



Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan



Cover images

The cover includes details of the artwork (within the graphic shapes) used for the Maggolee website by Mandy Nicholson. This image represents a place to gather and yarn; it symbolises a camp with its campfire smoke emanating to other mobs as an invitation to come and gather 'here in this place' (maggolee). The symmetrical lines are unique to south-eastern Australia and represent the different journeys taken by different groups to all end up on the same place to gather information. The Maggolee website was developed by Reconciliation Victoria, with funding from Victorian Government, as a resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities. The cover of this Plan has drawn on the Maggolee artwork because the intention of the plan closely aligns with Maggolee's purpose to support local government and Aboriginal communities to work together. Promoting the Maggolee artwork via the plan raises awareness of this purpose and of Maggolee as an important resource.

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Message from the Minister



As Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am delighted to present this Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan.

As Minister for these portfolios I am acutely aware of the mutual benefits that occur when strong relationships exist between Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their local councils.

I know that many examples of these productive relationships can already be found across the State, and I encourage you to explore the opportunities for good practice by visiting www.maggolee.org.au

This Action Plan outlines a range of important strategies to support Aboriginal Victorians and local councils to improve outcomes for their communities through councils in their role as employers, service providers, planning authorities and asset managers.

The Action Plan focuses on advancing self-determination and reducing inequalities experienced by Aboriginal Victorians. It provides practical steps that will create greater local respect and understanding for Aboriginal culture and rights, and leverage council leadership to increase employment and economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people and enterprises.

Importantly, this Action Plan recognises and builds on a range of effective policies and practices that have already been established between Aboriginal communities and Victorian local councils. Significant momentum has already been generated through the government's partnership with the local government sector peak organisations, Reconciliation Victoria and our best performing councils.

The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan will be a valuable resource to further strengthen relationships between Aboriginal communities and local councils, and contribute to the better outcomes we all seek for Victorians.

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

Hon Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Local Government

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Victorians

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples, and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we work and live. Traditional Owners and custodians have a unique and deeply spiritual relationship with their Country, and we also recognise that there are people from other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities living in Victoria.

The Victorian Government recognises the need for reconciliation and genuine partnerships to address the negative impacts of the past.

Explanation of the use of terms

Throughout this document, Aboriginal is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Use of *Koori*, *Koorie*, and *Indigenous* is retained in the names of programs and initiatives, and, unless noted otherwise, include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Acronyms used in this Plan

AV	Aboriginal Victoria, Victorian Government
CHMP	Cultural Heritage Management Plan
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victorian Government
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victorian Government
DET	Department of Education and Training, Victorian Government
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government
DJR	Department of Justice and Regulation, Victorian Government
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Government
EMRIPN	Eastern Metro Region Indigenous Planners Network
HACC	Home and Community Care
ICACC	Inter-Council Aboriginal Consultative Committee
LAN	Local Aboriginal Networks
LGAPP	Local Government-Aboriginal Partnership Project
LGV	Local Government Victoria, Victorian Government
LGPro	Local Government Professionals
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RDV	Regional Development Victoria, Victorian Government
RSA	Recognition and Settlement Agreement
RV	Reconciliation Victoria
VAAF	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
VAHC	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association
WRLGRN	Western Region Local Government Reconciliation Network

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NAIDOC smoking ceremony, Craig Niemann, CEO of Greater Bendigo City Council, Trent Nelson, Chairman of Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Cr Rod Fyffe, Mayor of Greater Bendigo City Council
Photo courtesy of Greater Bendigo City Council



Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan

Local government is central to the achievement of equity and opportunity for Aboriginal communities and in actively supporting Aboriginal self-determination. Recognising the critical impact that local councils can have in working with Aboriginal communities, the Victorian Government has developed this *Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan* (the Action Plan) as a resource for local councils and Aboriginal Victorians to strengthen relationships and drive positive change.

The Action Plan presents an overarching framework to connect and support councils and Aboriginal communities across Victoria, by recognising, celebrating and growing good practices. It also presents a consolidated statement of the Victorian Government's objectives with regard to the links between local government and Aboriginal affairs policy, and is a priority action in the Ministerial Statement on Local Government (2015).

This Action Plan is consistent with Victorian Government's reconciliation and self-determination agenda and aligns with local government frameworks, broader state and national strategies and frameworks designed to improve the lives of Aboriginal Victorians.

The Local Government-Aboriginal Partnership Project (2011-2015)¹ provided the foundations for the development of this Action Plan. The Partnership Project established active community engagement processes to recognise, celebrate and grow good practices across Victoria.

This Action Plan is guided by the Partnership Project approach of recognising, celebrating and growing good practices across Victoria, and encapsulated in these six principles:

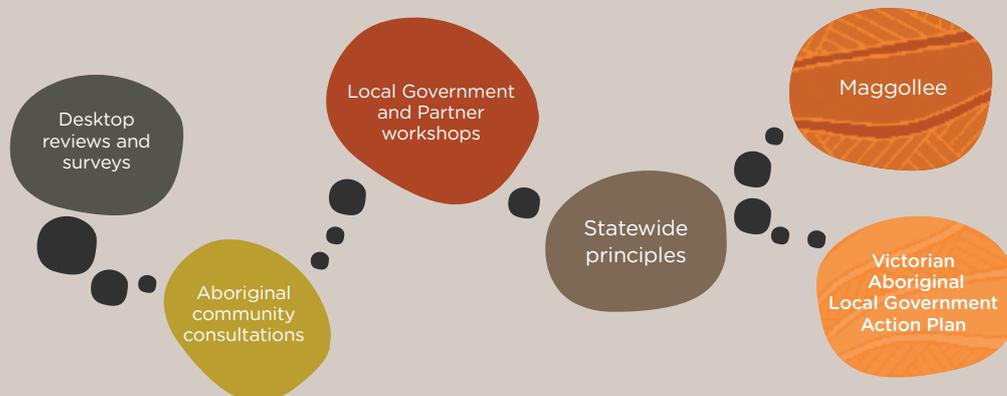
- 1. Lead - Councils play an important local leadership role in achieving reconciliation**
- 2. Celebrate - Acknowledging the richness of Aboriginal heritage and the influence of champions of reconciliation; build on positive models of Aboriginal-council partnership**
- 3. Emulate - Highlight activities and practices that are effective; share and extend them**
- 4. Target - Work with councils that are ready to take the next step and walk with them to strengthen respect, relationships and opportunities**
- 5. Integrate - Embed a holistic approach to reconciliation at the local level so that an Aboriginal perspective can inform council plans and strategies from the beginning**
- 6. Measure - Capture the difference we are making and refine policy to keep improving outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.**

Through the involvement of the key local and state government stakeholders² and targeted consultations with the Aboriginal community, the Partnership Project developed the state-wide Local Government Aboriginal Partnership Principles. These principles are widely supported by local councils and Aboriginal communities and can guide councils in the development and implementation of policies, plans, strategies and delivery of local government services. These principles inform the development of objectives and actions in this Action Plan.

¹ See: www.maggolee.org.au for more information

² The key partners of the project included Aboriginal people through community consultations, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Victorian Local Governance Association, Local Government Professionals, Reconciliation Victoria and Victorian government.

Statewide principles: Local government and Aboriginal people



The Local Government Aboriginal Partnership Project developed statewide principles to support relationships and engagement between councils and Aboriginal people and organisations. Many councils have already developed local principles or have action plans in place. The statewide principles are not intended to replace these local arrangements, but act as a starting point for any council seeking to strengthen engagement and partnership with local Aboriginal communities. They are available on the Maggolee website.

- Local government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the area, and recognises, values and respects the ongoing cultural rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners over their traditional Country.
- Local government recognises the unique and significant contribution made by Aboriginal people and organisations to the local community and to Australia's identity.
- Local government acknowledges the need to strengthen the voice of Aboriginal people in local decision making and the fundamental right of Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal community members including young people to engage about the matters that are important to their communities.
- Local government recognises the respected role of Elders and the important leadership role they have in guiding current and future generations of Aboriginal communities.
- Local government acknowledges that protection and conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage is important for all Victorians.
- Local government acknowledges the need to create culturally safe and respectful environments and provide services in a way that demonstrates cultural understanding and ensures Aboriginal people feel respected and welcome.
- Local government acknowledges that Aboriginal health is holistic and that it encompasses the physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of individuals and the whole community.
- Local government will actively work with Aboriginal people to respond to and address racism where it occurs to ensure that the cultural values and human rights of Aboriginal people are respected.
- Local government acknowledges the significant contribution to economic development that is provided by the unique skills of people within the Aboriginal community. It will partner with local Aboriginal people to create opportunities for employment and support local economic participation of Aboriginal businesses.

A major outcome of the Partnership Project was the support for the development of a platform to share information, encourage partnerships and build good practice between local government and Aboriginal communities. In 2015 Local Government Victoria supported Reconciliation Victoria to establish and maintain the Maggolee website, www.maggolee.org.au as a resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities. The site includes information on policies and programs, protocols and cultural awareness, key contacts, relevant local data, news and events. It contains information about each of the 79 Victorian local government areas, and actions councils can take to build closer relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to progress reconciliation and self-determination.

Leading on from these achievements, and in response to calls for greater support between councils and Aboriginal communities and organisations, Local Government Victoria

has developed this Action Plan to celebrate and encourage stronger partnerships and community change.

Local Government and Aboriginal Communities

Aboriginal cultures and communities are diverse and, in Victoria, include Traditional Owners who have an intrinsic connection to Country, expressed through their cultural life and language, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from other communities living in Victoria. Across these diverse communities there is different socio-economic status, however, Aboriginal Victorians experience significantly fewer socio-economic opportunities overall than most Victorians³.

³ https://www.coag.gov.au/closing_the_gap_in_indigenous_disadvantage

Traditional Owner Groups

Traditional Owners have managed land and waters sustainably over many thousands of generations. Victorian Traditional Owner Groups are comprised of Aboriginal people with cultural and traditional associations to their Countries. Traditional Owners typically identify themselves as members of one or more of a number of distinct language- and territorially-based groups. Some Victorian Traditional Owner groups have already been recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and/or under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic) or under other agreements with the State. In each of these cases, a corporate entity represents the interests of the recognised Traditional Owner group. Caring for Country is a cultural responsibility for Traditional Owners across land, waters and sea, including cultural and natural resources. Traditional Owners have strong connections to Country and are actively involved in caring for Country and managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage. For custodians, Country is an entity with a lifeforce and a will of its own. The relationship between Traditional Owners and Country is essential and specific to each place and group. Ceremonies, stories, songs, travelling through or visiting Country and speaking language on Country are all active caring for Country activities, and form part of contemporary management alongside scientific management practices.

Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs)

One of the ways in which Aboriginal people express their ongoing connection to land is through active involvement in the protection and management of cultural heritage places. The Victorian Government is committed to recognising Traditional Owners as the rightful decision-makers for their cultural heritage. RAPs are established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, which recognises Aboriginal people as the primary guardians, keepers, and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage. RAPs have significant statutory responsibilities. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, also established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, comprises of Traditional Owners appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and was established to ensure Traditional Owners play a central role in the protection and management of Aboriginal heritage.

LAN Community Brokers and the Hon Natalie Hutchins MP,
Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs

Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs)

LANs are made up of Aboriginal people who work together to provide a voice for their community, promoting partnerships and collaborative action at a local level. LANs, supported by Aboriginal Victoria, provide a strong foundation to build on the strengths of Aboriginal people and reaffirm the role of Aboriginal culture in building resilience and fostering prosperity through the Victorian



Aboriginal community. LANs take a place based approach which responds to the diversity of Aboriginal communities by enabling people to identify priorities and develop local solutions. The LAN Five Year Plan for 2016-2020 clearly articulates the strong partnership between the Aboriginal community and local government.

Local government plays a key role in achieving economic, equity and liveability outcomes for all Victorians. Like state and federal governments, councils have a critical role to play as partners in closing the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians: this is a goal that simply cannot be achieved without local government as a partner. The Victorian Government's commitment to advancing Aboriginal self-determination calls for a new relationship between all levels of government and the Aboriginal community, one in which Aboriginal people are supported to make their own decisions on the policies that affect them.

Over the past decade we have seen momentum building towards efforts to close the gap in Victoria⁴. However, there is variability across the 79 Victorian councils – some are very active and some have very little Aboriginal engagement and weaker partnerships. Regardless of the size of the Aboriginal community or the experience of the council in Aboriginal partnerships, all councils can undertake actions to participate in broadening their community's understanding of the importance of reconciliation and self-determination and take steps towards meaningful partnerships.

Local governments with strong Aboriginal engagement and partnerships have a reconciliation plan or similar; provide funding for Aboriginal-specific programs; provide cross-cultural training to staff and councillors; and have a powerful 'champion' or inspiring leadership driving the work. We also know that 75% of engaged councils collaborate with their Local Aboriginal Network; engage regularly with their local reconciliation group; have an Aboriginal Advisory Committee; and employ an Aboriginal Liaison Officer.

⁴ Victorian Local Government Engagement and Reconciliation Survey, Reconciliation Victoria, 2012

Without local government, we cannot close the gap. With council resolve, increasing life expectancy and opportunities for Aboriginal people right across our state is achievable.

This Action Plan recognises the different context for each council and is designed to help those councils to continue to build on momentum and assist those developing new partnerships and engagement. That might be to fly the Aboriginal flag and introduce a welcome to Country for council business; co-design health and well-being plans; establish a formal engagement process with Registered Aboriginal Parties for cultural heritage management and Traditional Owner Corporations in land use planning; or increase Aboriginal recruitment and retention.

A Welcome to Country is an important cultural responsibility for Traditional Owners in which visitors are welcomed to their traditional land or Country. It can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in the Aboriginal language of that Country or English. The Welcome provides an introduction to visitors to help them understand and respect local customs. Aboriginal people today continue this significant cultural responsibility, exchanging goodwill and respect with visitors on Country.⁵

⁵ For information about *Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country* see: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf> or <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/protocols-for-recognising-traditional-owners>

Policy context and the role of Councils in 'Closing the Gap'

The most recent Close the Gap Report⁶ shows that narrowing the gap in key health, economic participation and education targets remains a challenge, making stronger collaboration across all levels of government especially in the areas of health, education and employment, more critical than ever.

Self-determination and treaty

In March 2015, the Premier of Victoria announced that self-determination would be the new and ambitious policy principle that would guide the Victorian Government's approach to Aboriginal affairs. This marked an important shift in Aboriginal affairs policy in Victoria.

At its core, self-determination is about Aboriginal people being at the centre of decision making around the issues that directly affect their lives. In practice this means a substantive transfer of decision-making power from government to Aboriginal peoples. A policy of self-determination recognises that the ongoing impact of colonisation is still being felt today; that Aboriginal people themselves are best positioned to address issues in their communities; and that the resilience, strength, and resourcefulness of Aboriginal Victorians represents an enormous opportunity to build a healthy and prosperous future.

Self-determination will not immediately resolve all the challenges facing Aboriginal communities, but international best practice shows that empowering Aboriginal communities to make decisions about their own futures is an essential step.

In May 2016, the Premier committed the Victorian Government to treaty negotiations with Aboriginal Victorians. Negotiations are underway to discuss how to advance self-determination, treaty and an Aboriginal representative body. This is an important and historically significant commitment but we do not have to wait for a treaty in order to support self-determination. The Victorian Government, through its commitment to supporting Aboriginal self-determination, is already thinking of new ways to approach policy and service delivery so that self-determination for Aboriginal people informs and shapes all government policy going forward.

⁶ www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Closing_the_Gap_2015_Report.pdf

Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018

The *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018* (VAAF) brings together government and Aboriginal community commitments and efforts to create a better future for and with Aboriginal Victorians. The VAAF contains targets across health, education, life expectancy, early childhood development, and employment, which include, and go beyond, the National Indigenous Reform Agreement 'Closing the Gap' targets. It focuses effort and resources on six Strategic Action Areas that are central to delivering whole of life and whole of community outcomes for and with Aboriginal people over the long term. Local councils are recognised as key partners in four of the six Strategic Action Areas⁷:

- Maternal and early childhood health and development
- Economic participation
- Health, housing and wellbeing
- Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities.

Overall progress in meeting VAAF targets is reported annually in the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report*, which is tabled in Parliament⁸. The end of the VAAF's term in 2018 represents an opportunity to revisit how outcomes are defined and reported on, particularly in light of the commitment to advancing Aboriginal self-determination.

Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020

The *Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020* recognises the central role of economic participation and development in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. It builds on the strengths of Aboriginal communities' long history of successful enterprise and trade as part of their own economic systems, with three clear, integrated goals focused on: strong foundations in education and training; jobs with career pathways; and enterprise through sustainable businesses. The Strategy reaffirms the value of partnerships between community, private sector, and government in realising these goals. The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board, appointed in June 2016, is driving the delivery of key commitments under this strategy.

Marrung - Victorian Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026

The Victorian Government has worked closely with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to develop and implement *Marrung*. It sets out a 10-year vision for delivering the *Education State* to Aboriginal Victorians and is underpinned by the principle of self-determination.

Koolin Balit: Victorian Government Strategic Directions for Aboriginal Health 2012-2022

Koolin Balit, meaning 'healthy people' in Boonwurrung language, provides the strategic direction for Aboriginal health outcomes in Victoria. It is an integrated, whole of life framework based around a set of key priorities and enablers. *Koolin Balit* sets out what the Victorian Government, together with Aboriginal communities, service providers, and other levels of government, will do to improve Aboriginal health. A revised 10-year Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing and Safety Strategy Plan will be released in May 2017.

⁷ The key strategies for each Strategic Action Area can be found at: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework

⁸ www.dpc.vic.gov.au/images/Aboriginal_Affairs/Victorian_Government_Aboriginal_Affairs_Report_2014-2015.pdf

Action Plan Framework

This Action Plan builds on local council initiatives around the state that are demonstrating excellent results, and together with the Maggolee website provides opportunities to share and extend good practice.

The focus of the Action Plan is on those areas which councils essentially lead and influence: local leader; public authority; employer and procurer; and service provider and planner. The Action Plan also aligns with the four key local government Strategic Action Areas of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework. The objectives and actions are based on the outcomes of the Local Government Aboriginal Partnership Project, and have been developed through consultation workshops held in 2015 with Aboriginal Victorians and representatives from local and state governments.

The Action Plan does not set targets for local government but provides a framework for councils to work with Aboriginal communities to develop specific actions and set their own targets for success. This recognises the differing contexts of the Aboriginal communities and the 79 Victorian municipalities and enables each local community to shape plans and commitments through the agility of individual approaches and emphasis. Use of the International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum – spanning from inform to empowerment – is encouraged to help define appropriate levels of community participation and engagement (visit www.iap2.org.au). For information on setting targets and establishing measures, see www.maggolee.org.au, and the local government section of www.reconciliationvic.org.au.

Implementation

Local Government Victoria will lead the implementation of the Action Plan. Implementation will be guided by an Aboriginal Reference Group, and a Steering Committee to monitor and review the plan annually. An Implementation Plan will be developed to accompany the Action Plan and will detail specific actions, timeframes, measures and resources. Some actions may be subject to budgetary planning requirements. However, many actions can be achieved now without additional funding as shown by the positive work already happening across many councils. Gaps will be identified through annual reviews and addressed as the Action Plan evolves.



Council as Local Leader

Objective A: Best practice between local government and Aboriginal communities is recognised, strengthened and promoted

Action 1: Local Government Victoria will resource Reconciliation Victoria for a further three years to continue to manage, promote and update the Maggolee site, with the support of Victorian Local Governance Association, LGPro and Municipal Association of Victoria.

Lead: RV
Support: AV, LGV, VLGA, LGPro, MAV

Action 2: Local Government Victoria will establish and sponsor an LGPro good practice award to celebrate progress and achievements by individual staff in councils as leaders in reconciliation initiatives and programs.

Lead: LGV
Support: LGPro

Action 3: The Department of Premier and Cabinet and Local Government Victoria will sponsor the Local Government category of the Community HART⁹ Awards.

Lead: RV, VLGA
Support: DPC, LGV

Maggolee is a platform to celebrate excellence and support improved practice among Victorian local councils engaging Aboriginal communities and advancing reconciliation. Developed by Reconciliation Victoria with funding from the Victorian Government, and with support from the Victorian Local Governance Association, LGPro and Municipal Association of Victoria, the Maggolee website is a resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities. Maggolee can contribute to the building of a community of practice within the Victorian local government sector through greater community involvement and education activities.

Local councils already plan, design and deliver responses in partnership with local communities. A number of councils have already taken steps to promote their Aboriginal engagement programs on the Maggolee website and in other forums, showcasing benefits to all parties. Other councils could consider their work with Aboriginal people in their municipalities, and how they capture, measure and share that information.

⁹ Helping Achieve Reconciliation Together, a joint initiative of Reconciliation Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association

Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community.



Contributing to VAAF actions for strong culture, engaged people and confident communities.

Partnerships and proper engagement with Aboriginal groups occur from the start of a planning process, and are critical for genuine reconciliation, and addressing specific local needs for successful and long lasting outcomes. Embedding engagement and reconciliation principles in a formal and cross-council approach can provide stronger, long term outcomes.

Local Government Victoria will support good practice awards with Reconciliation Victoria, the Victorian Local Governance Association and LGPro to celebrate progress and achievements by local councils in partnerships and collaborations that improve relationships and create opportunities for greater Aboriginal involvement. The awards provide an opportunity to showcase good practice and are an opportunity for councils to learn more about the work of the sector in this area.



Case study: Bullawah Cultural Trail and Marmungan Rock, Wangaratta

The Bullawah Cultural Trail showcases the cultural heritage of the Pangerang People along the Ovens River, through a series of interpretive signs, sculptures, a Bush Tucker Garden and the Marmungan Rock - a local honour roll acknowledging Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal elders and community leaders. The trail has been developed to celebrate, share and record the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the area, which is spiritually significant and rich in history. The Pangerang People maintain strong links with Country and the name Bullawah, from *Bulla* - meaning two and *wah* - meaning water, signifies the joining of two rivers (Ovens and King) as well as the two suspension bridges crossing the river and the coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. A collaborative project between the Rural City of Wangaratta, the Wangaratta Local Aboriginal Network known locally as the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network, and local Elders with funding from Regional Development Victoria, the Bullawah Cultural Trail is a source of pride and recognition not only for the local Pangerang People but for the entire local community.

Photo: Bush Tucker Garden, Bullawah Cultural Trail
Courtesy of Marc Bongers



Case study: Wurundjeri Stories Heritage Trail

Wurundjeri Stories is an interpretive signage trail along the Yarra River at Pound Bend, Warrandyte, that explores the Wurundjeri history, culture, traditional life, spirituality, historic events and the people linked to this sacred site. The trail was developed through the collaboration of many partners including Wurundjeri Council, Manningham City Council, Parks Victoria, Aboriginal Victoria and the local Aboriginal community. Hinged upon Wurundjeri heritage site preservation and reconnection to country, the Heritage Trail also provides opportunities for mentoring for the next generation of cultural leaders, future employment, school excursions and cultural tourism.

Photo: Wurundjeri Stories Trail at Pound Bend
Courtesy of Manningham City Council

Case study: Integrated Planning

Panton Hill Bushland Reserve System in Nillumbik Shire Council form part of the living landscape of the Wurundjeri people and provides an authentic environment in which to understand the deeper significance of Aboriginal cultural heritage and ongoing connection to, and care for Country. Elders and Nillumbik Shire Council have been working with



many partners toward reconciliation through an Aboriginal cultural heritage project 'Reconnecting the Songlines: The rejuvenation of the Aboriginal cultural landscape of Nillumbik'. The development of a rich cultural education trail through the reserve system will integrate with other Aboriginal cultural programs and sites across the Shire to form a comprehensive, cultural education tool. These trails will provide educational opportunities and cultural awareness programs for schools, the local community and the public. Community have enjoyed immersive experiences on Country through Aboriginal cultural activities, stories, dancing, and yarning around a campfire through several events and celebrations, including the Spirit of Place Indigenous Festival at St Andrews market. The cultural trails and special sites being developed throughout the reserves will be a place for ongoing creative exchange between artists, ecologists; local Aboriginal people and the community. By encouraging this positive cultural exchange, partners hope to build on initiatives already achieved and continue to establish real and practical reconciliation outcomes. Through a deeper appreciation of place the community can be inspired to care for the natural and cultural environment for generations to come.

Photo: Reconnecting the songlines: the rejuvenation of the Aboriginal cultural landscape of Nillumbik
Courtesy of Nillumbik Shire Council



Photo: Spirit of the Land art installation
Courtesy of Monash City Council

Case Study: Spirit of the Land, Hurst Reserve, Oakleigh

In 2010, Monash City Council engaged a team of three Indigenous artists - Megan Cadd, Maree Clarke and Vicki Couzens in collaboration with Artery Co-operative - to design and deliver a major public art installation at Hurst Reserve, Oakleigh. The site is significant for its many reasons: a prominent intersection; for its location at a significant landscape threshold between the coastal sand belt and the Monash hills; and for its cultural significance as a meeting and gathering place for generations of Aboriginal people travelling between the bay and the eastern hills.

Spirit of the Land was conceived as Bunjil's breast feather, fallen to the ground to spark the revitalization of the earth. As described in the concept proposal: *'The feather is a powerful symbol of life, belonging and connection...It is the first work of a possible series. It is intended as a signifier of the sacred, the spiritual; in the form of a blessing from Bunjil to renew the site.'* The realization of the concept required a collaborative partnership between Council and the artists. The site was carefully shaped to reflect the proposal: *'Symbolically and visually the berms rise up from the landscape and appear almost skeletal, the bones of the earth or from the air. The site resembles a bird's wing.'* It is a visually striking artwork to celebrate Aboriginal culture, at a significant and prominent location.

Objective B: Increased Aboriginal representation in local government elections and participation in council decision making

Action 4: In collaboration with Aboriginal communities and councils, Local Government Victoria will develop and promote a range of best practice case studies for different governance arrangements between councils and Aboriginal communities.

Lead: LGV
Support: MAV

Action 5: Local Government Victoria will provide funding for programs that encourage Aboriginal women to nominate as candidates in 2020 local government elections.

Lead: LGV
Support: VLGA

There are a number of ways councils can engage with Aboriginal people in council business and decision making. Councils can actively encourage Aboriginal people to stand for council – for example, by circulating council election information, holding information sessions with local Aboriginal organisations, and developing Aboriginal communication plans for elections.

Engagement in council decision making can extend to support other avenues of Aboriginal leadership that enable greater participation within all areas of council – for example, through reference groups, standing committees, consultative committees, and employment of elders or Traditional Owner representatives. Each council needs to determine their approach in collaboration with their Aboriginal community, to ensure that the Aboriginal community is front and centre in shaping policy and service delivery.

The Glenelg Aboriginal Partnership Agreement 2011-2020, is a strong statement of reconciliation, and provides a practical example of council and local Aboriginal communities working collaboratively to improve Aboriginal community involvement in council decision making, reconciliation and local government service delivery.

Some councils have a policy that ensures their council plans go through a process for sign off with their relevant Aboriginal groups as part of a formal planning process. Formalising engagement structures or processes strengthens the long term approach by embedding it within council business, moving beyond individual relationships, and can further be supported by including cultural competency training for all councillors and staff.

Yarra City Council employs a Wurundjeri elder which enables the council to work closely with Traditional Owners as well as the local Aboriginal community.

GoWomenLG is a state-wide program run by the Victorian Local Governance Association and the Office of Women's Policy, to encourage and prepare women to run as candidates in local government elections. In 2015 the Victorian Government committed \$25,000 in additional funding to extend the GoWomenLG program to encourage Aboriginal women to nominate as candidates in the 2016 local government elections. The GoWomenLG program helped to raise the numbers of women, including Aboriginal women, candidates, however representation still lags behind men.

Case study: Regional local government-Aboriginal forums

Local councils and Aboriginal communities working in clusters or networks can be a strong and effective solution for regional planning, engagement and developing partnerships and policy. Networks can strengthen working relationships between local councils and Aboriginal communities by increasing capacity through collaborative projects, expertise and links with the local Aboriginal community.

The **Western Region Local Government Reconciliation Network (WRLGRN)** consists of six councils across Melbourne's western metropolitan region (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham City Councils) and Aboriginal and community representatives. This network aims to strengthen the capacity of local government to partner and carry out reconciliation focused strategies and plans, as well as undertake shared regional actions.

The **Inter-Council Aboriginal Consultative Committee (ICACC)** was established in 1997 by Aboriginal people, service providers and local councils in Melbourne's south-east metropolitan area, to enable greater Aboriginal community involvement in decision making. The ICACC includes six local councils (Bass Coast, Casey, Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula) and links Aboriginal people to the broader community and services through developing partnerships, strategic planning and policy development. In 2009 the ICACC won the local government category of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Wurreker Awards.

The **Eastern Metro Region LGA Indigenous Planners Network (EMRIPN)** includes seven local councils (Yarra Ranges, Manningham, Maroondah, Knox, Whitehorse, Boroondara and Monash), for information exchange, policy development and support. The Network helps Aboriginal staff and planners to discuss and negotiate complex issues, share ideas and implement actions relevant to Aboriginal communities. It also provides a forum for meet with Traditional Owners and Local Aboriginal Networks. The Network is hosted by each of the local councils in turn.

Objective C: Local government and Aboriginal communities are supported to achieve reconciliation outcomes

Action 6: Local Government Victoria and Reconciliation Victoria will develop a complementary evaluation and feedback tool for councils to review performance and work towards reconciliation action.

Lead: LGV
Support: RV

Action 7: Aboriginal Victoria and Local Government Victoria will support councils to develop Reconciliation Action Plans and other partnership planning documents that set out engagement strategies and agreed actions with Aboriginal groups.

Lead: AV, LGV
Support: RV, MAV

It is important that Victorian local councils review their reconciliation and engagement strategies and build collaborative relationships with the Aboriginal community in planning, decision making, programs and services across all areas of their organisations. Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) and dedicated Aboriginal engagement staff within councils can help to build relationships with Aboriginal community members. This will help to facilitate multiple reconciliation outcomes, including specific areas of rights and interests of recognised Traditional Owner groups and Registered Aboriginal Parties. Some councils have processes in place to regularly review their reconciliation and engagement activities with Aboriginal partners and community and this can encourage and support partnerships.

Resources:

- *LAN Five Year Plan 2016-2020:*
<http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-community-development/local-aboriginal-networks-lans>
- *Know your councils website:*
<https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/>
- *Maggolee website:*
<http://www.maggolee.org.au/>
- *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse: Resource sheet No. 23 - Engagement with Indigenous communities in key sectors.* Janet Hunt, October 2013: www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap
- *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum:*
<http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG.pdf>



Photo: Wood carving by Judy Nicholson
on the Yanggai Reserve sign
Courtesy of Nillumbik Shire Council

Council as Employer and Procurer

Objective D: Increased employment of Aboriginal people in councils and local businesses

Action 8: Local Government Victoria and Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will assist councils to set and improve their targets for Aboriginal staff employment and procurement of Aboriginal businesses.

Lead: LGV
Support: DEDJTR

Action 9: Municipal Association of Victoria will promote the MAV Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Framework to encourage councils to employ and retain more Aboriginal people in local government.

Lead: MAV
Support: AV, LAN

Action 10: Local Government Victoria and Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will write new guidance for the local government sector in relation to the use of social procurement strategies to engage Aboriginal businesses and generate Aboriginal employment.

Lead: LGV, DEDJTR
Support: AV and MAV

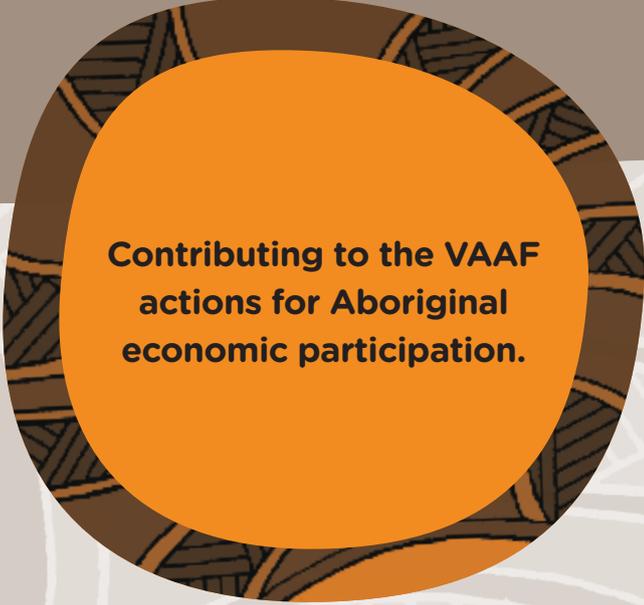
Economic participation and development have been identified as a high priority by Aboriginal communities around Victoria in recognition of the role economic participation has in building self-esteem, independence, and positive role models. The flow-on benefits of increased economic participation in terms of health and social wellbeing are also significant. Strong and genuine partnerships between councils and Aboriginal and Traditional Owner groups can deliver employment and business participation opportunities that contribute to closing the economic gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Victoria's councils are a significant contributor to our economy. Each year they employ more than 50,000 people and deliver \$9.1 billion in services including more than \$2 billion in infrastructure. Councils also manage over \$83 billion in vital public assets. This presents significant opportunities for employment and procurement

of services between local government and Aboriginal people, businesses and community organisations.

Evidence shows that setting tangible and measurable employment targets is the best way to increase procurement of specific sectors. The Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy has set a target of three per cent for Commonwealth contracts by 2019-20, which has already shown success. The Victorian Government is also looking to develop strategies to increase its procurement from Aboriginal businesses. Councils can consider setting their own procurement targets, specific to their particular context (for example, number of Aboriginal businesses in the area). The nine Regional Procurement Excellence Networks created with representation from all 79 councils, provide a forum to develop and communicate best practice procurement guidelines across the local government sector.

More opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians to secure jobs or operate business enterprises, build self-esteem, economic wealth, positive role models and contribute to Victoria's economy.



Contributing to the VAAF actions for Aboriginal economic participation.

Land management, including the management of natural resources and cultural heritage, is a key area in which the Traditional Owner Corporations have specific legal and cultural rights, interests and obligations, and can be a key area for council procurement.

Providing culturally supportive work environments for new Aboriginal employees, and support mechanisms such as mentoring, cultural competency training for all staff, and establishing an employment and retention strategy will help councils reach their Aboriginal employment targets. Supporting permanent Aboriginal dedicated roles embedded across the whole organisation can build inclusion, provide economic stability for individuals and better economic outcomes for the community.

There are a number of Aboriginal employment guides available, including the Municipal Association of Victoria's Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Framework, to help Victorian councils employ more Aboriginal people. The framework includes comprehensive information, guides, fact sheets and resources as well as background information and key actions for councils.

Objective E: Increased Aboriginal economic participation opportunities and resources between local governments, Traditional Owner Corporations and Aboriginal communities

Action 11: Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will maintain and promote an up to date register of Aboriginal businesses in the Victorian Aboriginal Business Directory.

Lead: DEDJTR
Support: MAV

Action 12: The Victorian Government will develop a number of business incubator pilot projects to support councils strengthen local Aboriginal businesses and to increase engagement with Aboriginal businesses via procurement processes.

Lead: DEDJTR, DPC
Support: LGV, MAV

Action 13: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will identify a number of place-based opportunities for integrated planning to strengthen culture, build inclusion and deliver economic participation opportunities for Aboriginal communities as part of Regional and Metropolitan Partnerships.

Lead: DELWP
Support: RDV

Councils can play a major role in supporting Aboriginal economic development by purchasing goods and services from Aboriginal owned and run businesses, and are a key conduit for the community to engage with Aboriginal businesses. Councils most commonly procure heritage, catering and land management services. Smaller Aboriginal businesses can sub-contract to, or form partnerships with, larger corporations to tender for projects. Land and sea management of traditional Country, which may cross-over many local government areas, is one key area for working with Traditional Owner Corporations to develop procurement practices.

The Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources maintains and promotes an accurate, current register of Aboriginal businesses in the Victorian Aboriginal Business Directory. Local Government Victoria will work closely with the Municipal Association of Victoria to ensure all councils are aware of opportunities to engage Aboriginal businesses in council procurement activities, and to promote Aboriginal businesses in their own municipality.

Economic development can create multiplier effects for Aboriginal communities and the wider community. Aboriginal enterprises are around 100 times more likely to employ Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal enterprises, and strengthening this sector will have a significant flow-on-impact for Aboriginal employment.

When Nillumbik Shire Council contracted an emerging Aboriginal artist Judy Nicholson to create artwork and carvings for the Panton Hill Bushland Reserves and facilitate cultural events, they also provided support to assist the artist comply with OH&S, contractual and insurance requirements, and sponsorship to develop artwork and facilitation skills. This helped the artist expand her artwork and profile, and also enabled positive and valuable cross cultural experiences for the community attending events.



Photo: Djirri Djirri dance troupe, 'Reconnecting the Songlines'
Courtesy of Nillumbik Shire Council

By incubating ideas and making them happen we strengthen connections between Aboriginal businesses and councils. This enables greater opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to be a preferred supplier to councils. The Municipal Association of Victoria has begun a scoping study to investigate this approach, and the Department of Premier and Cabinet with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will continue to develop and refine strategies to pilot broader Aboriginal business development and promotion. Examining the social determinants that may affect Aboriginal employment rates and understanding the enabling factors which foster and sustain local Aboriginal businesses and social enterprises, will be one important aspect of the pilot. Engaging with the newly developed Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board will bring a broader set of experiences to guide the pilot. Learning from these economic development projects and pilots can continue to inform local and state government policy and action to support ongoing Aboriginal employment and economic development.

A landscape approach where Country re-emerges, crossing local government boundaries, provides many opportunities to network and share

costs. A network of councils together with Traditional Owner groups, could share marketing and promotion of cultural interpretation trails and develop complementary cultural education and interpretation resources, providing one complete cultural education resource or tourism opportunity.

By supporting partnerships between local governments, Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal communities we can identify place-based opportunities for integrated planning. These have social and cultural benefits, build economic participation, and can leverage current partnerships to attract further investment to deliver shared priority projects. Regional assemblies, hosted by Regional Partnerships provide a clear pathway into government decision making for the priorities identified by regional communities.

Engaging through Country-based Plans developed by Traditional Owner groups can assist to identify the overlap between council and Traditional Owner priorities, and channel resources to support those priorities.

Case study: Aboriginal employment approaches in councils

Innovative employment programs have been developed in a number of councils to increase Aboriginal employment.

The **Latrobe City Council** developed the 'Steps to the Future' program to improve Aboriginal employment opportunities in Gippsland. The program is not limited to any particular industry or region in Gippsland and both private and public sector employers participate. The program offers pre-employment training, wage assistance, cross-cultural training for employers and mentoring and support to both the trainee and employer to assist career development and long term job outcomes.

The **City of Whittlesea**, through the 'Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan' provides a road map to foster a culturally appropriate and inclusive workplace for Aboriginal people. The council has a target to increase the proportion of Aboriginal people employed at council to 1.5 per cent by October 2017, by focusing on: workforce environment and cultural competency; attraction, recruitment and selection; retention and career development; and resources, governance and reporting. The City of Whittlesea currently has ten Aboriginal staff members.



Photo: Pre-employment training group
Courtesy of Latrobe City Council

Photo: Shoana Stewart receiving 2014 Wurraker Local Government Award
Courtesy of City of Whittlesea



The **Mildura Rural City** Council through its Aboriginal Action Committee, developed a strategic approach to providing sustainable career opportunities for Aboriginal people and supporting business and economic development in the local Aboriginal community. Since 2014 this approach has resulted in 20 positions, over 3 per cent of the council workforce. The Aboriginal Action Committee, established in 2011 to activate collaboration, partnerships and engagement between council and the Aboriginal community, was the driving force for this success.

The **City of Melbourne** has developed an Aboriginal Procurement Strategy to help Aboriginal businesses supply their services to council. The City of Melbourne has set a target of 0.9 percent of its annual budget (\$2.25 million) over three years. To commence and promote this strategy the City of Melbourne delivered an Aboriginal Supplier Expo in partnership with Supply Nation. The expo showcased a wide variety of service providers, from Aboriginal recruitment and catering to horticulture and construction. Open to all City of Melbourne employees, the expo was an opportunity for staff to meet Aboriginal service providers and better understand how they might procure goods and services from them. The City of Melbourne also participates in the Jawun Secondment Program, which connects council employees with the Aboriginal community across Australia through a six-week secondment program. Now in its second year, four City of Melbourne staff participate in the program each year.

In partnership with Yenbena Training Centre and Rural Access, **Moira Shire Council** supports a Certificate II in Horticulture, to increase vocational educational opportunities for Aboriginal community members. As a result of this program Yenbena is investigating ways to create a sustainable community enterprise through selling produce from the community garden that the students established.

Photo: Robert Young, Director of Blinte, installing LED lights at Mornington Peninsula Shire Depot
Courtesy of Richard Young



Case study: Aboriginal businesses partnerships

Encouraging partnerships between Aboriginal and other businesses or contractors can assist Aboriginal employment and economic development, beyond individuals and into the Aboriginal communities. Successful Aboriginal business employment models that align within Aboriginal cultural and community structures tend to be more successful and can spread economic benefits beyond the individual. A recent partnership between Blinte, an Aboriginal business that specialises in lighting and installation, and Broadspectrum, have teamed up to deliver a contract to **Mornington Peninsula Shire** to replace fluorescent tubes in council depot offices with environmentally friendly LED lighting. The partnership creates Aboriginal employment opportunities, provides additional exposure and support for Blinte and assists Broadspectrum meet Aboriginal employment targets. Blinte's employment model draws on a pool of employees from family groups, and the family groups also provide informal support and mentoring to the employee. Training, support and opportunities to move through the business and increase income is factored into long term employment pathways, providing additional opportunities as participants acquire skills, training qualifications and experiences working in industry. Support includes considerations that are not usually factored in for mainstream employment, including transport to and from the workplace, mentoring and necessary equipment: simple solutions to what are often insurmountable problems to gain entry into the workforce.

Photo: Shane Anstee, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Adrian Doye, City of Greater Bendigo, repairing fencing at a council managed site
Courtesy of City of Greater Bendigo

Case study: Djandak sub-consulting to Greater Bendigo City Council

Djandak, the commercial operation wholly owned by of Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, has recently partnered with the City of Greater Bendigo to provide sub-contracting services to undertake roadside vegetation assessment works and environmental services across the shire. The City hosts a Djandak employee within the Sustainable Environment Unit of the City, providing two-way information exchange and linkages across both organisations building capacities and establishing a basis for long term partnership. In another initiative, the City contracted Djandak to consult on the development of the new Environment Strategy, providing important insight from Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Traditional Owners on aspects of sustainability and liveability for the long term benefit local communities. The council found this input was invaluable in demonstrating the need for all people to connect to their natural world around them (Country) for improved wellbeing and environmental outcomes. These initiatives are of importance to creating employment and economic opportunities for the Traditional Owners and to maintain their continuing connection with Country.



Where employment opportunities within a council are limited by factors such as low staff turnover, regional approaches can support local Aboriginal employment. This may be achieved by a cluster of regional councils offering a traineeship, enabling trainees to gain experience and skills across multiple organisations and by councils working together to share costs. This strategy could be especially useful for engaging with Traditional Owner groups or Corporations, so that Aboriginal people can be employed on their Country where this overlaps a number of councils. Regional forums can promote the use of Aboriginal businesses and place-based opportunities. Local Aboriginal Networks can assist in developing a local community employment strategy.

Resources:

- Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Framework, Municipal Association of Victoria: <http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/indigenous/aboriginal-employment/Pages/default.aspx>
- Victorian Aboriginal Business Directory: http://directory.business.vic.gov.au/aboriginal/home#.V_2v0nn7VaQ
- Kinaway Victorian Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce maintain a register of Aboriginal businesses in Victoria: <http://www.kinaway.com.au>
- Australia's first national Indigenous business portal: www.blackpages.com.au
- The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board: <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/victorian-aboriginal-economic-priorities>
- First Australians Chamber of Commerce and Industry: <http://facci.org.au/>
- Supply Nation: <http://www.supplynation.org.au/>
- Handbook for Indigenous Employment, Social Ventures Australia: <http://www.socialventures.com.au/work/handbook-for-indigenous-employment/>
- Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria: <http://www.ilnv.com.au/>
- Closing the Gap Clearinghouse: Resource sheet No. 3 - Increasing Indigenous employment rates. Matthew Gray, Boyd Hunter and Shaun Lohoar, March 2012: www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap
- Closing the Gap Clearinghouse: Resource sheet No. 30 - Success factors for Indigenous entrepreneurs and community-based enterprises. Sam Morley, April 2014: www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap
- Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020: <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/victorian-aboriginal-economic-priorities>
- Regional Procurement Excellence Networks <http://lgpro.com/sigs/procurement> provides a forum for professional development opportunities, lessons and best practice approaches through a Local Government Victoria and LGPro partnership.



Council as Service Provider and Planner

Objective F: Enhanced municipal public health planning and delivery to improve health and well-being outcomes for Aboriginal communities

Action 14: The Department of Health and Human Services and Municipal Association of Victoria will provide updated guidance for councils on engaging and partnering with local Aboriginal communities and organisations to develop inclusive Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.

Lead: DHHS and MAV
Support: AV and LGV, VLGA

Action 15: The Department of Health and Human Services and the Municipal Association of Victoria will promote examples of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and case studies that demonstrate engagement of local Aboriginal people, communities and organisations in development of local policy and actions to support better health.

Lead: DHHS and MAV
Support: AV and LGV, VLGA

Through the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, councils are required to protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing within their municipality, and to produce a Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan every four years.

Councils are in an ideal position to work with local Aboriginal communities to co-design and identify actions for inclusion in their Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans that improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing. For example, councils can partner with local Aboriginal communities and organisations to

co-design and deliver programs and services. They can also work with local community members and organisations to improve local environments (built, social, economic and natural) and settings. This encompasses early childhood care, schools and workplaces.

Councils can also employ Aboriginal people to build partnerships and capacity in councils to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing. It will only be possible to 'close the gap' in Indigenous health by addressing the full range of the social determinants of health, specific to each local council and community.

The health of mothers and babies during pregnancy and in early childhood can have a significant and far reaching effect on children's survival, development and wellbeing well into adult years.

Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community.



Contributing to VAAF actions for health and well-being, early childhood health and development.

The Yarra City Council's Billabong BBQ program engages with marginalised groups and links them with relevant service providers, also providing a means of social inclusion and a healthy feed. The program provides a place where Aboriginal people feel safe, welcome and valued, and are more likely to access health and welfare services. This best practice community health program was awarded a Regional and State Justice award.

Supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans present a formalised mechanism to embed Aboriginal health and wellbeing into local government policy and actions.

Case Study: supporting and connecting youth in East Gippsland Shire

A large, prominent and colourful spray art mural has recently been completed in the heart of the Bairnsdale CBD. The mural takes inspiration from the history of the GunaiKurnai people. It shows the journey of the Bogong moth and dingo making their way from the mountains to the sea, a journey also taken by the GunaiKurnai people. Coordinated by **East Gippsland Shire**, the project aimed to reduce graffiti by engaging young people in public art to help them feel a sense of ownership and pride in the local area and to showcase local Aboriginal culture and stories. The mural was created by young Aboriginal people, with mentoring support provided by local artists. Aboriginal youth included those enrolled in the Federation Training's Koorie VCAL program, as well as those who may have a history of graffiti vandalism and at-risk youth.

Photo: Participant in the creative zone
Courtesy of East Gippsland Shire Council





Objective G: Enhanced Municipal Early Years Plans to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal children

Action 16: The Department of Education and Training and the Municipal Association of Victoria will work with councils to increase Aboriginal access to and participation in the Municipal Child Health Service, with actions included in the Municipal Early Years Plans.

Lead: DET, MAV
Support: LGV

Objective H: Stronger engagement and participation of young Aboriginal people in local government decision making

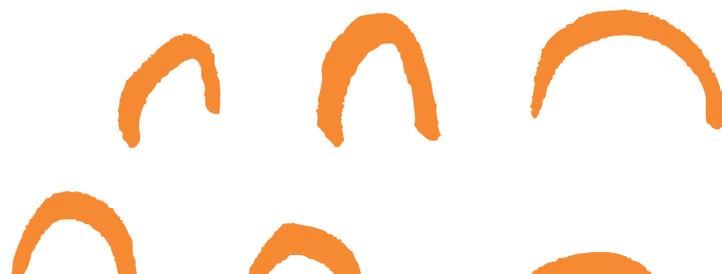
Action 17: The Department of Health and Human Services will provide guidance to councils to support opportunities for young people's voices to be heard, and influence and participate in council decision making.

Lead: DHHS
Support: LGV, MAV

All councils develop Municipal Early Years Plans. These provide strategic direction for education, care and health programs, and activities that impact on children and their families. Evidence shows that the more positive experiences and opportunities that a young person has in the early years of their life and through schooling, the more resilient and successful they will be in the adult years, and the more they will achieve their potential and be able to fully participate in society. Supporting foundations – family, community, opportunities, place (home and connection to country), as well as access to all services – vitally influence each person's life. Co-designing services acknowledges the empowerment and pride that comes with Aboriginal culture, knowledge and respect, and the important role these play in shaping a person's outlook, resilience and aspirations.

The Greater Geelong City Council has entered into a lease with Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative to run the Rosewall Kindergarten from Wathaurong's Morgan St site. The number of Aboriginal children attending the kindergarten program has increased since moving to this site, and this remains a true success story of two organisations working together to achieve real outcomes.

Councils play a key role in the delivery of youth services. They often provide the most immediate experience of being part of a democratic process and provide opportunities for young people to participate in their communities through funding for youth workers and support for youth councils. Amplifying the voice of young Aboriginal people in government decision making and priority setting can occur through a range of processes, such as through the Victorian Youth Congress and via Aboriginal representatives of the Youth Summit. The *Ministerial Statement on Local Government* outlines opportunities to strengthen local support for social inclusion, including better support for young people. This work is vital for the future health of civil society and is being supported by Office for Youth in the Department of Health and Human Services, Local Government Victoria and the Municipal Association of Victoria.





Objective 1: Continue to work with councils to enhance Home and Community Care Services to ensure that they are culturally appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal people

Action 18: The Department of Health and Human Services and Municipal Association of Victoria will provide updated guidance for councils to assist delivery of Home and Community Care services in culturally appropriate ways that respond to Aboriginal people's needs.

Lead: DHHS
Support: MAV

The Aboriginal Education Officer at the City of Melbourne will work across the community services portfolio to enhance Aboriginal participation in children's service programs. Ballarat City Council supports a Koorie Engagement Action Group - one of the council's key advisory committees to support council develop activities, services and strategic direction that are responsive to and inclusive of Aboriginal community.

Home and Community Care (HACC) services provide vital support to Aboriginal people and their families. These are delivered by councils with funding support from the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. HACC activities include assessment and care management, home care, property maintenance, personal care, meals, planned activity groups and respite services. The National Disability Insurance Scheme and the My Aged Care sector reforms mean the HACC Program for Young People is available to Aboriginal people aged under 50, and the Commonwealth Home Support Program is available for people over 50.

Councils can develop strategies that ensure HACC services are delivered in a culturally appropriate and responsive way. For example, a dedicated service that employs Aboriginal people in Home and Community Care services provides employment opportunities as well as offering Aboriginal people access to a culturally appropriate service. Engaging with local health Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is critical to provide local guidance.



Case study: Gathering Places

Gathering Places are community owned/operated places that provide opportunities for social connection and hosting of important services determined by each Aboriginal community, developed in partnership with local councils and supported by Local Aboriginal Networks. Community partnerships have created Gathering Places in Doveton, Melton, Frankston, St Kilda and Wodonga, and two are planned for Wyndham and Whittlesea.

Wyndham City Council is working with Aboriginal communities to develop a future community centre. The project is supported by the Victorian government to deliver a place-based initiative which will celebrate Aboriginal culture.

The **Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre** will be a culturally safe place for strengthening community and improving coordination and connection of services and programs for Aboriginal people living in Wyndham. Construction begins in 2017 and will be co-located with a new family and community centre in the suburb of Wyndham Vale. An interim site has been established at Victoria University Werribee campus so programs and activities can begin immediately. The project has received direct support through the Department of Health and Human Services Koolin Balit initiative, for a designated Aboriginal project officer who is hosted within council and who supports the Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre Committee (WACCC). In addition, DELWP has provided \$1.5million in funding through the Growing Suburbs Fund towards construction, with the expected opening in 2019.



Photo: Senior cloakmakers Maree Clark and Len Tregoning with workshop participant Rahima Hayes at the Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre interim site
Courtesy of Megan Evans



Case study: Gathering Places

Kirrip House is an Aboriginal Community Centre located in Melton. Melton City Council has provided the community with a council owned building to run a range of services including:

- Aboriginal support groups, activities, programs and services
- community volunteer services and programs that includes Kirrip Food Share and Kirrip Homework Club
- a range of health and well-being programs
- counselling services.

The centre is supported and governed by the Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation. The project also received funding through Koolin Balit initiative to employ an Aboriginal project officer to oversee the development of services, community engagement and overall management.

kirrip
Aboriginal Corporation:
Founded by Friendship
Inspired by Community



The **Casey Aboriginal Gathering Place** in Doveton is a community driven council facility, developed with assistance from the Local Aboriginal Network and Casey City Council. The Gathering Place is a hub for people to come together and relax, share conversation and company and engage in several programs and services developed with and for the Aboriginal community. Various activities operate from the Gathering Place, through partnership and support of local Aboriginal organisations such as the Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative, including:

- youth group
- youth holiday program (also supported by Victorian Police)
- interactive gardening group
- homework group for primary and secondary students (with volunteer tutors through Monash University)
- art and yarn group
- men's group
- playgroup
- 'Boys on the Bounce' and 'Girls on the Go' youth programs.

Resources

- Life is health is life: taking action to close the gap: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/life-is-health-is-life is a useful framework for shaping municipal public health and well-being planning with Aboriginal communities.
- Koolin Balit 2012-2022 Victorian Aboriginal Health Policy: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/health-strategies/aboriginal-health/koolin-balit>
- Victorian Health and Well-being Plan 2015-2019: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/health-strategies/public-health-wellbeing-plan>
- Fair Foundation: the VicHealth Framework for Health Equity provides evidence-based direct action: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-vichealth-framework-for-health-equity>
- Marrung: Victorian Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/aboriginal/Marrung_Aboriginal_Education_Plan_2016-2026.pdf
- Growing Suburbs Fund: <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/local-government/council-funding/growing-suburbs-fund>
- Youth Policy – Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria: <http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/government-info-assistance/youth-programs/victorian-government-youth-policy>
- Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council: <http://www.viyac.org.au/>



Council as Public Authority

Objective J: Stronger collaboration between councils, Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owner groups for the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and management of Crown lands

Action 19: Aboriginal Victoria and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council will develop guidance to ensure councils are aware of their responsibilities and of the role and statutory authority of Registered Aboriginal Parties, and the role of other Traditional Owner groups (where no Registered Aboriginal party is appointed) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Lead: AV, VAHC
Support: LGV, MAV

Action 20: Aboriginal Victoria will provide support and guidance to councils to engage Registered Aboriginal Parties or other Traditional Owner groups (where no Registered Aboriginal Party is appointed) for planning and management decisions around Aboriginal cultural heritage, land use planning and development.

Lead: AV
Support: LGV, MAV

Action 21: The Department of Environment Land Water and Planning will provide guidance to councils to include statutory requirements related to Aboriginal cultural heritage matters in their Municipal Strategic Statement, and all related strategic planning documents.

Lead: DELWP
Support: LGV, MAV

The Victorian Constitution recognises the unique status of the Aboriginal peoples as descendants of Australia's first people. It recognises that Aboriginal peoples make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of the state. Traditional Owner rights are recognised under legislation in several ways:

- The Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* recognises the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs.
- The Victorian *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* recognises Traditional Owner groups based on their traditional and cultural associations and enables Victorian Government to make formal agreements with those groups.
- The Victorian *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* is Victoria's principal legislation for the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The range of native title determinations and agreements give rise to a range of rights, interests and obligations of Traditional Owners, including in relation to decision making and land use activity on Crown land, cultural heritage and natural resource take and use.

These forms of legal recognition and agreements provide certainty for councils about which Traditional Owner groups they are required to work with, and provide a platform for building formal relationships and ongoing collaboration. Although there is a strong statutory basis for involvement of Aboriginal people under these Acts, early engagement can be the foundation to meaningful partnerships and better outcomes for all concerned.

Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community.



Contributing to the VAAF actions for strong culture, engaged people and confident communities.

Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) are Traditional Owner organisations established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, and that have specific functions to manage Aboriginal cultural heritage within their appointed areas. RAPs are appointed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, and where a RAP has not been appointed, councils can seek support through Aboriginal Victoria to navigate contested country.

There are currently 10 appointed RAPs, together covering over 60 per cent of Victoria.

Local councils have a clear role in working with RAPs for the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Strategic planning tools available within the planning system to protect places of significant Aboriginal cultural heritage, such as Heritage Overlays, Environmental Significance Overlays and local Aboriginal cultural heritage policies, will assist local governments undertake their role as statutory authorities. Inclusion of statutory obligations and strategic planning tools concerning Aboriginal cultural heritage protection and management in each Municipal Strategic Statement will clearly communicate how councils intend to comply with their statutory obligations.



Several mechanisms have been established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* for the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage, including Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) and Cultural Heritage Permits. A CHMP must be approved by the RAP prior to local government issuing any statutory approval, such as a planning permit. The State Planning Policy Framework, established under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, gives councils direction on their responsibilities to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage, including the requirement of councils to consult with RAPs, and the alignment of planning permits with recommendations made under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Act 2016* (Amendment Act) provides for greater involvement of Traditional Owners in decisions regarding their cultural heritage, and greater certainty for Victoria's land use planning and development industries by establishing clear Traditional Owner consultation processes in non-RAP areas ¹⁰.

Early engagement and forward planning where councils and RAPs meet periodically to discuss upcoming works and ensure cultural heritage is managed appropriately under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, allows for effective staff and resource allocation for both the council and the RAP. The process can help to build relationships for long term strategic outcomes.

¹⁰ Further information may be found at: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council

Objective K: Strong Local Government and Traditional Owner engagement to realise Traditional Owner aspirations for Country under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010

Action 22: Victorian Government will support relevant councils and Traditional Owners in the delivery of actions and objectives under the Dja Dja Wurrung Local Government Engagement Strategy.

Lead: LGV
Support: AV, DJR

Action 23: Victorian Government will support relevant councils and Traditional Owners in the delivery of actions and objectives under the Gunaikurnai Local Government Engagement Strategy.

Lead: LGV
Support: AV, DJR

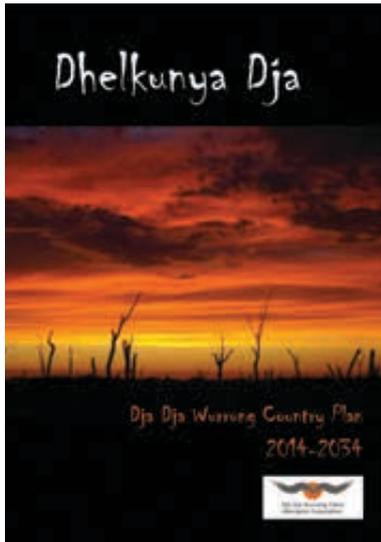
Under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, the Victorian Government entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation in 2013, which formally recognises the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners for part of Central-West Victoria. The Victorian Government entered into a RSA with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation in 2010, which formally recognises the Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Owners (and native title holders) for an area of south-eastern Victoria¹¹.

The Taungurung are in negotiations for an RSA, and five other Traditional Owner groups are seeking entry into negotiations for an RSA. As further agreements are reached more councils are likely to be engaged through this process across Victoria. These agreements are a mechanism to identify and deliver engagement opportunities for Traditional Owner participation across state and local governments, from policy development to business opportunities.

The Dja Dja Wurrung RSA comprises a suite of agreements, including a Local Government Engagement Strategy that incorporates 12 different local councils, in part or whole. The Strategy details 12 actions that aim to improve the economic and social standing of the Dja Dja Wurrung people within municipal government boundaries. The Gunaikurnai RSA incorporates seven local councils, in part or whole.

It can be a lengthy, resource-intensive process for Traditional Owner groups to engage with the often multiple local councils that overlap with traditional Country. Working in clusters can simplify the demand on RAPs and Traditional Owner groups, as well as assist with sustainability or resourcing issues which may be present across councils. For example, Wurundjeri Traditional Owners maintain relationships across 19 local government areas. Country-based Planning or Country Plans can be one mechanism for councils to engage with Traditional Owners, regardless of the outcome of native title or the *Traditional Owners Settlement Act 2010*. This can also guide councils to collaborate across clusters or networks of councils that overlap with traditional Country, to engage with Aboriginal driven priorities for Country.

¹¹ Wotjobaluk Peoples (2005) and Gunditjmara Peoples (2007) have settlements that were entered into prior to the passage of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. The State entered into a Cooperative Management Agreement (2004) and a Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement (2010) with the Yorta Yorta People.



Case study: Country-based Planning

Country-based Planning is a way to plan and look after Country that is led by Traditional Owners who can use Country-based Plans as a tool to express their aspirations, values and concerns for Country, and develop strategies for the future. The planning process gives groups the time and space to look at what is important on Country, tell the story of Country and its people by documenting traditional and western knowledge about important values, and create strategies and actions to protect what is valued. Traditional Owners may decide to include all of Country or only parts of Country, and saltwater or freshwater Country in a Country-based Plan.

A Country Plan can also be a tool to create a common focus that supports community cohesion. It can:

- promote the strengths, skills, capacities and momentum of a group
- give partners and stakeholders an idea of what collaborative work can lead to
- look at long term planning in broader political, economic, social and environmental contexts
- communicate Traditional Owner aspirations, values and concerns for Country

- grow investment and other resources to achieve Traditional Owners' goals
- provide a clear pathway for implementing the strategies and actions contained in the plan
- be a tool for cultural inductions for partners and employees.

Identifying or strengthening partnerships to work together for mutually beneficial outcomes is a key element of Country-based Planning, and where local councils can engage to assist Traditional Owners realise their aspirations for Country. Where traditional Country crosses over several local councils, a Country Plan offers a central, accessible and community driven plan for all council to engage with, be guided by and support Traditional Owners to realise their aspirations for Country. Country-based Planning is widely used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups across Australia, and in Victoria Dja Dja Wurrung and Gunaikurnai people have both developed Country Plans. Other Victorian Aboriginal groups are entering into country-based planning processes to guide future management and build partnerships.

Resources:

- Local Aboriginal Networks: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-community-development/local-aboriginal-networks-lans
- Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs): www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/registered-aboriginal-parties
- RAP map: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/images/Aboriginal_Affairs/VAHC/statewide%20appointed%20raps-sw-24dec13.pdf
- Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations: fvtoc.com.au
- Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council: dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council-publications-and-fact-sheets
- National Native Title Tribunal: www.nntt.gov.au
- Department of Justice, Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/your+rights/native+title/traditional+owner+settlement+act>
- Dhelkunya Dja: Dja Dja Wurrung Country plan 2014-2034: <http://www.djadjawurrung.com.au>
- Gunai Kurnai Whole of Country Plan: <http://www.gunaikurnai.org>
- Guidelines for Country-based Planning, Dermot Smyth: http://sbconsultants.com.au/images/stories/Guidelines_for_Country_Based_Planning.pdf

Timeline dates will be developed with lead and support organisations, and reviewed annually. An indicative timetable for the action plan is outlined here:

Short term

- Update and promote the Maggolee website to councils and Aboriginal people, communities and organisations **(Action 1)**
- Support programs that encourage Aboriginal women to nominate as candidates in the 2020 local government elections **(Action 5)**
- Promote the MAV Employment and Engagement Framework **(Action 9)**
- Maintain and promote an up-to-date register of Aboriginal Business Directory **(Action 11)**
- Develop guidance to ensure councils are aware of their responsibilities and of the role and statutory authority of RAPs under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 **(Action 19)**
- Support relevant councils and Traditional Owners in the delivery of actions and objectives under the Dja Dja Wurrung Local Government Engagement Strategy **(Action 22)**

Medium term

- Establish local government good practice awards **(Actions 2 & 3)**
- Develop and promote best practice case studies for governance arrangements between councils and Aboriginal communities **(Action 4)**
- Develop an evaluation and feedback tool for councils to review performance and work towards reconciliation action **(Action 6)**
- Support councils to develop Reconciliation Action Plans and other partnership planning documents **(Action 7)**
- Develop new guidance for councils on use of social procurement strategies **(Action 10)**
- Develop business incubator pilots to strengthen Aboriginal business opportunities through innovative procurement practices **(Action 12)**
- Support local councils and Aboriginal communities to identify place-based opportunities for integrated planning **(Action 13)**
- Support councils to engage RAPs and other Traditional Owner groups (where no RAP appointed) for planning and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage **(Action 20)**
- Councils to include statutory requirements related to Aboriginal cultural heritage matters in their Municipal Strategic Statement **(Action 21)**
- Support relevant councils and Traditional Owners in the delivery of local government actions and objectives under the Gunaikurnai Local Government Engagement Strategy **(Action 23)**

Long term

- Assist councils to set and improve their targets for Aboriginal staff employment and procurement of Aboriginal businesses **(Action 8)**
- Provide guidance for councils to work with Aboriginal communities to develop inclusive Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans **(Action 14)**
- Promote best practice examples of inclusive Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans **(Action 15)**
- Provide guidance for councils to develop inclusive Municipal Early Years Plans with Aboriginal communities **(Action 16)**
- Provide guidance to councils to support opportunities for young people's voices to be heard, and influence and participate in council decision making **(Action 17)**
- Provide guidance to deliver culturally appropriate and responsive Home and Community Care services **(Action 18)**

