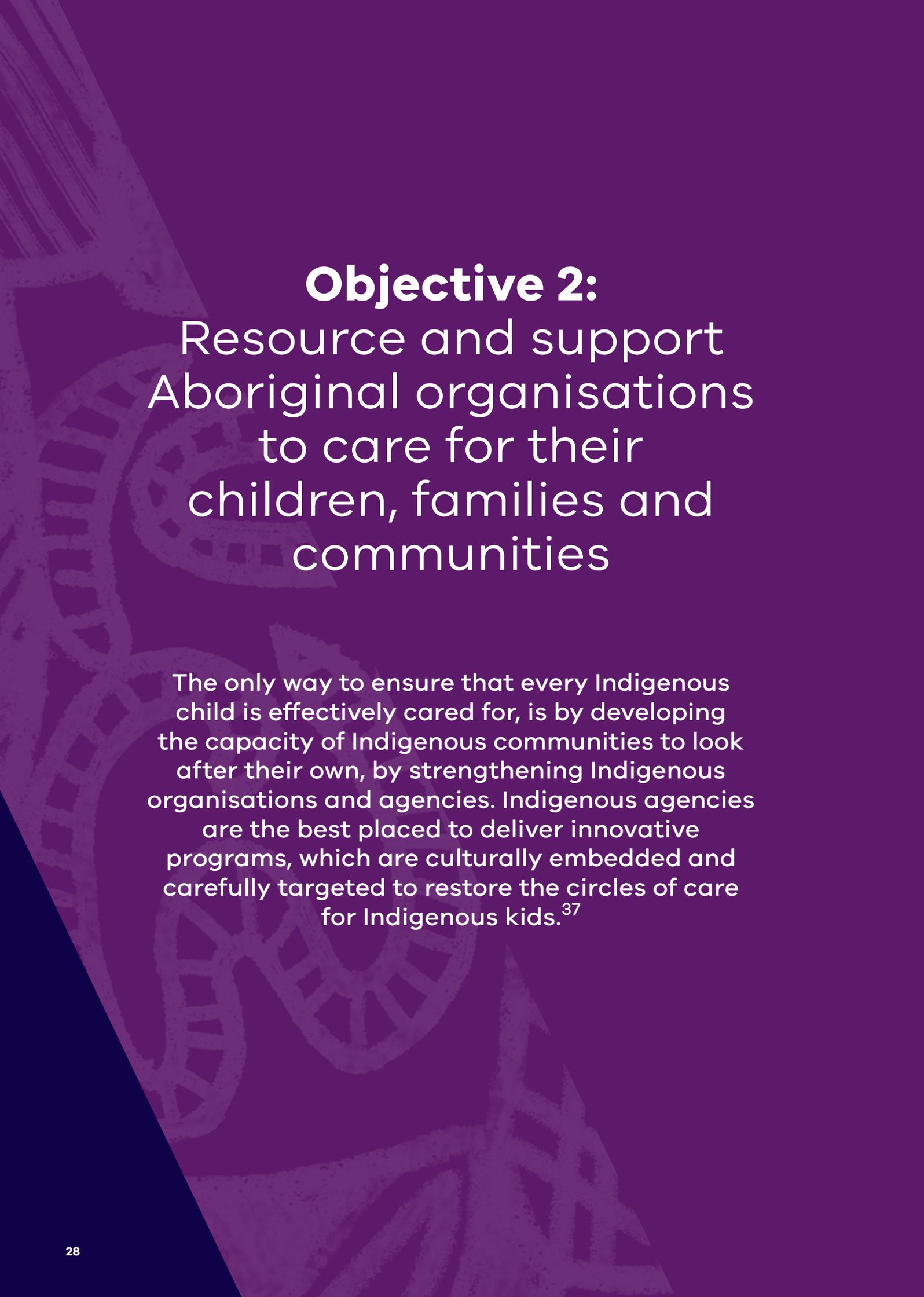
Many Aboriginal children in out-of-home care have become disconnected from their community, kinship groups, and Country, but it is their right to remain connected to these vital parts of their heritage and culture throughout their life. The Aboriginal Return to Country initiative is aimed at achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, through the provision of support to reconnect children and young people with their communities and Country. It builds on previous and existing programs that strengthen culture through place-based learning, including Connecting to Sea Country.

Return to Country allows Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to reconnect with fundamental aspects of their heritage, which provides the significant opportunity for growth, renewal and healing. The program is currently at pilot stage and is delivered by Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative in conjunction with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

For John, 17 participating in the pilot, Return to Country will ensure that on leaving care early next year, he will be connected to his father's Country. Return to Country will therefore validate and legitimise his connections to land, family and kinship lines and provide identity, a significant protective factor.

Return to Country enables children and young people to explore their cultural connections in a culturally safe and supportive environment.³⁵ The program gives children and young people a chance to develop their own sense of self, who they belong to, and where they belong in terms of Country, family history, cultural traditions and beliefs.

*'Returning home gave me a sense of belonging that I have not had, it was so rewarding and so beneficial that I would recommend ALL Aboriginal children in care who have the opportunity to Return to Country should be supported to do this.'*³⁶



Objective 2:

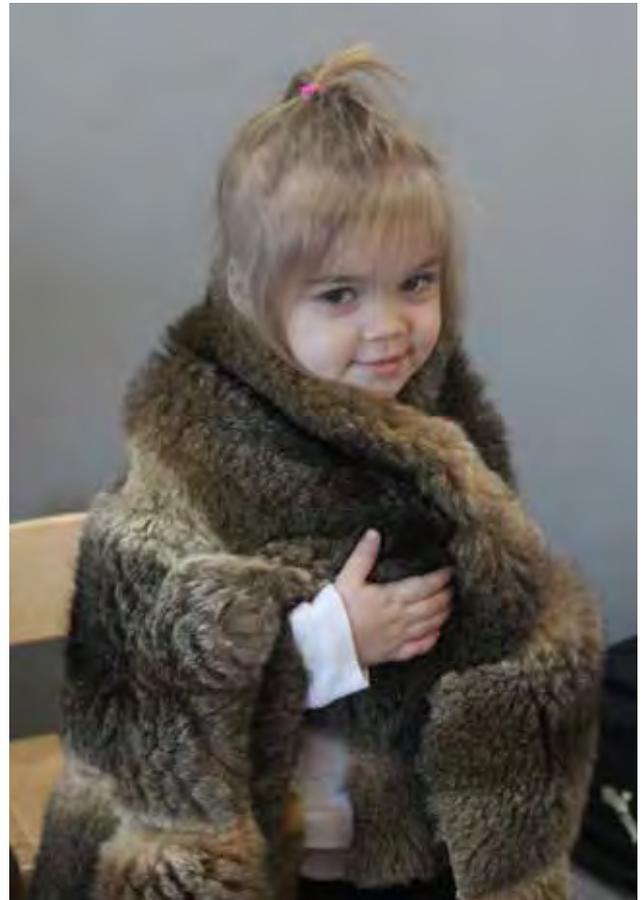
Resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for their children, families and communities

The only way to ensure that every Indigenous child is effectively cared for, is by developing the capacity of Indigenous communities to look after their own, by strengthening Indigenous organisations and agencies. Indigenous agencies are the best placed to deliver innovative programs, which are culturally embedded and carefully targeted to restore the circles of care for Indigenous kids.³⁷

Aboriginal leadership in Victoria is strong and focused on responding to the current and future needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal organisations provide a vehicle for strong community leadership, supported through community governance models, programs and services that are culturally appropriate, culturally safe, innovative and inspirational.

Victorian Aboriginal communities have strong leaders and inclusive Aboriginal organisations that provide a range of vital services to support Aboriginal Victorians' health and wellbeing. Victorian Aboriginal organisations continue to express an aspirational vision for their communities. It is their organisational and individual leadership that provides the basis for future and visionary approaches to prevention and long-term achievement for Aboriginal communities across the state.

Aboriginal-led innovation is evident in the way that services have been developed by Aboriginal organisations – providing wrap-around services, a culturally safe and effective model of 'hubs' that deliver essential services, responsive to the needs of the local Aboriginal community.



Case study:

Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative



Victorian Aboriginal organisations have always provided a range of culturally-secure services, tailored to the priorities of their local communities and championing Aboriginal self-determination. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative is one of many Aboriginal organisations across Victoria that provides place-based services to the local Aboriginal community.

'Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative exists to achieve self-determination for the Aboriginal community, enabling stronger families by ensuring equal opportunities in health, housing, education, employment and justice through a holistic and culturally relevant approach.'

Like many Aboriginal organisations across the state, the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative provides a 'one-stop shop' service delivering health, parenting, social and emotional wellbeing, substance abuse, gambling, family violence, and kinship care support services. The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative also works, in collaboration with universities and health research institutes, to develop a range of culturally appropriate health promotion resources for community.

'Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative has been operating as a hub model for nearly 40 years. A high number of Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative's clients have experienced multiple, complex and transgenerational trauma. This means that treating one issue in isolation will often have little effect on overall client health or social emotional wellbeing.'

The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative also take a fundamental preventative approach to services, which aligns with the Indigenous view of holistic health. The co-operative offers a full health service through its Baarlinjan Clinic, as well as direct pathways to other programs that support vulnerable families. Recognising the impact of family violence and the lack of options for perpetrators, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative offers a culturally specific program aimed at perpetrators of family violence. Within the Koorie Family Support program, the co-operative offers support to kinship carers, early years play groups, as well as facilitating the Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making program.

'In the nearly 40 years of the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative operation, we have seen that this holistic approach to care is far more likely to assist individuals and families to move along a spectrum towards achieving social capacity and self-determination.'



Aboriginal organisations: safe and strong for families

Aboriginal organisations understand the circumstances of Aboriginal families: they are attuned to their needs, and base their services and programs on these requirements, even if standard models of funding do not align with these ways of working.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and child and family services, has agreed that Aboriginal organisations should be empowered to take on a greater role in the care and case management of children and families within the child protection system.

Transferring responsibility for the case management and care of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations will enable the Victorian Government to ensure Aboriginal children and young people, their families and carers, are receiving culturally appropriate supports and services. Aboriginal children and young people case managed by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations will have the opportunity to thrive in a culturally safe and connected environment.

Prioritising spending as a long-term investment

The continuous expansion of Aboriginal organisations, functions requires increased capacity, infrastructure, funding, capability and self-management to ensure that services are equipped to meet the needs of all Victorian Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Case study:

**Victorian Aboriginal
Child Care Agency:**

A story of successful growth and
the importance of back-of-house
investment.



In 2017, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) turned forty. In the last twenty years from 1996, the organisation has grown dramatically. Continued process improvements, training, planning, investing in back-of-house functions, technology, specialist resources, benchmarking, collaborating and learning from one another are just a few of the key factors that have enabled the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to grow successfully over the past twenty years along with strong leadership, staff passion, commitment and loyalty.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency's development and achievements today could not have been attained without the investment and innovation in its back-of-house services.

Rapid growth has also meant revising the agency's organisational structure and management, and investing in specialist skills to equip staff to operate in an ever increasingly complex and highly regulated environment.

A key component is the appointment of specific expertise and sufficient resourcing in back-of-house operations to enable the efficient and effective delivery of organisational services, timely decision making, good governance and a capacity to forward plan in order to manage organisational change and challenges. Another important benchmarking activity that the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency has undertaken several times is salary benchmarking. The process of paying staff according to government funding received for particular programs was becoming problematic across the organisation. Salaries across the agency need to be addressed and aligned to organisational needs.

'We believe being technically skilled and having cultural expertise is a deadly combination and it will certainly ensure our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff are highly valued and sought after in our sector... not that we want to lose anyone!'

Objective 3: Commit to culturally competent and culturally safe services for staff, children and families

Every Aboriginal person, every Aboriginal child, needs to feel that their sense of self and their identity is valued in some way, by the people and environments that surround them.³⁸

Cultural competence and cultural safety are fundamental to the positive experience and outcomes of Aboriginal children, young people and families. The implementation of culturally responsive services is a critical enabler of this agreement's success, which requires leadership and commitment across the child and family services sector and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Cultural competency has been defined as 'developing knowledge, skills and attitudes to work effectively and respectfully with diverse people'.³⁹ Training for staff that focuses on responsiveness and communication enables better working relationships with Aboriginal children and families. Mandatory cultural awareness training is an acknowledgement that racism exists in the system and that it is harmful for Aboriginal children and families.⁴⁰ However, cultural competency is not sufficient if we are truly committed to ensuring best outcomes for Aboriginal families – the goal should be culturally safe services based on respect and understanding.⁴¹

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) speaks to culturally safety as:

'...providing quality health care that fits within the familiar cultural values and norms of the person accessing the service that may differ from your own and/or the dominant culture.'

Similarly, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation has identified that:

'A culturally safe environment does not ignore, challenge or deny cultural identity. Because a culturally safe environment is about shared respect, knowledge and understandings, it empowers people, enabling them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.'⁴²

There is also significant work from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation entitled *This is Forever Business: A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety*,⁴³ which reflects Victorian Aboriginal history, heritage and experience. As part of the research project, the authors identified processes enabling Aboriginal communities to promote cultural safety through: remembering, empowering voice, resourcing and recreation. Aboriginal leaders have confirmed that the provision of services for Aboriginal children and families must align with local Aboriginal community values, priorities and approaches to be effective and culturally safe.

Some features of 'culturally safe' services for Aboriginal people have been identified as:

- **Representation and inclusion:** including Aboriginal staff, Elders, board members, advisors and art, that show respect and acknowledge the First Peoples of this land.
- **Communication:** appropriate and helpful, in plain language rather than bureaucratic jargon.
- **Time:** to navigate and understand often bewildering bureaucratic practices.
- **Culturally respectful:** respectful of protocols, sorry business, language, and cultural practice and, where appropriate, acknowledging and celebrating success together.
- **Relationship building:** developing partnerships and collaborating with Aboriginal organisations.
- **Historical truth-telling:** that permeates practice and organisational business.

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Bill 2015 has amended the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005*.

The Bill requires that organisations who work with children must promote 'cultural safety for Aboriginal children' in their response to each Child Safe Standard.⁴⁴

Ensuring cultural competency and safety in government and child and family services

Staff training that teaches cultural competence and safety is necessary in order to ensure that mainstream child and family services are effectively responding to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. Creating culturally safe services requires opportunities for staff to continually learn and allows time for critical self-reflection; a process that cannot be provided by one-off cultural training, though this may be the start of a personal journey.⁴⁵ On an organisational level, this commitment from the child and family services sector organisations and the department, requires their staff to be able to demonstrate that their practice has changed as a result of cultural competence and safety training.

There are examples in current practice, where adopting a strengths-based, culturally responsive program, aiming for cultural safety, is making a real difference in the lives of Victorian Aboriginal families.

Case study:

Koorie Family Court Marram-Ngala Ganbu

Marram-Ngala Ganbu, meaning 'we are one' in Woiwurrung language, aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children involved in child protection proceedings. It is a special Koorie Hearing Day in the Children's Court Family division and was established in 2016, following recommendations from the Protecting Vulnerable Children's Inquiry in 2012 and the Aboriginal Justice Forum in March 2009.

Marram-Ngala Ganbu aims to engage Aboriginal children, parents and their family to participate in proceedings in a way that is respectful of their cultural identity, and give participants a voice to self-determine their outcomes in a culturally responsive way. The first of its kind in Australia, the program encourages magistrates, and clients to build relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

Marram-Ngala Ganbu is working because it empowers families navigating an often-bewildering court system. As Gunditjmaran Ashley Morris, who is the Marram-Ngala Ganbu coordinator explains, 'The Marram-Ngala Ganbu program gives the clients an opportunity to speak directly to the magistrate, feeling that they have a voice and are being heard'.

The Koorie Family Court is different in that all participants sit around the table, and all participants are given an opportunity to speak. For some families, it is the first time they have felt empowered to attend, and participate.

'One dad didn't feel good about attending court, once he did and realised his voice was heard, he began to feel empowered. Twelve months on and the dad now has his four kids back with him.'

Within Marram-Ngala Ganbu program, ensuring cultural safety is a process for everyone. The program ran a possum skin cloak making project as a way of engaging community in the program. This took place over three weekends, and over 80 people participated in the program. The last day of the possum skin cloak making program was open to lawyers and magistrates as well as their families to participate, but also to share in the children's stores of family and culture. The project was a great way to break down barriers and showcase Aboriginal cultural practice and the importance of working together. The possum skin now lies in the middle of the table in court proceedings; the presence of the cloak is critical to its success:

'Marram-Ngala Ganbu takes place every Tuesday, where we make sure the possum skin is laid out on the table, so our clients feel culturally safe, empowered and comfortable. Our families start to feel the possum skin and it puts them at ease and makes them feel stronger from a cultural perspective, allowing them to open up and work towards solutions.'

Objective 4:

Capture, build and share
Aboriginal knowledge,
learning and evidence to
drive children and family
services' investment and
to inform practice

*We Can Like Research...
in Koori Hands.⁴⁶*

The Australian experience of Aboriginal knowledge reflects a long and varied history of traditional knowledge about connection to Country (including land and agriculture), and as well as ways of family, kinship, community and stories of creation.⁴⁷ Importantly, Aboriginal knowledge is a storytelling practice: it was not written in the Western tradition, but continues in the oral tradition of stories and songlines,⁴⁸ and through ceremony, artwork and places of cultural significance.⁴⁹

Aboriginal evidence should be based on the 'Aboriginal family way' of being and doing.⁵⁰ An Aboriginal learning system – one that supports and shares Aboriginal ways of building and sharing evidence – is a critical enabler for this agreement, and will support it into the future. Critically, Aboriginal families themselves must be given the recognition, as a valuable resource of knowledge within this learning system.

'Engagement strategies work best when Indigenous families are consulted about their needs, and services respond using holistic approaches that are delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.'⁵¹

Aboriginal organisations have developed a deep knowledge of how to work with, and what works for, Aboriginal families and community. Across Victoria, there are many examples of programs and services that have been developed by Aboriginal organisations that speak to the priorities of their local communities.

Case study:

Culturally safe family healing with a focus on prevention

Mallee District Aboriginal Services provides a range of place-based, community-oriented programs and services across Mildura, Swan Hill and Kerang, within a framework of Aboriginal self-determination. With a focus on the early years, the programs offered, including Bumps to Babes and Beyond⁵² and Wondering from the Womb⁵³ have been undertaken using a strengths-based framework. Evaluations of these programs utilised appropriate participatory research, underpinned by Aboriginal knowledge relating to children and families.

Mallee District Aboriginal Services strongly focus on Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing across the Mildura, Swan Hill and Kerang sites. The Mallee District Aboriginal Services social and emotional wellbeing programs provide a suite of services to support the healing of individuals and families. The programs recognise the inherent value of community, optimism, compassion and respect for culture to enable people's successful journey to health and wellness. The sharing of expertise in partnerships between Mallee District Aboriginal Services and mainstream organisations, including universities, produces culturally respectful evaluations of programs that impact families.

With its family-focused and community prevention lens, Mallee District Aboriginal Services is able to respond with innovative resources and programs. There are also programs that speak to some of the drivers of contact with the child protection system, such as holistic gambler's help, alcohol and drug and mental health services. Other programs that allow for the strengthening of families because of their focus on healing, reconnection and increasing self-efficacy include:

- Koorie Women's Diversionary Program, which aims to reduce recidivism among women who often have complex needs
- Witta (meaning 'look') art therapy diversion for women, which includes the painting of pots to put on unmarked grave sites as a contribution back to community
- Wiimpatja Healing Centre, an off-site centre that provides an alternative to traditional incarceration for Aboriginal men, and includes cultural healing.

Development of a learning system that recognises Aboriginal knowledge systems

'Research needs to be practical and action orientated, and aligned with community needs... It should be the catalyst for change in policy, programs, and practice, in a way that benefits the Koori community.'⁵⁴

An Aboriginal learning system must be developed by Aboriginal organisations and communities, and privilege Aboriginal models of health, wellbeing and knowledge,⁵⁵ including Aboriginal-developed measures of success. Specifically, this will require the resourcing of Aboriginal organisations to develop and grow their understanding of Aboriginal approaches to evidence development and measures that reflect Aboriginal values, as well as the capacity to collect, analyse and report on data,⁵⁶ and the creation of a robust framework, led by Aboriginal people, which will support organisations to generate, share, translate and apply evidence.

There needs to be a dedicated focus on recognising, documenting and sharing innovative and promising practice, that leads to improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, especially:

- programs and services that identify and measure cultural wellbeing outcomes
- culturally safe, healing-informed programs and services for Aboriginal children and families
- programs and services that work for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care and at risk of youth justice involvement that promote culture, pride and identity to improve outcomes
- culturally appropriate programs that improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people with disabilities and their families
- early intervention, treatment and recovery programs for family violence that promote the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families.⁵⁷

A learning system needs to empower Aboriginal organisations and communities to use and benefit from the data that already exists within the sector. This will require the department and community sector organisations to understand and commit to the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty⁵⁸ also known as OCAP: ownership, collection, access and possession.⁵⁹

Objective 5: Prioritise Aboriginal workforce capability

Increasing Aboriginal workforce capability is critical to meeting the overall agreement objectives. A focus on developing, supporting and upskilling Aboriginal employees is essential to strengthening this workforce's availability and capability to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, young people and families.

This objective is built around the implementation of practical strategies that include organisational culture, and the design and workforce management of Aboriginal staff involved in the delivery of services to Aboriginal children and families.

Victoria's Aboriginal population is young and vibrant, and is projected to grow to over 80,000 people by 2021.⁶⁰ With a foreseen influx of Aboriginal people accessing services, Aboriginal organisations require support to establish and implement strategies to affectively support this increasing growth, to allow the balancing of supply and demand, increase awareness opportunities for education and employment, identify skill gaps and align employment practices to pipeline training.

Indeed, economic participation and development has been identified as a high priority by Aboriginal communities around Victoria, in recognising that being employed and contributing to the economy builds self-esteem, independence and positive role models.⁶¹

The workforce is a critical enabler to build the capacity and capability of Aboriginal service providers, by growing and supporting the development of a highly skilled and available Aboriginal workforce, to meet reform and sector demands, and supporting the existing Aboriginal workforce to upskill into emerging workforce roles, whilst increasing the availability of a work-ready Aboriginal workforce.

There is a need to plan for changing and evolving service and care models in order to align the workforce of today with the needs of tomorrow.⁶² Consultations with the Aboriginal workforce within Aboriginal organisations have identified that self-determination, addressing racism, Aboriginal-led service design and growing the Aboriginal workforce, are critical enablers that drive real system change to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing outcomes.

To build the required workforce to support these models of care, organisations need to be enabled to develop the workforce capabilities they require to meet their local service models.

Build the Aboriginal workforce availability and capability in delivering services to Aboriginal children and families

The skills, qualifications and experiences across Aboriginal workforces within Aboriginal organisations are rich and varied. Workers, particularly those working in community settings, may lack formal qualifications. However, they instead have many years of on-the-job experience or informal training that results in the acquisition of unique capabilities required in the delivery of child and family services.

The following case study shows where:

- developing, supporting and upskilling Aboriginal employees has been effective
- the workforce's availability and capability to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, young people and families has been strengthened.

Case study:

The Indigenous program at the Bouverie Centre

'All Indigenous peoples have been touched by trauma in some way. All Indigenous peoples deserve the opportunity to work through this trauma to heal...'⁶³



The Indigenous Program Team at the Bouverie Centre consists of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal family therapeutic workers and trainers who recognise the impact of complex trauma. This has resulted in a trauma-informed lens being central to all work undertaken by the team, recognising the significance of language, culture, walking in two worlds, creating a safe place, and complex trauma and its impacts on Aboriginal people.

The work of the Indigenous team comprises three components:

1. University award training

The Bouverie Centre's Aboriginal Family Therapy Training Program has one of the highest tertiary retention and graduation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationally, with 106 graduates to date. A western district Aboriginal community-controlled organisation cohort graduated at the end of 2017 and a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency cohort commenced in 2018. These graduates are predominantly employed in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across Victoria.

2. Healing training

Training programs in trauma-informed family systemic practice includes the Indigenous Program Team's foundation training package for mental health, alcohol and drugs, social and emotional wellbeing, family services, health and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers.

Healing training programs include:

- Healing Aboriginal Families – two-day workshop
- First Steps in Family Work – five-day training
- Narrative Therapy with Families – one-day workshop
- Worker Wellbeing, Vicarious Trauma and Resilience
- Clinical Program – *Working with the Mob* – a unique and dedicated clinical team.

3. Healing (clinical) including genogram – Working with the Mob.

Offering culturally accessible family therapy to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with complex trauma and mental health issues. Working with the Mob also sees non-Aboriginal carers and the Aboriginal children who are in their care.

Creating a culturally safe and supported working environment

Cultural safety is an important factor when offering support to Aboriginal people working in non-Aboriginal organisations. Racism in particular can have a negative impact on the overall health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

Employers have a role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of all employees, and creating a culture that supports staff, sustains their participation in the workforce and recognises some of the unique pressures and challenges that many Aboriginal people face. It is estimated that the financial return on supporting mental health in the workplace could be more than double the cost.⁶⁴

Regardless of employer type, the impact of vicarious trauma, including isolation and cultural load, can be more pronounced for Aboriginal staff working in a community where they are known and related to community members. Reflective practice should be offered to those staff on a regular basis.

Training organisations also play an important role in building the capability of the Aboriginal workforce. It is vital that workers from Aboriginal organisations access appropriate career pathway models to gain formal qualifications.

Glossary

- **Aboriginal self-determination**
Predicated on the idea that Aboriginal peoples are entitled to control their own destiny. This involves government and mainstream organisations relinquishing power, control and resources.
- **ACCO**
Aboriginal community-controlled organisation
- **ACF**
Aboriginal Children’s Forum
- **AFLDM**
Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making program
- **BADAC**
Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative
- **BDAC**
Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative
- **Country**
Country for Aboriginal people is land with which Aboriginal people share a spiritual and cultural connection.
- **CSO**
Community service organisation
- **Elders**
Someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. In some instances Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders.
- **First Peoples**
Indigenous peoples, also known as First Peoples, Aboriginal peoples, native peoples, or autochthonous peoples, are ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region.
- **GEGAC**
Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
- **Mob**
‘Nation’, ‘community’, ‘people’, ‘mob’ or the local language or culture group
- **OCAP**
Ownership, collection, access and possession
- **SEWB**
Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing
- **VACCA**
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- **VACCHO**
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Endnotes

- 1 Milroy H. 2008, 'Restoring life and spirit: Recovery from trauma', in: *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report 2007*, Sydney: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
- 2 Department of Health and Human Services, 2017 *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan*, p. 5. Victoria State Government.
- 3 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- 4 Taylor R. 2001, 'About Aboriginality: Questions for the uninitiated, Identity and gender in hunting and gathering societies' *Senri Ethnological Studies*, vol. 56, pp. 133–50.
- 5 Sherwood, J. 2013, 'Colonisation – it's bad for your health: The context of Aboriginal health', *Contemporary Nurse*, vol. 46, p. 1.
- 6 Australian Human Rights Commission, 2003 *Social justice and human rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*.
- 7 Watson Rebecca, Adams Karen, Fredericks Bronwyn and Mahoney Ray 2010, *Strategic Directions Report for the Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health Project*, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), Melbourne.
- 8 Walker R, Shepherd C. 2008, Strengthening Aboriginal family functioning: What works and why? AFRC Briefing 2008 (cited 2014). Available from <<http://aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing7.html>>.
- 9 National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party 1989, *National Aboriginal Health Strategy*, Canberra.
- 10 Panaretto, K.S., Wenitong, M., Button, S. & Ring, I.T. 2014, 'Aboriginal community controlled health services: leading the way in primary care', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 200, no.11, pp. 649–652.
- 11 (Ref) Article 3, United National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, The General Assembly.
- 12 Behrendt, L. 2003, 'Power from the people: a community-based approach to Indigenous self-determination', *Flinders Journal of Law Reform*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 135–150.
- 13 Behrendt, L. 2003, 'Power from the people: a community-based approach to Indigenous self-determination', *Flinders Journal of Law Reform*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 135–150.
- 14 Department of Health and Human Services 2012, *Best interests case practice model: Summary guide* p. 13. Victoria State Government.
- 15 Commission for Children and Young People, October 2016 *Always was, always will be Koori children*, Systemic inquiry into the services provided by Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria, pp 55–57, Victoria State Government.
- 16 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2016 and Census 2011.
- 17 Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) provides detail of this work: <vaclang.org.au>.
- 18 For example, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) <vahs.org.au>; Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) <ahvic.org.au>; and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) <vals.org.au>.
- 19 For example, NAIDOC Week: <naidoc.org.au>.
- 20 November 2013, *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture: Five Year Plan for Aboriginal Children in Out of Home Care: A joint submission from Victorian Aboriginal organisations and Child and family services*, p.7.
- 21 Department of Health and Human Services, April 2016, *Roadmap for Reform*, p. 3.
- 22 Report on Government Services 2018, Section 16.
- 23 Jackomos, A. Mar/Apr 2015, *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 17.
- 24 Bamblett, M. and P. Lewis. 2006, 'Speaking up, not talking down: doing the "rights" thing by strengthening culture for Indigenous children', *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 91–103.
- 25 MacLean, S., et al. 2011, *Health and wellbeing outcomes of programs that include strategies to enable the expression of cultural identities for Indigenous Australians: a systematic review*; Reilly, R.E., et al. 2017 'A pilot study of Aboriginal health promotion from an ecological perspective' *BMC Public Health*, vol. 11, p. 749.
- 26 Lohoar, S., et al. 2014, *Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing*, Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia.
- 27 Sharron Williams, SNAICC Deputy Chair, Child Welfare.
- 28 Bamblett, M. and P. Lewis. 2007, 'Detoxifying the child and family welfare system for Australian indigenous peoples: self-determination, rights and culture as the critical tools', *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 43–56.
- 29 November 2013, *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture: Five Year Plan for Aboriginal Children in Out of Home Care: A joint submission from Victorian Aboriginal organisations and Child and family services*.
- 30 National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party 1989, *A National Aboriginal Health Strategy*.
- 31 Dodson, M. 1994, 'The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the International Year of the Family', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 13–18.
- 32 Bamblett, M. and Frankland R, et al. 2010, *This is 'Forever business': a framework for maintaining and restoring cultural safety in Aboriginal Victoria*, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency: Melbourne, Victoria.
- 33 Burgess, C.P., et al. 2009, 'Healthy country, healthy people: the relationship between Indigenous health status and "caring for country"', *Medical Journal Australia*, vol. 190, no. 10, pp. 567–72.
- 34 Schultz, R. and Cairney, S. 2017, 'Caring for country and the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians', *Medical Journal Australia*, vol. 207, no. 1, pp. 8–10.
- 35 Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, 2016 *Return to Country Framework*, p. 14.
- 36 Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, 2016 *Return to Country Framework*, p. 15.
- 37 Bamblett, M. and P. Lewis. 2007, 'Detoxifying the child and family welfare system for Australian indigenous peoples: self-determination, rights and culture as the critical tools', *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 43–56.
- 38 Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, et al. 2010, *This is 'Forever business': a framework for maintaining and restoring cultural safety in Aboriginal Victoria*. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency: Melbourne, Victoria.
- 39 National Aboriginal Health Organization, Ottawa 2008, *Cultural Safety: Respect and Dignity in Relationships, Indigenous Health, British Columbia and Cultural Competency and Safety: A Guide for Health Care Administrators, Providers and Educators*.

- 40 Kelaher, M.A., A.S. Ferdinand, and Y. Paradies 2014, 'Experiencing racism in health care: the mental health impacts for Victorian Aboriginal communities' *Medical Journal Australia*, vol. 201, no. 1, p. 44–47.
- 41 Zon, A., et al. 2004, 'Cultural safety in child protection: application to the workplace environment and casework practice', *Australian Social Work*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 288–298.
- 42 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, 2010, *Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competency in Child and Family Services*, p. 17.
- 43 Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, et al. 2010, *This is 'Forever business': a framework for maintaining and restoring cultural safety in Aboriginal Victoria*, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency: Melbourne, Victoria.
- 44 The Department of Health and Human Services Child Safe Standards: Victoria State Government: <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards>.
- 45 National Aboriginal Health Organization 2008, *Cultural Safety: Respect and Dignity in Relationships* Indigenous Health, British Columbia and *Cultural Competency and Safety: A Guide for Health Administrators, Providers and Educators*, Ottawa.
- 46 Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit 2008, *We Can Like Research... in Koori Hands: A Community Report on Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit's Research Workshops in 2007*, Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- 47 Lynette Russell. 2005 'Indigenous Knowledge and Archives: Accessing Hidden History and Understandings', *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 161–171.
- 48 A songline (also known as Dreaming Track) is a path across the land which marks the journey of creator-beings as they created the lakes, rivers, plants, land formations and living creatures during the Dreaming. Source: <<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/glossary-of-aboriginal-australia-terms>> accessed 13 July 2017.
- 49 Aunty Joan Vickery, Angela Clarke, Karen Adams 2005 *Nyernila Koories Kila Degaia: Listen Up to Koories Speak about health*, Koorie Heritage Trust and Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, The University of Melbourne.
- 50 Maggie Walter, Karen L. Martin and Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews (eds), 2017 *Maggie Walter 'Doing Indigenous Family' in Indigenous Children Growing Up Strong*, Palgrave MacMillan.
- 51 Malin, M., K. Campbell, and L. Agius 2012, 'Raising children in the Nunga Aboriginal way' *Family Matters*, 1996, no. 43, pp. 43–47; Lohoar, S., C.F.C. Australia, and A.I.o.F. Studies, *Safe and supportive Indigenous families and communities for children: a synopsis and critique of Australian research*, Melbourne, Vic.: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- 52 Avril Burrows, Beverley Allen and Sharon Gorton December 2014, *Evaluation of the Bumps to Babies and Beyond Program*, Queen Elizabeth Centre and Mallee District Aboriginal Services.
- 53 Kathy Crouch 2017, 'Wondering From the Womb: Antenatal Yarning In Rural Victoria', *Children Australia*, vol. 42 no. 2, pp. 75–78.
- 54 Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit 2008, *We Can Like Research... in Koori Hands: A Community Report on Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit's Research Workshops in 2007*, Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- 55 Blakeney, M. 2015, 'Protecting the knowledge and cultural expressions of Aboriginal peoples', *University of Western Australia Law Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 180–207.
- 56 Karen L. Martin and Maggie Walter 2017, 'The Story of LSIC: It's all about Trust and Vision' in Maggie Walter, Karen L. Martin and Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews (eds), *Indigenous Children Growing Up Strong*, Palgrave MacMillan.
- 57 *Children and Families Research Strategy 2017–2019*.
- 58 Tahu Kukutai & John Taylor (eds), *Indigenous data sovereignty: toward an agenda 2016*, Australian National University: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
- 59 OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) <www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP>.
- 60 Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–2018*, State Government of Victoria.
- 61 Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013–2026*, State Government of Victoria.
- 62 Health and Human Services Branch. December 2016, *Workforce futures – Transforming the workforce to achieve the best health, wellbeing and safety of all Victorians*. Consultation draft 2.0.
- 63 Australian Human Rights Commission 2008, *Social Justice Report*.
- 64 Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services 2015, *Victoria's 10-Year Mental Health Plan*, Retrieved 20 June 2017 <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/victorias-10-year-mental-health-plan>>.

