



VACCHO

# Impact Report FY24







Victorian Aboriginal Community  
Controlled Health Organisation

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## Acknowledgment of Country

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) acknowledges the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the lands on which we live and work, and the power and resilience that is shared as members of the world's oldest living culture.

VACCHO respectfully acknowledge that our office is based on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

We pay our respects to Wurundjeri ancestors and caretakers of this land, and to Elders both past and present.

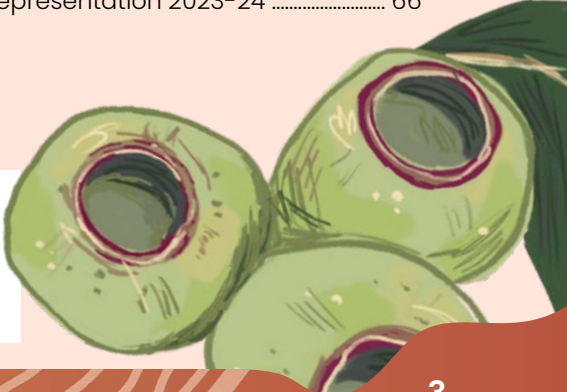
We extend our respect to all Traditional Owners and Elders across the lands on which we and our Members work, and acknowledge their everlasting connection to Country, Culture and Community. They have paved the way, with strength and fortitude, for our future generations.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication includes names and photographs of people who have passed away.





# Foreword from VACCHO CEO, Dr Jill Gallagher AO

Ngatta ('hello' in my traditional Gunditjmara language)

Welcome to VACCHO's Impact Report, covering the 2023–24 Financial Year.

VACCHO is the leading voice for change in Aboriginal health, social, and emotional wellbeing in Victoria. We're also strong and proud advocates for justice, self-determination, and the pursuit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander equity.

Our Impact Report keeps VACCHO Members, Community, and funding partners informed about the progress we've made toward achieving the goals set out in VACCHO's strategic plan, *On Solid Ground*, and its Outcomes Framework. It measures and showcases the tangible achievements we've made for Community over the past 12 months keeping us accountable to those strategic objectives.

Nothing we do is possible without the support of our incredible Members. I'd like to pay tribute to and thank each of them for all that they do for their Communities. We are deeply and personally invested in the work that we and VACCHO Members do to support our Communities.

A powerful message you may have heard from us this past year is: 65,000 Years Strong. This mantra is a testament to the resilience, wisdom, and deep connection our People have with this land.

As a People, we're no strangers to facing challenges and the past 12 months have certainly presented opportunities to show the wider Australian population just how strong and resilient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are.

Of course, the biggest challenge we faced in the past year was campaigning for a Voice to Parliament. While the outcome of the vote didn't give us the desired result, I'm still exceptionally proud of everyone at VACCHO, the Members, and everyone in Community, including our Allies, who worked tirelessly campaigning for the Yes vote. Regardless of the outcome, we are resilient and our resolve has only strengthened.

To say our Community felt hurt and disheartened post-Referendum is a huge understatement – we needed healing. I was most honoured to have been a part of our Gathering of Mob event held at Camp Jungai in November 2023. The event saw hundreds of people come together from all over Victoria on Taungurung Country to reconnect, heal, and re-energize after the disappointing outcome of the Voice Referendum. Families, Elders, and youth gathered to witness and share rich displays of Culture and storytelling. This event was incredibly special to me and was just what Mob needed at a difficult time.

The period of time pre and post Referendum taught us so much and reinforced that we remain Blak, LOUD and PROUD! (A fitting and timely theme for NAIDOC 2024!)

Over the past year, there have been countless moments I look back on with immense pride. Of note, it was a special privilege for me to personally give testimony at the Yoorrook Justice Commission several times over the year. It is the first formal truth-telling process into Australia's historical and ongoing injustices that Mob in Victoria have lived through. With support from my incredible team at VACCHO, I shared my own experiences with injustice and discrimination. I'd like to extend my gratitude to the Yoorrook Commission and everyone who has stepped up and given evidence at the hearings. The importance of developing a shared understanding of the multigenerational impact colonisation, while also shining a light on the diversity, strength, and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, is crucial to developing practical changes to laws, policy, and education.

This is only the third year we've produced our Impact Report. And with each year it's been a privilege to witness the weaving of rich tapestry for generational change. Our Impact Report demonstrates what happens when you put Aboriginal health and Aboriginal hands.

Stay deadly and look after one another.



Dr Jill Gallagher AO





# About us

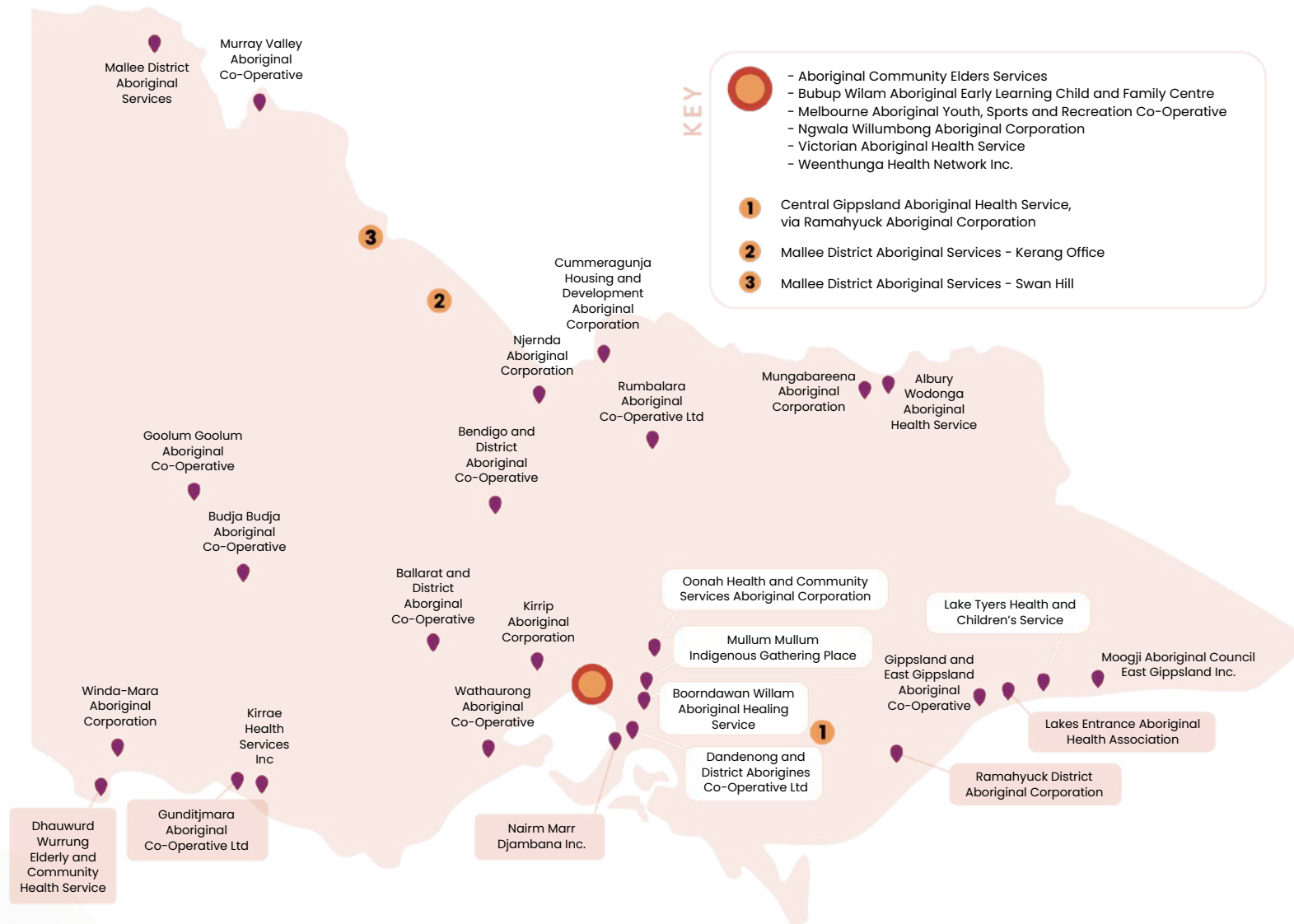
The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) is the peak representative for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Victoria. We lead and support Aboriginal Community Control and the broader health and social services sector to deliver transformative health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria.

VACCHO was established in 1996 after Victoria's Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCOs) identified the need for a united voice from the Community controlled health sector to ensure we had a say in the decisions being made about our Community: putting Aboriginal health back in Aboriginal hands.

Over the last 28 years, VACCHO's Members have grown from humble beginnings as Community organisations with a handful of staff into large, vibrant, high-performing organisations that provide a complex variety of services.

Our Members share our vision to provide the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in Victoria with access to high-quality, culturally safe primary health care, as well as childcare, family services, employment services, housing, and justice.

# VACCHO Members and Associate Members





# VACCHO's Vision

We work with our stakeholders to Close the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing outcomes, creating vibrant and healthy Aboriginal communities capable of, and enabled to, self-determination. By working with our stakeholders to this end, we hope to Close the Gap within a generation.

We want our Members to be thriving, locally based cultural hubs with wrap-around services from Birth to Dreamtime. We want to secure sustainable, long-term growth and independence according to the needs and aspirations of Community.

## To do this, we start at the roots

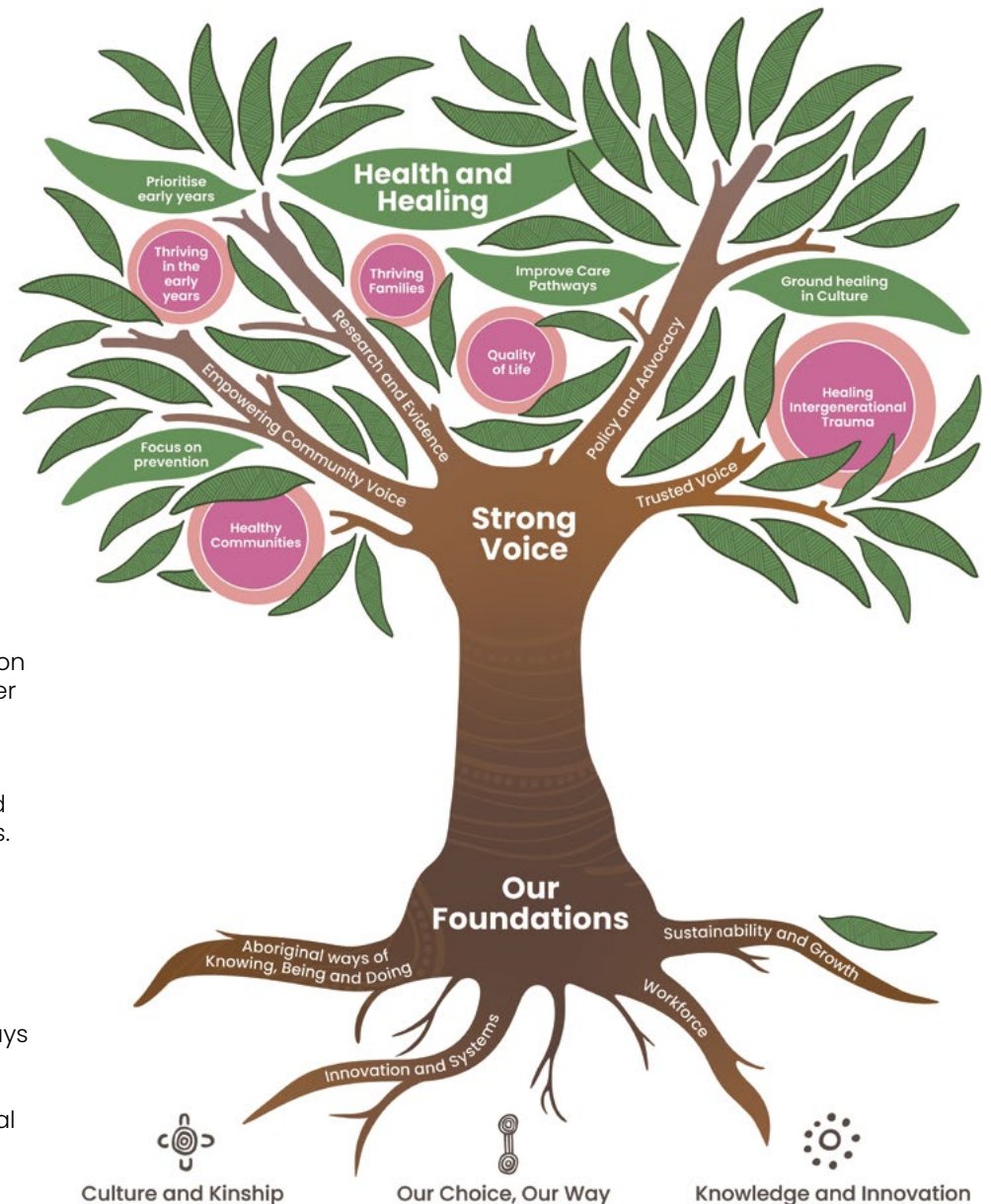
Culture is at the heart of Our Foundations: Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing are central to the way we work and are embedded into everything we do. We invest in innovation and systems to support and grow the capacity of our Members. We focus on sustainability and growth to ensure VACCHO and Members have the self-determination and control over resources to meet Community aspirations. We strengthen, grow, and empower the workforce to deliver culturally safe, holistic health and wellbeing services to Communities.

## On these foundations we grow our Strong Voice, reaching high and wide like the branches of a tree

Our Strong Voice fosters and promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations, experience and innovation, and strengthens VACCHO's position as an authoritative voice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, wellbeing and self-determination. We empower Community voice, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a say in the health and wellbeing decisions that impact them. We strive to be a trusted voice for Community, and trusted custodians of research and evidence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. We use this knowledge to inform our policy and advocacy, influencing decisionmakers on the issues that matter most to our Communities.

## From these branches, new leaves grow

Our Communities will flourish and we will see Health and Healing. By prioritising the early years, our children will thrive and get the best start in life, supported by thriving families. Social and emotional wellbeing services ground healing in Culture and will support our Communities to heal from intergenerational trauma. We will work to improve care pathways so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Elders experiencing poor health and/or disability receive appropriate care and support and have better quality of life. We will focus on prevention, to promote healthy communities: communities in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are healthy in mind, body, and spirit.





# Our Foundations

## 1.1 Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing

### Outcome 1.1.1 The health and wellbeing sector is culturally safe for workforce and Community

#### The development of the Victorian ACCO Model

Victorian ACCOs speak with pride about their holistic, self-determined model of operation. Its origins are in the formation of the Victorian Co-operatives as places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could support each other with any need. When our Members say 'holistic', they mean something beyond what is typical of Aboriginal Health Services in other States.

When government, mainstream health services and even Mob interstate come with their own frame of reference, they can miss the full vision, and also an understanding of what our Members need to fully support Community as they intend.

To build Cultural Safety, and understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, we decided to build a living model that the Sector can use and develop over the years.



#### What we did

- Consulted with Members and key knowledge-holders to develop a draft (October 2023 - March 2024).
- Developed the first full representation of all services offered by Victorian ACCOs.
- Document and website design and review with Members (March - June 2024).
- Revision and final document (June - July 2024) to be annually updated.

#### Our impact

- Decision-makers have better understanding of Victorian ACCOs and their challenges.
- Members are satisfied with VACCHO's effort and engagement to document the Model.
- Members and Community feel pride at the incredible self-determined organisations they have built.

*"ACCOs are born out of Community and respond to Community needs. This is key to their success, but also means government and other decision-makers can struggle to understand how and why they work. The Victorian ACCO Model does a brilliant job of explaining both their complexity and the barriers they face. It's a great starting point for anyone wanting to understand why and how they should engage with ACCOs."*

- Terry Garwood is a Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Wergaia man, and is Deputy Secretary, First Peoples - State Relations Group in the Department of Premier and Cabinet

View or download the full Model here: [vaccho.org.au/vicaccomodel/](http://vaccho.org.au/vicaccomodel/)



## Outcome 1.1.1 The health and wellbeing sector is culturally safe for workforce and Community

### Building understanding through cultural safety training

Through education, we aim to address racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people, in policy-making and decisions, and in frontline service delivery.

We deliver cultural safety training to a wide range of people and organisations: government departments, businesses, health and wellbeing organisations and others from diverse sectors. Our training packages and products are developed by Aboriginal people in Victoria to reflect and celebrate their histories, relationships, and cultures.

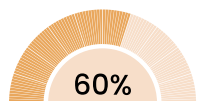
Our Cultural Safety Unit is a for-purpose social enterprise, offering Cultural Safety Training since 2014. It will provide cultural safety audits and accreditation from 2024-25.

### What we did

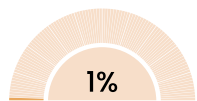
- Reviewed and revamped all course content.
- Conducted 82 cultural safety training sessions to 830 people from 26 different organisations.

### Our impact

- Feedback from the training participants on their level of knowledge of and understanding of the concept of cultural safety:

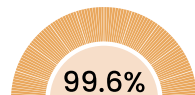


60% said "very good", which remarkably increased from 15% before the training



Only 1% said "limited", which significantly decreased from 28% before the training

- 99.6% of the training participants said they would recommend the training to their colleagues/networks



- Thirteen organisations, including one government department, booked in the whole year - 11 sessions.

### Feedback from training participants:

*"I will absolutely be exploring further opportunities to learn from VACCHO. I have recommended the training to many colleagues and friends. It was an incredible, powerful, reflective training session. Thank you very much!"*

*At a personal level, I was struck with the deep resilience of the First Nations people, considering the horrors endured ... I have so much more learning to do about this history.*

*"Importance of identity, optimism and hope going forward."*



## Outcome 1.1.1 The health and wellbeing sector is culturally safe for workforce and Community

### Building a Cultural Safety Accreditation system

Most service industries have accreditation systems in place to guarantee that services are high quality, responsive, and meet the needs of the people they serve. However, that is not yet in place to ensure mainstream health services provide services consistent with Aboriginal cultural standards and expectations.

The practice of cultural safety is two fold: building knowledge, skills and changing mindset of individuals, and also addressing systemic and structural barriers to create culturally safe practice and environments.

The accreditation process is designed to guide organisations on how to address their cultural responsiveness. It also enhances the perception of organisational accountability and transparency to the Aboriginal community and to funding providers.

VACCHO has been working towards this since 2021, when we developed a feasibility study and business case for a Cultural Safety Accreditation Framework for mainstream health and wellbeing services. This year we have taken significant additional steps.

### What we did

- Created culturally safe service standards to be met by public and Community health services.
- Registered these standards with IP Australia and ACCC.
- Developed a multi-year implementation plan to roll out to all services funded by Department of Health within six years.
- Developed a Victorian Budget Business Case to set up an accreditation system (to be led by an Aboriginal organisation with experience in the health sector) and trial with mainstream health services.

### Our impact

- Secured funding to set up the accreditation systems set up and conduct trials.
- With standards registered, VACCHO can now operate or license an approved Cultural Safety Accreditation process for mainstream health.

## 1.2 Innovation and Systems

### Outcome 1.2.1 Members are satisfied with VACCHO engagement, services and support



#### Members feedback

VACCHO's annual survey of its Members aims to track Member satisfaction with VACCHO as a peak body, providing key information for our planning and aim to do better each year.

Since May 2024, VACCHO is tracking our daily contacts with Members across all areas of support and reporting this to Members CEO's monthly. We look forward to showing an annual picture of Member contacts in our next Impact Report.

#### What are we doing well?

**77%** of Members surveyed said they were satisfied with VACCHO's services and support overall.



**73%** are satisfied with the way VACCHO provides information and advice to Members. This has **increased** by 19% from 54% in FY22/23.



**73%** are satisfied with the way VACCHO represents its Members and advocates on their behalf. This has **slightly increased** by 1% from 72% in FY22/23.



**72%** agreed that they have built capacity in one or more of the following areas with support from VACCHO:

- Workforce recruitment, retention and development**
- Organisational infrastructure**
- Funding sustainability**
- Organisational governance.**

Even though there was a **decrease** from **82%** to **77%** of satisfaction with the *networking opportunities* facilitated by VACCHO (*Forums, Gatherings, Members Meetings etc*), this percentage is still considered relatively high.



#### What could we improve?

Even though there was an **increase** from **54%** in FY22/23 to **66%** of satisfaction with the way VACCHO engages with Members to determine policy, advocacy and program priorities, this area still needs improvement.



**61%** of Members surveyed are satisfied with the support VACCHO provides to your workforce (resources, training, development and networking opportunities). This has **slightly decreased** by 2% from 63% in FY22/23.



**61%** are satisfied with the way VACCHO supports Members to build organisation capacity (governance, quality improvement, business development support etc). This has **slightly decreased** by 2% from 63% in FY22/23.



#### Positive feedback from our Member CEOs

*"Great Leadership from all at VACCHO."*

*"Advocates well on behalf of us."*

*"I think that VACCHO does a great job as a peak body."*

*"I have always been well supported by VACCHO."*

*"I think that the quality of information that comes out of VACCHO and VACCHO staff is excellent. The level of engagement and consultation is fantastic."*



## Outcome 1.2.2 Members are strong and effective

### Information and technology support

VACCHO supports Members in the increasingly complex management of their IT systems. We also liaise with vendors on Members' behalf to gain better deals and support best practice.

#### What we did

- Provided a range of IT-related support to our Members, including training, software, liaison with vendors, network security, and assistance with tenders for services.

#### Our impact

- Members have access to culturally safe IT support
- Members receive consistent results from the IT support they receive
- VACCHO has a good rapport with its Members

### Movement by Improvement Annual Forum

This Forum aims to bring together staff from across the sector to support Continuous Quality Improvement. It's an opportunity to celebrate the sector's success and innovation in service delivery.

#### What we did

- Convened the Movement by Improvement forum in August 2023; 80 attendees over two days.

#### Our impact

- Forum attendants were able to identify opportunities for growth, and celebrate Community-led initiatives that have created stronger services and healthier communities.
- Forum attendants established and strengthened connections with each other.



### Quality and Clinical Governance support

VACCHO supports Members with their accreditations and quality management, so they can meet expected safety and quality standards and demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement.

#### What we did

13 Members were supported with:

- LOGIQC Quality management system training, resources and tools.
- Accreditation preparation support, including RACGP, NSQHS, HSS/Social Services reform, Rainbow Tick, Child Safe standards.

#### Our impact

- Members receive continuous support with their accreditations and quality management.
- North-West VIC Members felt empowered to start their own Community of Practice from the support and connections facilitated by VACCHO.

## Outcome 1.2.2 Members are strong and effective

### Support for Members to access funding

The Victorian ACCO Model (see page 7) identifies that a key challenge for ACCOs is the lack of a *funding model* that is designed to meet their *operating model*. Within the current piecemeal funding arrangements, VACCHO supports its Members to be competitive, while also keeping a strong focus on reform of funding arrangements.

#### What we did

- Identified and reviewed more than 150 funding opportunities.
- 84 Funding Alerts: after review, viable opportunities were emailed with analysis, tips and offer of assistance.
- Supported Members' preparation of 50 funding proposals.
- Worked with the Victorian Health Building Authority to extend eligibility to all VACCHO Members and simplify the application process for the Regional and Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Funds (MHIF and RHIF). Two years ago, only half of VACCHO Members were eligible.

#### Our impact

- Members saved time and resources in identifying and reviewing funding opportunities
- Members received useful information to improve likelihood of funding success
- All VACCHO Members now eligible for the MHIF and RHIF; eight Members were successful in gaining funds for repairs and maintenance

#### Feedback from Members:

*"Your Funding Alerts have totally helped me to identify key grants, key points, and the timelines."*

*"Love your funding summaries, save me so much time in previewing so I know whether to have a deeper dive."*

*"I'm in awe of your wordsmithing .... Huge thanks for your and VACCHO's advocacy on this matter. So much stronger as a collective voice."*

### Finance support

On request, we guide and assist Members in their financial operations and reporting challenges, to support their financial resilience, growth and efficiency.

#### What we did

- Provided on-site and online financial support to Members.

#### Our impact

- Relationships between VACCHO and its Members are strengthened.
- Improved trust and faith in VACCHO's ability to assist and guide during crisis situations.

*One of the Members was six months behind with their financial audit and reached out to VACCHO to assist. We made several visits, working with their team onsite and the auditors to finalise the audit and reporting to their Board. We also assisted the finance team to review current processes and implement better alternatives, including with how they set up program budgets. The CEO was really pleased and relieved, and this built both the relationship between VACCHO and its Member organisation and the ACCOs own reputation regarding its financial capabilities.*

- VACCHO Finance team



## Outcome 1.2.2 Members are strong and effective

### Frameworks to support ACCOs build their workforce

Since their inception, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) have faced workforce challenges that affect their capacity to provide care to their communities. To address this, we developed two frameworks aimed at enhancing the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff by offering a unique suite of benefits and entitlements. These frameworks also support staff in understanding the skills and ways of working required in the ACCO sector.

#### What we did

- 12 face-to-face and three online consultations with Members, varying in size and location.
- Reviewed 53 position descriptions to understand capabilities/job requirements, as well as benefits provided by ACCOs.
- Surveyed Members to better understand Member workforce policies staffing numbers and arrangements..
- Analysed ACCO policies and procedures and available workforce data.
- Developed a gap analysis of benefits and entitlements.
- Sought regular feedback from the Workforce Projects Steering Committee.
- Presented the developing frameworks to the December 2023 Members Meeting, the March 2024 Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum, the April 2024 Workforce Forum meeting and April 2024 Members HR Community of Practice in April 2024 for feedback.
- Launched *Our ACCO Ways of Working Capability Framework Workbook*, and *Benefits & Entitlements Framework* in May 2024.



#### Our impact

- People working in the ACCO sector have a better understanding of skills and capabilities required to meet the responsibilities of their role and Community needs.
- ACCOs are able to identify what is already being offered in their organisation and what else they would like to offer, the direction and changes they may wish to make.
- A stronger evidence base to support sector advocacy to government on workforce issues and to support ACCOs in their workforce planning.

## Care on Country Project

The Victorian Government has committed to providing “care closer to home” including virtual care, telehealth and other digital models. But access to specialist care in particular remains a huge challenge for Aboriginal communities in rural parts of the state.

In 2021, VACCHO partnered with KPMG and the Department of Health Victoria to develop a Model of Service Delivery to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural Victoria to access specialist care. This year we have kicked off the Care on Country project, linking our Members and their clients with specialists including Dermatology, Respiratory and Endocrinology services ‘On Country’.

#### What we did

- Established three pilot sites; Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS), Abury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) and Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GECAC).
- Onboarding and training of Telehealth Care Coordinators at each pilot site.
- Managed a transition from an end of life booking service provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service to a bespoke system for Members to expedite bookings for Community.
- Regular meetings with the project team, coordinators and practice managers.
- Onsite workshop at MDAS in April 2024 with 13 clinicians, including training in the systems.

#### Our impact

- 302 ‘On Country’ specialist appointments were made available to Aboriginal people via their ACCO.
- Aboriginal community in rural areas have better access to health services via online appointments.

## 1.3 Sustainability and Growth

### Outcome 1.3.1 ACCOs have self-determination and control over resources

#### Re-creating an ACCO in the Latrobe Valley

The Latrobe Valley Aboriginal community has a strong desire to return their health and wellbeing services to self-determined Community control. Some years ago, the Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative ceased operating, and Ramahyuck in Sale took on an auspice arrangement so services could continue. VACCHO is working with the Community, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and Ramahyuck to help establish the new organisation and return the service and building to the Latrobe Valley Aboriginal community.

##### What we did

In collaboration with Ramahyuck and DFFH:

- Ramahyuck developed a Statement of Intent.
- Conducted three Community meetings.
- Supported the formation of the ACCHO Transition Working Group of members from the Latrobe and Baw Baw Aboriginal Communities and seven Working Group Meetings.
- Supported the Working Group to develop key documents.

##### Our impact

- The Latrobe Valley Aboriginal community feel supported to re-establish its own ACCO.
- The sense of self-determination of Latrobe Community strengthened.

#### Self-determination and Victorian government funding

Historically VACCHO and its Members have advocated to change government policies and increase resources, but Government budget processes have been opaque. In 2022, building on the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination, the Department of Health (DH) agreed to establish a mechanism to involve us more closely. In 2023-24, we built our knowledge and capacity and secured commitments.

##### What we did

- Developed one 2024-25 Victorian Budget Business Case ourselves, the first time we have done this.
- Contributed all content to two additional FY25 Victorian Budget Business Cases.
- Developed an annual process with VACCHO's Members to establish budget priorities.
- Established a Working Group with DH to develop a formal mechanism.

##### Our impact

- The Latrobe Valley Aboriginal community feel supported to re-establish its own ACCO.
- The sense of self-determination of Latrobe Community strengthened.



## Outcome 1.3.2 ACCOs have sustainable business models

### Medicare support

Medicare is designed for mainstream services and quick turnaround appointments, and it is challenging for Members to balance their holistic, Community-focused approach with their financial viability. They must also navigate constant changes to the Medicare schedule. Support in this area is a key request from Members.

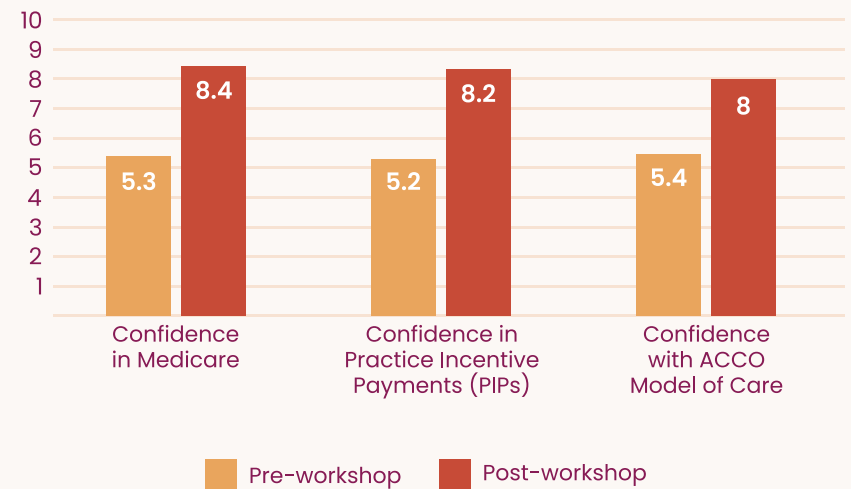
#### What we did

- In February 2024, we ran a Statewide Medicare Workshop with 45 participants from 21 Members, to discuss systematising claiming methods and sustainable revenue models to improve ACCOs capability to continue provide services with an ACCO Model of Care.
- Provided participants with Medicare resources to support day-to-day claiming, including Medicare Claiming Flow Charts, MyMedicare Fact Sheets and, Medicare Cheat Sheets tailored for Aboriginal Health Practitioners and Workers, Nurses, Midwives, and others.



### Our impact

- The Medicare Workshop helped with future planning on how to best support ACCOs with financial sustainability through effective Medicare claiming and navigating the ever-changing policy landscape.
- Results from the Workshop overall indicated increased confidence amongst participants in the following topics:



The workshop participants' level of confidence in different topics before and after the training. The rating on scale from 0-10. The higher the rating, the better the confidence.

#### Feedback from Medicare Workshop participants:

*"It was thoroughly enjoyable, in an ever-changing environment, frequent sessions would be beneficial."*

*"Enjoyable and comprehensive."*

## Outcome 1.3.2 ACCOs have sustainable business models

### VACCHO financially strong and sustainable

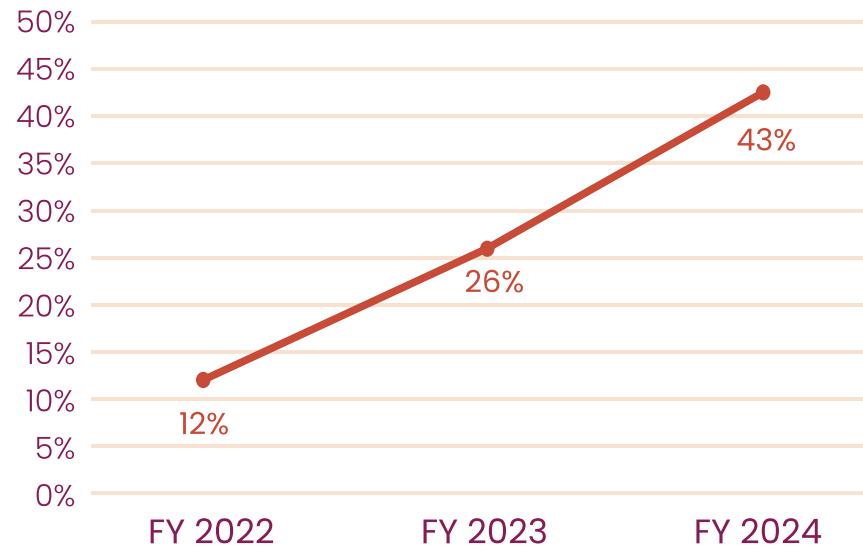
VACCHO is governed by Members and VACCHO's financial health is a key part of sector sustainability. We all face the problem of funding via dozens of short-term grants, even for activities that are ongoing over many years. Long term health disadvantages need long term solutions and funding approaches that allow planning and self-determination. We also seek to diversify funding and create new partnerships.

#### What we did

- Participated in Victorian government and social services sector working group to develop new Funding Agreements, which for the first time include annual indexation.
- Gained our first research funding grant from the Medical Research Future Fund (See page 33).
- Developed an innovative affordable housing project proposal to Housing Australia, in partnership with HESTA, Super Housing Partnerships and Assemble. The funding outcome is due in 2024-25 and may also provide a model for Member projects.
- Formed further new partnerships with Melbourne Genomics, CSIRO, and AIA Australia.
- Provided the pilot site, feedback and learning to inform proposed transition to pooled outcomes-based funding from the Victorian Department of Health.

#### Our impact

- A commitment gained from the Victorian Department of Health that all funding for ACCOs will be recurrent or minimum four-year, indexed, unless it meets strict criteria for a shorter contract.
- VACCHO's income shows a steady trend towards longer term funding contracts
- Strong diversity in VACCHO's funding. See the table on page 17.



Above: The percentage of funding received in a minimum four-year funding.



## VACCHO Income Mix FY24

Category	Details	Proportion of income FY23	Proportion of income FY24
Victorian Government Funding Grants	Department of Health	43%	52%
	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions	5%	2%
	Department of Premier and Cabinet	<1%	<1%
	Department of Education / Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions	4%	4%
	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	1%	2%
	Sustainability Victoria	<1%	0%
	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning	<1%	0%
	Melbourne Genomics	0%	<1%
Commonwealth Government Funding Grants	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	10%	12%
	Department of Health and Aged Care	9%	3%
	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet incl National Indigenous Australians Agency	6%	6%
	Australian Digital Health Agency	1%	<1%
	National Disability Insurance Scheme (Ramahyuck auspice)	2%	1%
	MTP Connect	0%	1%
	Primary Health Network	<1%	<1%
	Rural Workforce Agency Victoria	<1%	1%
Philanthropic and other grants	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	<1%	<1%
	The Lowitja Institute	<1%	<1%
	University of Melbourne	<1%	<1%
	Palliative Care Victoria	<1%	<1%
	Gandel Foundation	0%	<1%
	AIA Australia	0%	<1%
Social Enterprises	Other	<1%	<1%
	Cultural Safety Services	1%	1%
Fee for service	Registered Training Organisation	<1%	<1%
	To Members	<1%	<1%
Donations	External	<1%	<1%
	Personal and philanthropic	<1%	<1%
Other income/revenue	Interest	2%	2%
	Other	1%	2%
Funds carried forward	Approved c/f	12%	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## Outcome 1.3.3 VACCHO is a workplace of choice

Underpinning the more public side of the work of VACCHO and its Members are internal structures and processes to keep our engines running. Key aspects of *Our Foundations* are also sites of innovation that are supporting all at VACCHO in our work.

### Quality and Clinical Governance

- Continuous improvement of policies, procedures, risk management, staff training.
- Accreditations including ISO9001 and Rainbow Tick

#### Impact:

- Improved efficiency and risk management
- Accreditations maintained
- A safe, inclusive and affirming workplaces

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

- Structures, systems, and processes to prioritise MEL
- A leadership and culture that values MEL
- Building staff capability and skills

#### Impact:

- Staff know how they are evaluating their work
- Increasing opportunities to implement Aboriginal evaluation practices
- Our third annual Impact Report

### Human Resources

- A new HR Management Platform
- A new Employee Assistance Program
- Staff training in Respect and Responsibility and Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid

#### Impact:

- As an employer, we meet all legislated requirements
- Employees have access to mental health support

### Finance

- Upgrading the finance system to Business Central, improving staff accessibility
- Improved system access and training for staff

#### Impact:

- Staff can perform their tasks more efficiently
- Reduced manual system adjustments and data entry

### Information Technology

- Control, review and security of all aspects of our IT environment
- Responsive staff support and process improvements
- Commenced steps to achieve ISO27001 accreditation

#### Impact:

- Security and data sovereignty is maintained
- Improved staff efficiency and productivity

### Operations

- Maintained all office safety, compliances and services
- Introduced Digital Cabcharge vouchers
- Minor works to increase work spaces

#### Impact:

- The workplace is clean, comfortable and supports collaboration



# Outcome 1.3.3 VACCHO is a workplace of choice

## Great Place to Work



Achieved accreditation as a 'Great Place to Work' for the second consecutive year.

**74%**

of staff said VACCHO is a 'Great Place to Work'

which is an increase of

**13%**

from last year



**77%**

have a sense of *pride* in their work, up by **10%**



**78%**

have a sense of *enjoyment* (camaraderie) in the workplace, up by **12%**

Feedback from employees:

*"When I look at what we accomplish, I feel a sense of pride."*

*"My work has a special meaning: this is not 'just a job'."*

*"I'm proud to tell others I work here."*

Pictured: VACCHO Staff in November 2023





## Outcome 1.3.3 VACCHO is a workplace of choice



VACCHO Staff celebrate Wear It Purple day 2023

## Rainbow Tick accredited!

Rainbow Tick Accreditation is a quality framework to help services become safe, inclusive and affirming workplaces and service delivery for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy (LGBTQIASB+) community. VACCHO uses the accreditation to signal to the LGBTQIASB+ community that the organisation is committed to safety, inclusion and affirming practice.



### What we did

Reviewed the 26 indicators in the standards and completed our accreditation actions which included:

- Implementing LGBTQIASB+ inclusion to 100% of organisations staff and induction processes.
- Re-launching the Dhuliny Djerring (Pride Together) Working Group to lead, identify and champion Rainbow Mob inclusive improvements at VACCHO.
- Reviewing and updating all organisation policies, procedures, forms, and other internal and external publications across all units to ensure they were LGBTQIASB+ inclusive.
- Promoting Rainbow Mob significant days with celebrations, presentations from Rainbow Mob stakeholders, and social media content.
- Updating our Quality Management System and reporting mechanisms to classify and trend LGBTQIASB+ feedback.

### Our impact

- Achieved Rainbow Tick Accreditation in November 2023. We passed the LGBTQIASB+ inclusion and safety best practice standards with flying colours and no non-conformances.
- Our accreditation has solidified VACCHO as a leader in the sector for Rainbow Mob inclusion.
- Our staff have increased feeling of LGBTQIASB+ safety as there is a commitment from every level of the organisation for Rainbow Mob inclusion.

## Building opportunities to step into work

VACCHO aims to be a workplace of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from entry level to our leadership and all the steps in between. We have a proud tradition of prioritising entry level employment opportunities for our Communities - a sense of safety and stability is a social determinant of health and wellbeing after all! Mostly young, but not always, these staff are building their economic participation and they're feeling good!

### What we did

- Welcomed six Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people into entry level roles, providing mentoring and structured support.
- Provided induction and training across a range of work areas including Microsoft 360 and other online platforms, purchasing and invoicing, understanding and working with organisational policies, occupational health and safety, teamwork and being Deadly!

### Our impact

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff increased from 34% to 39% of total staff.
- 30% of VACCHO's staff are aged between 20 and 30 years.
- Staff developed diverse skills and knowledge.
- Staff feel supported to build their future career.



## Outcome 1.3.3 VACCHO is a workplace of choice

### Cherkera Austin's story

"I have been a stay-at-home mum to my kids for the past 12 years dedicating myself to my four beautiful children aged from two to 12. Being a stay-at-home parent is a full time job within itself. But as much as I love being a mother, I also felt like there was more to life for me. Coming from where I was in life to where I am today is a massive improvement and it just felt like the right time to get my head in the game and get a job.

When the chance to work at VACCHO presented itself, I had no hesitation; I knew that this was the right thing for me. I put my name down for the reception position with my sister's assistance, then two weeks later I got a call from VACCHO asking me to come in for an interview. The day after I got a call saying that I got the job, and I started the day after that!

On my first day, I was sitting down at reception with my laptop and work pass nervous and over-excited just taking in as much information as I could. Each day I was learning something different and just having Elesha there to mentor me and teach me made it easier for me to learn things.

It was scary and challenging because I didn't have that experience and knowledge of what I had to do. But as each day came and went it all got easier and it felt like I had been doing it my whole life. I was juggling being a mother at the same time, it was tiring at first but the more I worked myself up to coming in and getting things done the more it just felt right and like this is what I wanted and needed. I am a very proud person and wanted my kids and family to be proud of who I have become. They motivated me to keep going and keep doing good and to be that role model and inspiration for my children.

I am now working full time and with everything that I have learnt myself and all the knowledge I have soaked up I have become a mentor myself and just helping and teaching our new receptionist Lucy in the way that I was taught. Lucy started to blossom into a skilled and capable receptionist. Her positive attitude and willingness to learn impressed everyone in the office.

Looking back at least two-three years ago I would never have seen myself where I am today. It is possible to do what you want and be who you want to be."





## 1.4 Workforce

We are all aware of the workforce challenges across the health and social services sector. Some describe the competition for staff as 'ruthless'.

For ACCOs the challenges are higher. They are mostly operating in regional and rural areas and limited in what they can pay.

As well, ACCOs want to prioritise employment pathways for Community, who bring critical skills and knowledge with them.

VACCHO's *Whole of Workforce* strategy was developed with Members in 2021/2022 and is a long-term plan framed around

**Attraction** **Recruitment** **Development** and **Retention** of the staff we need across all of our services.



Above: Leigh is an Aboriginal Health Worker at Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative Ltd  
Left: Paul and Steven are Aboriginal Health Practitioners at Mallee District Aboriginal Services





## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### Building, supporting and strengthening the Social and Emotional Wellbeing workforce

Development


Retention

Workforce development, including training, is one of the key strategies of VACCHO's Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing. We aim to ensure best practices are in place across services, to support clients and Community.

#### What we did

- Co-ordinated an annual training needs assessment, which provides expansive data for our annual planning.
- Provided a total of 17 training sessions in 14 locations, with 211 participants.
- Facilitated two gatherings for the SEWB workforces to connect, network, and learn every year.
- Visited and engaged with workers in their workplaces to discuss their wellbeing and any additional supports they need.
- Hosted a bi-monthly online Community of Practice to check in, connect and stay up to date with sector news, best practice and any other developments.
- Surveyed the workforce to ascertain the need for training and upskilling: now, and into the future.
- Commissioned and coordinated fit for purpose training courses to upskill the sector.
- Co-ordinated scholarships for 48 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders students to complete qualifications in psychology, social work, youth work, art therapy, counselling and mental health; 20 awarded this year.
- Provided scholarships and traineeships for Mob to get into the field.
- Responded promptly to any emerging issues with the workforce via phone or email.

#### Our impact

- Participants in SEWB gatherings rate our gatherings at 4.5 to 4.7 stars out of 5. 
- Increased scholarships opportunities for Mob to get into the field; 20 this year with more to come.
- Sector workforce is highly engaged in development, evidenced by 87% response rate to our annual training needs assessment.
- The sector's knowledge is strengthened; training participants reported increased knowledge and understanding of suicide prevention and how to respond to mental health crises.
- Increased culturally safe and self-determining mechanisms and support systems to address emerging and ongoing workforce matters.

#### Feedback from the gathering and training participants:

*"The importance of bringing Mob and Community Controlled Organisations together."*

*"Knowledge and Family. Love the gathering, building trust across the state."*

*"My take home: Connection with other organisations and seeing a lot of younger ones joining the workforce. Feel like we are fresh within our roles."*

*"Thank you everyone at VACCHO for another great Gathering."*

*"Informative to my role working in suicide prevention to be able to know what's happening and what's current in this space, and building knowledge."*



## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### Education for a strong and able workforce

Attraction Recruitment Development

VACCHO's Registered Training Organisation (RTO no 20739) is a key component of our strategy to build and support the current and future ACCO workforce. We offer 14 nationally recognised qualifications in Primary Healthcare, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Community Services, Counselling, Training and Assessment and Leadership and Management. Our courses range between 15 and 26 months in duration. We are the only RTO with a focus on the workforce needs of the Victorian ACCO sector.

Our team is committed to empowering, strengthening and connecting the ACCO workforce through education. Our students and graduates are:

- Strong in their culture
- Respectful
- Workforce ready
- Responsive
- Confident

### What we did

- Provided a culturally safe environment and support in the pre-enrolment and delivery phases of our student's journey.
- Completed all compliances to achieve the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency's standards.
- Delivered courses ranging from Certificate III through to Diploma level in nine disciplines, at VACCHO and onsite at five ACCOs.
- Facilitated placements at 48 different workplaces.
- Employed three Aboriginal student Mentors to provide a circle of care and support for the 117 students.

### Our impact

VACCHO's Registered Training Organisation (RTO) had

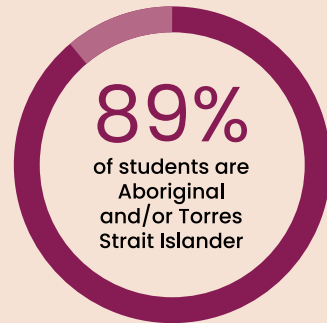
117

students, aged between 21 and 64 years, enrolled into courses during 2023/24



68

students graduated in November 2023 in eight disciplines.



✓ 67.5% student completion rate for Health and SEWB qualifications, compared to the overall mainstream VET completion rate of 29%

- 100% of students surveyed in the period reported increased confidence in addition to the skills and knowledge gained through completing their course.
- 95% of students are satisfied with the student support VACCHO offers.
- 85% believe their course had sufficient flexibility to allow them to balance their other needs and priorities, such as work and family.

### Feedback from students:

*"Everyone I met through VACCHO has been supportive and Community oriented."*

*"Having a trainer who was very familiar with the mental health space and was able to give us real life examples."*

*"Our trainer was very caring and supportive. She made the course enjoyable, and I looked forward to class."*

Dr. Jill Gallagher AO (second from the right) with graduates at VACCHO's 2023 graduation ceremony.





## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### Learners at every age

“Our education programs draw in people from all walks of life, such as two of our students who are studying a Counselling course – Aunty A and Aunty B, childhood friends aged 63 and 64.

They recognised a need for Aboriginal Women and Elders in their Community to receive culturally safe support to keep families together and strong. Aunty A and Aunty B would like to set up a small business after finishing their course to run art workshops, where they will sit with women and families and support them in healing from trauma.

Seeing this is a reminder that you can never stop learning and the connections you have with others are profound and can carry you through anything.

I feel honoured that these two students with so much lived-experience want to study here. We can't do what we need to do alone. We have people around us who will continue to inspire us to want more for ourselves.”

**Jad David de Busch**  
Executive Manager  
of Operations,  
VACCHO Education  
and Training Unit



### New Aboriginal Health Worker training scholarships

Attraction Recruitment Development

Scholarships are awarded through a newly established training support program, funded by the Victorian Department of Health and administered by VACCHO. These scholarships aim to remove barriers to participation in training and professional development with areas of professional development self-determined by scholarship recipients.

#### What we did

- Awarded 16 scholarships of \$4000 each to Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners currently working in ACCOs across Victoria in May 2024.
- Attracted applicants from a wide variety of rural and urban communities, ranging in age from new graduates to Elders who, as AHWs, have served their communities for decades.

#### Our impact

- Awardees stated that their motivation to apply for a scholarship was to better serve the communities that they work within:

*“This scholarship will not only benefit me but the Community ... to help Mob. It will also help me to be a role model for young Mob coming up through the Community to give them hope that they can come from a small Community and complete a degree and leave a positive impact on the Community through health.”*

*“The scholarship will help me to be a mentor and role model in my profession.”*

## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### VACCHO's 2nd Statewide Aboriginal Health Practitioner and Worker Gathering

Development Retention

Priority 1 of our workforce strategy is to *Grow our Own: Increase the number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed in the sector and across all levels, roles, and functions.* Greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the health and wellbeing sector is fundamental to strengthening our voice and influence. The gathering aims to provide peer-support and knowledge-sharing, to ensure the workforce feel better supported as well as gain additional knowledge and confidence.

#### What we did

- Planned and hosted the second Statewide Aboriginal Health Worker / Practitioner (AHW/P) Gathering in March 2024 on Taungurung Country in Marysville; 34 AHW/Ps from 14 ACCOs attended.
- Provided a blend of cultural and clinical education, peer support and professional development with a focus on wellbeing.

#### Our impact

Feedback from an AHW/P demonstrated the impact of Gatherings on professional development:

*"VACCHO staff done a wonderful job once again I have taken some very important information I can implement back into my role as a AHW/P."*

### Training to support the cancer journey

Development Retention

Training delivered to the Aboriginal workforce to build knowledge and skills across the cancer journey.

#### What we did

- Undertook a cancer training needs analysis with the workforce, with 21 Aboriginal Hospital Liason Officers (AHLOs) and 17 AHWs completed survey. The needs analysis showed a demand for topics across the entire cancer journey.
- VACCHO and Cancer Council Victoria developed a four-day cancer training program for AHLOs and AHW/Ps. A tour of Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and St. Vincent's Hospital's breast cancer clinic was part of the training, so regional or staff new to the role can see where their patients/clients are transferred to.
- Delivered training in cancer prevention, screening and early detection, treatment, and support for families and caregivers. Additionally, we offered workforce support and cultural healing to address the pressures of these roles, including community expectations and the emotional and cultural burdens they entail.

#### Our impact

- Aboriginal workforce expressed their appreciation for being able to receive training that was designed specifically for our workforce.
- All training participants agreed that they increased their knowledge of all training topics, including cancer screening and early detection programs.

Feedback from training participants:

*"Very much Community-based and focused. Great resources and network contacts."*

*"Safe space to speak and learn, presenters spoke in language that we all understood."*



## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### Attracting and supporting GPs

Development Retention

VACCHO has a GP Workforce Strategy 2021-2031, and a GP Advisory Group (GPAG) which engages on statewide clinical issues and informs our work. Key activities in support of this critical workforce are an annual Gathering and a Balint Group: an experiential, small group educational activity where clinicians can discuss cases from their practice with a focus on the professional relationship.

#### What we did

- Hosted the third Statewide GP Gathering, 3-5 May 2024 on Gunditjmara Country in Warrnambool. 100 participants; 46 GPs and their families attended.
- The Gathering brought together GPs who work at ACCOs across Victoria. This special event provided a platform for cultural immersion, clinical education, peer networking, and professional growth.
- Organised an online peer clinical reflective practice group for GPs working in the ACCO sector. 10 monthly sessions were provided with an average of six GPs attending each session.



*“Spending time with such a great group of GPs doing similar work is really recharging. The cultural component of the program is great. The weekend is a great reminder of why we do this work.”*

#### Our impact

##### Feedback from GPs on the Balint group:

*“It allows me to reflect on my interactions and reactions to certain patients, so I can approach the patient-doctor dynamic with a new perspective.”*

*“Very supportive team to discuss cases with colleagues.”*

*“Unique small group discussion around complex Aboriginal health cases; learning about ourselves as clinicians and what we bring to the consultation.”*

##### Feedback from GPs on the gathering:

*“Opportunity to reflect and learn about issues affecting Community outside of working at an ACCHO.”*

*“Feeling connected to others working in the same area and field. Continual cultural learning and reinforcement.”*

## Outcome 1.4.1 The Aboriginal health and wellbeing workforce are skilled and capable

### Aboriginal Aged Care Workforce Gathering

Development Retention

This year our Aged Care workforce grew, with our existing staff in Residential Aged Care and Home and Community Care joined by new Aged Care 'navigators' (see below). VACCHO worked with our national peak, NACCHO, to provide induction and training for the new staff and professional development for our existing workforce.

#### What we did

- Convened an inaugural statewide gathering of the Victorian Aboriginal Aged Care Workforce in June 2024 in Wurundjeri country at Epping; 43 participants.

#### Our impact

- The Victorian Aboriginal Aged Care Workforce have a safe space to voice their needs and challenges.
- VACCHO and NACCHO have better understanding of the initial challenges the workforce are encountering supporting Mob to navigate aged care.

## Outcome 1.4.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People at all levels of the health and wellbeing sector

### Members supporting our Elders to navigate aged care

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended that a new workforce is established to support Aboriginal people and their families to understand, navigate and access aged care services. The Elder Care Support program was the result and this year VACCHO worked hard to support our Members to access this opportunity and employ these staff.

#### What we did

- Co-ordinated to remove barriers to our Members accessing the funding.
- Proactively engaged with Members to ensure they were ready to apply and so all eligible Members submitted an Expression of Interest.
- Convened a gathering of the Elder Care Support workforce (see above).

#### Our impact

- ACCOs in Victoria have received funding so that Elders and their families across the state are able to access an Elder Care Support worker.

### AHLOs meet in Melbourne

Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers (AHLOs) provide a range of support to Aboriginal patients, families, Community members and staff. This includes improving healthcare services and maintaining positive relationships within the Aboriginal community. The AHLO Gathering aims to provide a safe space for AHLOs to meet and yarn about various matters.

#### What we did

- VACCHO convened the annual three-day gathering of AHLOs in Melbourne.

#### Our impact

- AHLOs feel safe to share their challenges and celebrate their successes.
- A group of AHLOs were supported by VACCHO to provide evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission, about their experiences witnessing racism in hospitals.



# Strong Voice

## 2.1 Empowering Community Voice

Outcome 2.1.1 Members have influence on VACCHO's policy and advocacy positions, and program priorities

### Truthtelling – Stories to Yoorook

The Yoorook Justice Commission is a Royal Commission established by the Victorian government and First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to investigate injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria since colonisation. In 2024, Yoorook held further hearings to listen to Community. VACCHO ensured Members' voices and the deep experiences of our own people were clearly heard.

#### What we did

- Connected Yoorook to VACCHO's Members by facilitating visits from Yoorook to regional meetings with our Members.
- Supported Community members to submit evidence by recording and filming testimony, and including case studies in our own written and oral submissions.
- Produced submissions for two Yoorook hearings: Land Injustice, and Health, Housing and Education.
- VACCHO's CEO Dr Jill Gallagher AO and Executive Director Sheree Lowe each gave evidence at two of Yoorook's hearings, pictured left.



Strong Voice

#### Our impact

- VACCHO's evidence, both oral and written, was used by Yoorook when questioning Victoria's Ministers for Health and Mental Health.
- Yoorook Commissioners have a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by VACCHO Members, including those of funding policy, workforce recruitment and retention, and long-term lack of investment in infrastructure, and questioned Government representatives on these issues.
- Yoorook's August 2023 report into the child protection and criminal justice systems encourage urgent development and implementation of an Aboriginal Affairs Commission to hold public bodies accountable for the outcomes they are responsible for delivering to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, crediting VACCHO's work, with Lowitja Institute, to design this mechanism.
- Victoria's Minister for Health confirmed her Department, at the prompting of VACCHO, were looking to move funds for Aboriginal health and wellbeing from public health services to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and to commit to four year, rather than single year contracts.



## Outcome 2.1.1 Members have influence on VACCHO's policy and advocacy positions, and program priorities

### Members' meetings

Our quarterly Members' meetings are at the heart of VACCHO's responsibility to our Members. They are the key forum where Members outline their needs and priorities, to inform the development of our services, policies and strategies.

#### What we did

- Held Members' meetings in July 2023, November 2023, March 2024, May 2024 with an average attendance of 22 Members.
- Meetings rotated between ACCO locations in Melbourne and regional areas and included an opportunity for ACCOs to share their Culture, history, facilities and Community.

#### Our impact

- Members have a safe space to share their priorities and the support they need from VACCHO.
- VACCHO increased its knowledge on the Members' needs and priorities.
- VACCHO's strategic planning and policies are informed by input from Members.
- Members reported satisfaction with VACCHO's engagement and hearing their voices.



Attendees at the VACCHO Member's Meeting in Echuca in May 2024



## Outcome 2.1.1 Members have influence on VACCHO's policy and advocacy positions, and program priorities

### The Centre of Excellence of Aboriginal Digital in Health (CEADH)

As 'digital health' rapidly develops, VACCHO Members identified significant challenges to those services being available to Aboriginal people in all parts of the health system. ACCOs were not resourced to adapt their own services and had a high percentage of clients without good connectivity or digital skills. They saw the risk that *digital in health* advances would create further inequality. National bodies in Aboriginal health and digital health were not leading the way or meeting consistent government commitments to Aboriginal-led solutions.

To address this need, VACCHO has been the driving force behind the creation of a new national body to increase digital health capacity and capability and improve system design infrastructure and quality of care for Aboriginal communities. Its members are the seven state peak bodies for Aboriginal Community Controlled health working as an agile and interactive network.

#### What we did

- Established the foundational governance requirements needed to establish CEADH.
- Developed a partnership with CSIRO to support CEADH's development.
- CEADH governance workshop in May and June 2024.

#### Our impact

- Members feel their voices are heard and their needs are considered by VACCHO.
- VACCHO strengthened their relationship with Members.
- A national voice representing Members needs in the transition to digital health models.

#### What's next

- A program of work in FY25 to improve the representation of communities into digital health policy and strategy.
- Seeking financial support to build a team.
- CEADH will develop Aboriginal-led recommendations for digital in health technologies.

### Yarning Ear and Hearing Health Forum

In March 2024, VACCHO collaborated with the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) to host the inaugural Yarning Ear and Hearing Health gathering for the ACCO sector.

#### What we did

- Hosted the gathering for 40 attendees at Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-op, led and supported by strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.
- VACCHO and other stakeholders shared and promoted Resources.

#### Our impact

- Determined key ear health advocacy, training and equipment needs and priorities for the next six, 12, and 24 months.
- Improved networking and building connections between VACCHO and the forum attendees.

## 2.2 Research and Evidence

### Outcome 2.2.1 Ethical and self-determined Aboriginal research in Victoria that benefits Community

#### **marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri: The Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Research Accord**

marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri aims to improve the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research is conducted in Victoria.

#### What we did

- Launched the Accord on 11 October 2023, after endorsement from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Accord Governance Group and the Victorian Government.
- 13 yarns and conversations with Community and the research sector to prepare strategies and frameworks for implementation; 145 participants.
- 10 presentations to the Research Sector.
- Two presentations/workshop with VACCHO members.
- Wrote a departmental state budget proposal and supported significant advocacy in the budget process.
- Received ethical approval from the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee and commenced work on the project to establish the Victorian Research Ethics Committee.

#### Our impact

- 13 ACCOs and 48 research organisations endorsed the Accord.
- Secured \$4.5million in the May 2025 budget for the next phase of the Accord.
- Increased awareness of the Accord and improved research practices.

*“This is one of those events that I will probably remember for the rest of my life, where I stood there with the health minister and Dr Jill Gallagher AO from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, recognising and embedding culturally safe practices in respect of our First Nations people into medical research.”*

– Deputy Premier and Minister for Medical Research Ben Carroll at the launch



*Pictured right: The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP speaks at the launch of marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri at the Melbourne Museum which was attended by 125 people including VACCHO Executives, Government Ministers and key Community and research sector representatives.*





### Researching Aboriginal-led prevention approaches

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) is a \$22 billion long-term investment supporting Australian health and medical research, whose grants are usually only awarded to universities and research institutes. VACCHO gained MRFF eligibility in 2023, and this year we achieved our first research grant in our own name. Our two-year project is evaluating the effectiveness of the Culture + Kinship model in achieving chronic disease prevention outcomes in urban Aboriginal populations.

The research will also explore how approaches to primary prevention and health promotion can be redesigned with Aboriginal leadership and self-determination, and the empowerment of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. It will also explore strategies and requirements for wider implementation of the model.

More about Culture + Kinship on page 47.

#### What we did

- Four new Member sites were engaged and recruited for the Culture + Kinship program.
- Project, Research, and Cultural Governance committee established.
- Ethics application approved through AIATSIS for stage one of the research (Design Workshops + Impact Yarn© Co-design Workshops).
- Design workshops held with the four ACCOs to develop Community context maps and design local initiatives that target outcomes in chronic disease prevention.

#### What's next

- Embedding Impact Yarns© into local initiatives and establishing data sovereignty processes.
- Support ACCOs to implement their local initiatives.
- Develop knowledge translation resources and strategies to support Aboriginal-led organisations to implement Culture + Kinship initiatives.



### Building equity in cancer research

VACCHO's Victorian Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy 2023-2028 identified the need for greater equity and access along the cancer journey for Aboriginal people to improve cancer outcomes.

#### What we did

- Developed two projects for the next three years, **Framework Respect** aiming to increasing retention, success and equitable participation of Aboriginal people in Victoria in Cancer Clinical Trials and a **Lung Cancer Screening Pilot** project with two Members.
- Applied for funding from Victorian Cancer Agency to be able to implement the project.

#### Our impact

- VACCHO received \$3.87 million to carry out the project activities.

#### What's next

- Delivering the project, including planning, recruitment, ethics approval, consultations with ACCOs and other relevant stakeholders.

## Outcome 2.2.1 Ethical and self-determined Aboriginal research in Victoria that benefits Community

### The Indigenous Genomics Health Equity project

Genomics is the study of an individual's genes (the genome), including interactions of those genes with each other and with the person's environment, to tell stories about a person's health. Genomics medicine can add significant value to people's lives, in diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. But to achieve equitable access for Mob, we need to address the deep history of injustice for genomics in Australia.

VACCHO is proud to spearhead new research to address these injustices as well as ongoing health disparities, to ultimately improve healthcare delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria. Launched in November 2023, this project seeks to engage with ACCOs and Community to understand the current gaps and barriers to accessing genomics health services with the aim of developing recommendations to improve referral and access.

It emerged from a collaborative effort between VACCHO, the Australian Alliance for Indigenous Genomics (ALIGN), and the Melbourne Genomics Health Alliance, who funded the project through the Melbourne Genomics Equity (Priorities) Project.

#### What we did

- Established the governance structure, including the Project Steering Committee.
- Submitted ethics application to AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee, which was approved.
- Conducted informal yarning sessions with ACCOs to gather insights and build relationships.
- Held engagements and presentations to promote the project including at the AIATSIS Summit and at a workshop on for genetic counsellors on implicit bias.

#### What's next

- Conduct formal consultations with Aboriginal communities and ACCOs to identify the barriers and opportunities to accessing genomics healthcare.
- Identify initial recommendations from the project and advocate for their sustainable implementation.



## Outcome 2.2.2 Aboriginal organisations and communities have access to and control over their data

### Innovative data management through the Wominjeka Program

Wominjeka was developed to address Members' long standing need for digital systems to manage client data in their extensive non-clinical services. Launched as CMS in 2022, this year it has developed into an integrated ecosystem of four applications:

- **CMS:** the original client data system.
- **Message Stick:** connecting workers statewide, to exchange knowledge, support, and training.
- **Paperbark:** for Social and Emotional Wellbeing services allowing workers and clients to engage in meaningful care planning using cultural symbolism and local language.
- **Message Media MMS:** providing rapid dissemination of information to individuals and large groups of people, including appointment reminders.

Wominjeka is replacing paper-based and hybrid systems in ACCOs. A holistic and culturally safe approach to client management, it supports service delivery optimisation, data security and Aboriginal data sovereignty and governance. It also captures significantly improved data about client outcomes, including both cultural and professional insights and contributes to Closing the Gap tracking.

#### What we did

- Completed implementations at seven Member organisations for 17 different program types.
- Five further Members completed approvals for implementation in 2024.
- 150 new ACCO staff members were onboarded and using Wominjeka, for a total of 250 staff.
- Message Stick upgraded to host information and updates for the Victorian Alcohol and Drug collection (VADC), the Quality in Health Network and the HR and CMS Communities of Practice.



#### Our impact

- Transformed operations by saving 36,000 hours for every 100 full-time workers per year, freeing up time for client support and engagement.
- Message Media SMS ensured that critical messages reach the intended recipients quickly, reducing effort and guesswork.
- ACCOs now have a digital workflow from enquiry at their reception through to their non-clinical service teams.
- CMS replaces the government system IRIS for Family Services and Family Violence, greatly improving security, data sovereignty, digital workflows, and reporting capabilities.
- Won *Best Technology Achievement by a First Nations Group* at the 2024 Australian Not-for-profit Technology Awards.
- Certificate of Merit at the 2024 Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) Awards.

#### Feedback from VACCHO Members:

"I like the documentation side of it, I'll be able to find documents and forms quite easily."

"There's no need to do manual stats now since the system can produce reports, this will save us time."

"Great for reporting our time."

"I thought it wouldn't be what I need, but it is. I'm going to get my life back."

Pictured left: Wominjeka won Best Technology Achievement by a First Nations Group at the 2024 Australian Not-for-profit Technology Awards in May.

## Outcome 2.2.2 Aboriginal organisations and communities have access to and control over their data

### Statewide infrastructure assessments

For more than a decade there has not been a Government program or strategy to address the physical infrastructure needs of the growing ACCO sector. In FY24 we built a statewide evidence base to support advocacy for investment in self-determined infrastructure for the Victorian health and wellbeing ACCO sector.

### What we did

- Building asset assessments for 32 organisations (94% of the sector), totaling 230 assets across 150 sites; assessing building condition, design, cultural safety and energy efficiency.
- Over 1,000 contact instances, including visits to all 32 sites.
- Compiled statewide data on replacement and maintenance needs and schedules, improvements needed for energy efficiency and on the quality and cultural safety of each space to meet each Community and its needs.
- Developed a needs assessment using five key data metrics for each Local Government Area.

### Our impact

- Members reported their appreciation for the work being led and advocated for by VACCHO, including that VACCHO had secured \$2.6 million in funding from the Victorian Department of Health to enable the work to take place.
- Critical issues and gaps were identified, which may impact some ACCOs' ability to continue to operate. These are also informing VACCHO's priorities for support of Members.
- Members reported that this evidence base will support them to self-determine their future service and infrastructure plans and will assist with decision-making and advocacy.

*For more on our advocacy for Member Infrastructure strategy and funding see Outcome 2.3.1 Decision-maker align relevant policies, budgets and actions with the priorities of the Victorian Aboriginal Community.*

### We data together

"I was working on VACCHO's Workforce team, and from January, also with the Infrastructure team. The projects interlinked nicely – if you are looking at workforce data and where the workforce is going to be in 10-15 years, then you will need the infrastructure to support that.

When we go out on-site and complete an infrastructure assessment, we also use these visits for yarning and engagement with Members. As part of this, and I am not joking, we needed to ask for quite a bit of paperwork, something like 50-odd documents from every Member. It's a big ask!

But from this, we created a range of documents which went back to Member CEOs. One CEO said she loved it because she could see a utopia of the services they could have in the future, develop their strategy and go for funding. The workforce data will also be used by them as evidence to support better resources. We have developed a great relationship and we always have a good yarn.

Visiting the Members as an integrated workforce and infrastructure team was efficient for Members and reduced our ask on their time."

**- Brooke Sando,  
Strategic Project Engagement Lead.**



## Outcome 2.2.2 Aboriginal organisations and communities have access to and control over their data

### Workforce forecast modelling

Victoria's Aboriginal population is growing at double the rate of the overall Victorian population. This means VACCHO and our Members need to urgently plan for the increasing workforce they will need.

VACCHO has modelled workforce requirements for the next 15 years, based on projected growth and distribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Victoria linked to the specific requirements of each type of service offered by ACCOs.

### What we did

- Collected detailed workforce data from 21 Members.
- Updated our population projection model, in partnership with Social Ventures Australia with the final 2021 Census release data, Local Government Area (LGA) mapping and inclusion of NSW border communities.
- Commenced modelling of the workforce data into integrated forecasts of catchment population, service demand and workforce requirements, with seven forecasts generated.
- Presented results to the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria conference, Department of Health and Departments of Families, Fairness and Housing.

### Our impact

- A strong evidence base of Population, Service and Workforce Data to support sector advocacy.
- Members and VACCHO are using the Population, Service and Workforce Data in their strategy and planning, for example one ACCO decided to prioritise a childcare centre after viewing the data.
- Acceptance of VACCHO's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population Growth Model by the Department of Health's System Planning Branch is a major endorsement for acceptance of the model.

## 2.3 Policy and Advocacy

### Outcome 2.3.1 Decision-makers align relevant policies, budgets and actions with the priorities of the Aboriginal Community in Victoria

#### Boosting access to immunisation

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Victorian ACCOs played a pivotal role in protecting Community, but were frustrated by not being able to use their Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency-registered Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) to provide immunisations. This was not a new problem; VACCHO, ACCOs, AHPs and Elders have been advocating for 15 years for legislative change to add vaccine administration to the AHP scope of practice.

##### What we did

- Increased our lobbying efforts towards legislative change and to support implementation.
- Qualified four health trainers as accredited Immunisers and Immuniser trainers.
- Provided the HESA Accredited Immunisation course via VACCHO's Education and Training Unit.

##### Our impact

- The Victorian Government changed the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and subsequent Regulations to allow AHPs to complete their National Immunisation Program training.
- VACCHO secured funding to develop and deliver the training across Victoria.
- 70 AHPs have already enrolled in the HESA Accredited Immunisation Course.
- AHPs can administer vaccines, greatly improving Community access to immunisation.



#### Life expectancy data matters

Target One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to reduce the difference in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people. However, in Victoria, the government has never been able to provide data on Aboriginal life expectancy. So we do not know what the gap is and if it is reducing or growing. Victoria has also not been reporting on Target 14, which is the rate of suicide.

##### What we did

- Worked with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to understand what was causing poor data collection by funeral directors and health professionals.
- Engaged Victoria's Department of Health (DH) and Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages to discuss the issues.
- Reviewed practices in other States and Territories to learn opportunities for improvement.
- Worked with DH, Victoria's Coroners Court and the ABS regarding use and sharing of suicide data.

##### Our impact

- The Victorian Department of Health has committed to resolving the issues as a high priority.
- The Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages will now use information from the Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death as well as the Death Registration Form.
- Victoria and the ABS will now report on the suicide rate in Victoria as part of its Closing the Gap obligations.



## Outcome 2.3.1 Decision-makers align relevant policies, budgets and actions with the priorities of the Aboriginal Community in Victoria

### Action on prison healthcare

Aboriginal people make up just over 1% of the Victorian population but 11% of those in prison. Prison-time leaves most people less healthy, but data shows that more severe and complicated health outcomes are experienced by Aboriginal detainees compared to non-Indigenous. Prisoners are not eligible for Medicare, cannot gain access to their health records and are often at greatest risk when they leave prison without adequate information or access to medications. Action on this issue is an urgent priority for our Members, their Communities and families.

#### What we did

- Led the Cultural Review of the Adult Correction System for the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS).
- Assisted the Victorian Ombudsman's Investigation into healthcare provision for Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons.
- Contributed to the Australian Department of Health's review of healthcare for Aboriginal people in prisons.
- Worked with DJCS and ACCOs to shape the provision of health checks for Aboriginal people in prison.
- Submitted evidence to Yoorrook Justice Commission's inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.

#### Our impact

- DJCS agreed to work with VACCHO, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and VACCHO Members to resource the development of an ACCO-led model of care for Aboriginal people in prison, to be trialed in a prison from July 2025.
- The Victorian Ombudsman's conclusions and recommendations were informed by our advice and evidence.

### Action Plan: action!

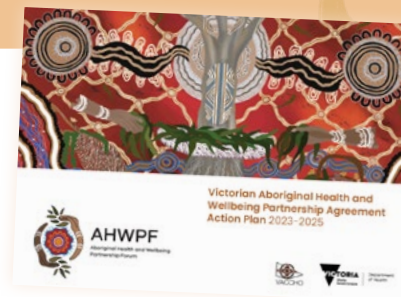
In May 2023, VACCHO and the Victorian Department of Health signed the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Action Plan 2023-2025: 38 tangible actions to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria. So how far have we moved together in the first year of the Plan?

#### What we did

- Established four working groups covering actions related to funding reform, infrastructure, cultural safety, workforce and meeting the Government's commitment to self determination.
- Developed two budget business cases, totaling \$20m, seeking funds for 12 actions in the Plan.
- Four actions have been completed.

#### Our impact

- The Action Plan provides a solid base from which to work with government, prioritising effort and ensuring that there is authority from government to act.
- Government has heightened accountability for Aboriginal health outcomes, for example the Action Plan was consistently cited by Ministers appearing before the Yoorrook Justice Commission, leading to specific commitments to support resourcing of actions.
- Achieved \$2.6 million funding to develop a statewide evidence base for our sector's infrastructure needs (see page 36).
- The actions provide firm commitments from government that allow us to proceed through to budget bids for Member and Community-identified priorities.
- Achieved \$10.8 million in the May 2024 State Budget for three programs tied to Action Plan commitments.



Working through the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum and Action Plan structure has provided new ways for Members to support each other. In January 2024, the Koori Caucus of the Forum passed a motion that a solution for the infrastructure issues at Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited (DDACL) was the sector's current highest priority. Whilst we are still to gain a funding response, the whole of sector agreement is a powerful advocacy tool.

## Outcome 2.3.1 Decision-makers align relevant policies, budgets and actions with the priorities of the Aboriginal Community in Victoria

### Infrastructure advocacy

ACCOs are recognised by government as not only critical to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, but also a key preventative strategy that reduces demand on expensive tertiary services such as hospitals and prisons. But unlike hospitals and prisons, there is no program or resourcing for the buildings and facilities Victorian ACCOs need to operate.

VACCHO's advocacy on this has been relentless since 2022, guided by Members through an Infrastructure Community of Practice and pushing the issue to top of mind with relevant Victorian Ministers and Departments. We secured a Department of Health commitment to fund budget asks for new facilities for 12 sites, and to develop a Perpetual Infrastructure Fund - a proactive and long-term strategy to ensure VACCHO Members can operate from fit for purpose, safe facilities that welcome Community.

After a May 2023 Budget Bid to address the critical infrastructure needs at Dandenong (DDACL) and Echuca (Njernda) did not succeed, we needed to step up with new strategies. Particularly for DDACL, whose facilities have had no investment for over 25 years, creating high risk for the Co-op and its Members. We also turned to building the evidence base to mount successful bids in the future.

See Outcome 2.2.2  
Aboriginal organisations and Communities have access to and control over their data.

### What we did

- Mounted a multi-layered campaign to secure a new site for DDACL, ideally closer to the Aboriginal population growth area of Cranbourne, including:
  - Meetings with 12 Victorian Ministers and Parliamentary secretaries with relevant responsibilities and further meetings and additional briefings with their Advisors.
  - Meetings with six Victorian and Commonwealth MPs representing Aboriginal people in DDACL's catchment.
  - Motion of endorsement from the AHWPF Koori Caucus.
  - Letters and submissions to 16 members of the Victorian Cabinet.
  - Produced a video highlighting the urgent building issues at DDACL.
  - Achieved widespread media coverage including an ABC TV news and digital feature reaching an audience of 1.1 million, two op-eds and five further radio/online stories.
  - 611 social media posts/videos across five channels creating 815,000+ impressions.
- Maintained a Project Control Group progressing the agreed infrastructure actions in the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement (AHWPA) Action Plan, despite a complete restructure of the Department of Health Infrastructure team.
- Worked with Infrastructure Victoria, the state's independent advisory body, to inform an update to their Victorian Infrastructure Strategy as well as a stand-alone report on ACCO Infrastructure in Victoria; due March 2025.

### Our impact

- All elected representatives, Victorian government Ministers and Cabinet are fully aware of the crisis situation at DDACL, the urgent need at Njernda and the overall need for an Infrastructure strategy for the ACCO sector.
- Julian Hill, Member for Bruce has established a cross government state and Commonwealth working party to address the critical needs of DDACL.
- Infrastructure Victoria has better knowledge and understanding of ACCOs model of operation sites, scale, impact for Community and need for infrastructure investment.
- VACCHO's Members are confident there is strong advocacy on this difficult challenge.



## 2.4 Trusted Voice

### Outcome 2.4.1 VACCHO has strong reach and engagement with Aboriginal communities

#### Rainbow Mob Gathering

The event aimed to seek Community feedback on the Rainbow Mob training module being developed by VACCHO in partnership with the Wurru Wurru Health Unit, Melbourne Medical School. The training aims to empower health and wellbeing workers with the knowledge and skills to provide culturally safe, responsive, and effective care to Rainbow Mob.



*Pictured: Indigenous Drag Performers 2Joocee, Cerulean and Stone Motherless Cold at VACCHO's Rainbow Mob Gathering event, 2024.*

#### What we did

- Hosted a Rainbow Mob Gathering in March 2024 with 29 Rainbow Mob and total 32 participants.

#### Our impact

- Attendees reported high satisfaction with the event, and asked for more Rainbow Mob gatherings and events.
- Gathering attendants felt safe to share their stories and experiences.

#### Feedback from participants:

*"I've never been in a space where all sides of me have been celebrated."*

*"VACCHO's gathering was a masterclass in creating inclusive and culturally safe spaces where important conversations could be had, identities celebrated, and incredible Blak Queer talent could be appreciated."*

## Outcome 2.4.1 VACCHO has strong reach and engagement with Aboriginal communities

### The Voice to Parliament Campaign

In March 2023, VACCHO's Board decided to publicly support the Yes vote for the Voice to Parliament Referendum in October 2023. VACCHO believed that The Voice would create health and wellbeing benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through recognition and improved governmental decision making, while also aiding reconciliation.

VACCHO took on a leadership role within the Aboriginal community and the health sector. Through an extensive advocacy plan, led tirelessly by our CEO Dr. Jill Gallagher AO, VACCHO worked with the Yes23 and Uluru Dialogue campaigns nationally and mobilised Community and allies in Victoria.

#### What we did

- Convened a coalition of Aboriginal leaders to campaign for the Voice.
- Organised speakers for 80 events, the majority by our CEO.
- Formed a health coalition of 54 organisations to publicly support the Voice, and mobilised about half of them to significantly campaign for the Voice.
- Conducted a survey of 1600 health professionals which revealed that 80% believed that a Voice would improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Organised five large scale nationally covered media events that brought together many partners and Aboriginal leaders.
- Published a total 62 weeks of high-profile billboard advertising on major roads.
- Produced 15 videos, 38 social media tiles, seven website stories, four opinion editorials.
- Distributed 5000 A3 posters, along with banners, badges and flyers.



#### Our impact

Even though the Yes vote did not succeed, there was positive impact:

- VACCHO gathered Aboriginal leaders into a leadership group that achieved the largest support for the Voice from Aboriginal leaders anywhere in the country and mobilised others to campaign for the Voice.
- This leadership mobilised Community and allies to contribute resources and campaign at greater levels.
- Support for the Voice was high in Victoria throughout the campaign with Victoria's Yes vote 5% higher than any other state/territory excluding ACT.
- Relationships established have led to health allies also advocating on Treaty.
- Relationships enhanced across the ACCO sector is advancing other policy work.
- The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria have adopted our campaign approach to prepare their Treaty campaign.



## Outcome 2.4.1 VACCHO has strong reach and engagement with Aboriginal communities

Following the Referendum campaign and result, VACCHO saw the need for Community to come together to recover, heal, and feel safe, grounded in Culture. We organised the Gathering of Mob event, at Camp Jungai, to celebrate our Community's long and proud history and Culture.

Those attending delivered an emphatic message – Aboriginal Communities are strong, resilient, and will not falter.



Strong Voice



# Health and Healing

## 3.1 Focus on Prevention

### Outcome 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to Community, Kinship, Culture and Country

VACCHO continues to build the evidence base for self-determined models of preventative health. We use our collective voice to challenge western approaches that haven't worked for Mob and advocate for cultural models of care.

#### Expansion of the Beautiful Shawl Project (BSP)

Launched in 2018, this innovative project continues to improve breast screening pathways for Aboriginal women in Victoria. The Beautiful Shawl is an empowering cultural shawl women can wear during a breast screen and can keep after. Created using designs from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, the shawls aim to wrap a woman in comfort, beauty and safety.

#### What we did

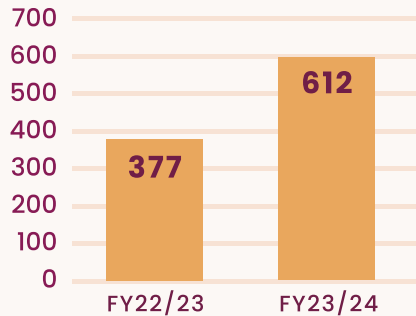
- Maintained our partnership with BreastScreen Victoria (BSV) and engaged with 19 ACCOs and three other health services across Victoria.
- Introduced regular group bookings at fixed clinics.
- Provided a breast screens to 612 women, 406 of whom are Aboriginal.
- Developed six individual ACCO/health service BSP videos, as well as a statewide video.



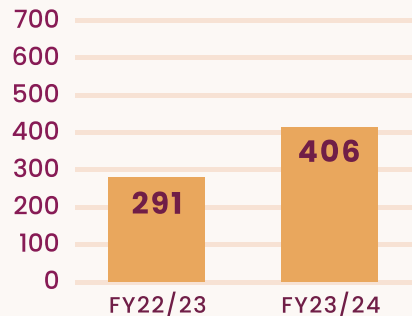


## Outcome 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to Community, Kinship, Culture and Country

### Our impact



Total number of women who have had breast screening through the BSP



Aboriginal women who have had breast screening through the BSP

- Aboriginal screens increased from 2022–23 to 2023–24:
  - 33% increase of first time screeners from 120 to 160.
  - 42% those who screened when due from 92 to 131.
  - 46% who were overdue from 79 to 115.
- All clients' screen increases from 2022–23 to 2023–24:
  - 51% increase of first time screeners from 161 to 243.
  - 74% of those who screened when due from 121 to 210.
  - 67% who were overdue from 95 to 159.
- Stronger relationships between breast screening clinic and ACCO/health services increased cultural safety for Aboriginal women screening at the clinic.
- Increased cultural safety for women throughout their screening experience.
- Overcome barriers to screening, including accessing services that are culturally safe, availability of female radiologists, cost, and provision of modesty.
- VACCHO and BSV continue to explore sustainable opportunities/strategies to increase breast screening participation for Aboriginal women.



*"...beautiful thing about it is, it brings all our beautiful, strong, black women and Elders in each Community together, to support each other in a safe cultural space, especially on Country. And the most amazing thing is you get to own and wear the Beautiful Shawl, designed by the local artist from your Community"*

**- Amanda Morgan, Artist, GunaiKurnai**



## Outcome 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to Community, Kinship, Culture and Country

### Faith's story about cancer prevention

Proud Ngadjuri woman, Faith Greenwood shared her story as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project video that VACCHO launched in October 2023. She works for and is a client at Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC).

"I was working at BDAC in 2021 when BreastScreen Victoria's Mobile Screening Service, otherwise known as The Van, attended BDAC for the first time, as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project (BSP). My colleague, Crystal, was leading BDAC's Community engagement for the project and she asked me if I wanted to screen. I didn't think I was eligible, because I wasn't yet 50, but Crystal explained that, through the project, I was actually eligible from 40 years old. Crystal kept insisting, and I would sort of say no, like I'm not old enough, I don't need to! But I eventually chose to screen.

I screened in the van using a beautiful shawl with Trina Dalton-Oogjes' design. The experience was very respectful and the radiographer was so appropriate and caring.

After my mammogram, I was called in for further assessment by BreastScreen Victoria. Two weeks later, I was sitting with other women in the waiting room. All the women supported each other in

that moment, often celebrating when women came out from their appointments with the all-clear. In my case though, I was told that I did have breast cancer.

I soon started the treatment process, having surgery to remove several lymph nodes and the tumor. After healing from the surgery, I started chemo and intensive radiation for six weeks. I managed to continue working during this time and the support and care from everyone at BDAC was absolutely amazing.

I'm a proud advocate of breast screening and the Beautiful Shawl Project. Having the van come here saved my life. And if I continued to say no to Crystal, and I waited until today to have my test done, I'd be looking at a different picture of my treatment and outlook, given how aggressive the cancer would have become.

I want to encourage women to get screened, get tested, and catch cancer early. I'm setting a precedent to all women around me that it's so important to have the breast screening done. It takes 10 minutes of your time and can, in my experience, literally save your life."





## Outcome 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to Community, Kinship, Culture and Country

### Expansion of the Culture + Kinship program

The Culture + Kinship Model of Care improves the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people by creating, strengthening, or restoring connections to Culture, Kinship, Community, and Country. It incorporates Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing into health promotion and primary prevention approaches. In FY22, VACCHO developed a Theory of Change and piloted the model with four regional ACCOs. A 2023 evaluation demonstrated its effectiveness and a significant Social Return on Investment, including a social value of \$8.29 for every dollar invested.

This year, new ACCOs joined the program to design and implement Cultural activities with their Communities.

### What we did

- Developed a Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) research proposal and a 2024/25 Victorian State budget proposal to expand the program.
- Supported participant Members throughout their program design within a self-determined, local, and culturally driven health promotion approach.
- Supported the development of a monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan that helps test the program benefits with Community.

### Our impact

- Culture + Kinship is expanding and growing through a two-year MRFF project (commenced September 2023) and four-year funding secured in the May 2024 Victorian State Budget.
- Increased opportunities for ACCOs to address health and wellbeing outcomes through self-determined Community programs.
- New options for Members to increase their engagement with Community members.
- Community members experienced reconnecting with Community, Culture, and Country within their local ACCO.

Some examples of supported projects include:

**DWECH Youth Camps** were designed so Community could engage and grow self determination through sharing knowledge and exploring Cultural identity. DWECH health promotion team, Elders and Youth workers co-ordinated, and 40 local children participated in cultural activities, including eel trapping, storytelling, and caring for Country skills. Using Go-Pros, the kids also captured their experiences on Country and recorded Elders stories of the Community. Their outcomes include:

- Children reported greater sense of pride and self-identity, and improved confidence and self-esteem.
- Children who participated became more engaged with youth services, especially those who were described as disengaged. As a result, they now gather at the ACCO to socialise (recognising it as a place of safety) after school.

**Njernda Women's Camp: Dungaludja Winyarr Nitel** was designed to support and rebuild connection within the Community. Women accessing domestic violence support and youth services participated in the camp, with healing for women on Country a big focus. Two respected Indigenous women who live and work in the Community ran the camp; 27 women, including some Elders, and 10 children participated. Their outcomes include:

- After reconnection via the Njernda Camp, many women are now participating in the weekly women's group (Winnabooga) and using other ACCO services.
- Reports of women upskilling through community programs because their confidence and identity has been strengthened through camp participation and reconnection.
- Elders felt a sense of purpose in knowledge sharing. Elders were also healing on Country.

### Feedback from camp participants:

*"The women felt connected, and healing was a priority in practice. Participants noted that healing comes from being on Country - our safe place"*

*"It was a real sisterhood."*

## Outcome 3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to Community, Kinship, Culture and Country

### The Men's Possum Skin Cloak

In 2017, Breast Cancer Network Australia and The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (PMCC) collaborated to create a possum skin cloak for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are undergoing treatment at PMCC. Inspired by this project and requests by men, VACCHO partnered with PMCC and the Royal Melbourne Hospital to develop the Men's Cloak in 2023.

#### What we did

- Ran a workshop facilitated by an Aboriginal possum skin artist to create a possum skin cloak for men. Four men with cancer, one carer, two adult sons, and three Aboriginal Health Workers participated.
- Developed an implementation model to advocate for the project to be rolled out across all health services in Victoria, led by the local Community.

#### Our impact

- The Cloak offers physical comfort and honours Aboriginal cultural traditions and provides a sense of connection and strength.
- The Men's Cloak is now being used while men are receiving cancer treatment at the two hospitals.



Left L-R: Uncle Doug Smith and Uncle James Williams at the Men's Possum Skin Cloak workshop.  
Above L-R: Andrea Casey, Natashia Ellis-Corrigan, Uncle John Whichello, Uncle Greg Matthews, Uncle Doug Smith, Lani Smith, Jay Hamann at the Men's Cloak Launch Ceremony.



## Outcome 3.1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to preventative and primary healthcare

### Eliminating cervical cancer

The Victorian Government has committed to eliminating Cervical Cancer by 2035. It's a big task overall, but the rates of cervical cancer are higher in our Communities, and it is critical to remove barriers to effective prevention. These include feelings of shame or exposure during testing and making sure culturally safe testing is available in both ACCOs and mainstream health services.

#### What we did

- Collaborated with the Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer to promote and distribute Aboriginal-designed pouches for self-collection and coverings for clinician-collected cervical screening (CST).
- Resources included 3,079 self-collection pouches, 2,390 coverings, specimen bag and swab, self-collection instruction sheet, clinical CST information, how-to-use information and links.
- Distributed CST resources to 28 ACCO sites, 13 community health centres, 19 general practices, five hospitals, two women's prisons, and one Local Public Health Unit.
- Promoted the CST resources at VACCHOs AHW/P workforce gathering.
- Booked or held cervical screening appointments while women were already screening as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project.



The cervical screening resources featured artwork by Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi artist Madison Connors.

#### Our impact

- Women reported feeling less shame, and more safe and secure when using the resources while getting their tests done in the ACCO.
- Women feel motivated to engage in cervical screening.
- Women reported the resources are easy to use and understand.

### Tobacco and vaping

As use of vapes increased dramatically, VACCHO Members highlighted the need to address this issue. The Victorian government also signalled it would introduce reforms to e-cigarette regulation, and our work focused on feeding into that process.

#### What we did

- Developed two webinars on tobacco control; 23 attended including GPs, nurses and Aboriginal Health workers.
- Developed two clinical information sheets on tobacco and vaping.
- Collaborated with key stakeholders, including QuitVic and Tackling Indigenous Smoking, in the development of resource content and sharing of information for the ACCO sector.
- Developed VACCHO's submission and addressed the Victorian Parliament inquiry into Tobacco and Vaping Controls.

#### Our impact

- The Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Tobacco and Vaping Controls has a better understanding of the impact of tobacco and e-cigarettes on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria, including youth.



VACCHO Chief Operating Officer Jim O'Shea addresses the Inquiry.

## Outcome 3.1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to preventative and primary healthcare



### Yarning about melanoma and skin cancers

Melanoma is one of the fastest growing forms of cancer in the Aboriginal community in Victoria – the sixth highest among new diagnoses of cancer. VACCHO partnered with SunSmart at Cancer Council Victoria to understand the barriers and enablers to skin cancer/melanoma prevention and early detection, specific to Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

#### What we did

- Facilitated yarns with 59 Community members across six yarning groups, two individual in-depth interviews, and two intergenerational kinship paired interviews. The yarns informed development of two SunSmart resources tailored for the Aboriginal Community.
- Attended five SunSmart/skin cancer initiatives including Sale and Morwell skin check days, where 56 Community members had a skin-check performed, and held stalls at Health Promotion days.

#### Our impact

- Multiple skin cancers were found after the skin checks, which led to timely treatment.
- Increased VACCHO's and Community members' knowledge around SunSmart behavior and skin cancers.
- The SunSmart resources are the first nationally that are tailored for Community and are ready to be distributed, with a further two to be developed in readiness for summer's high UV rates.

### Preparing for summer heatwaves

In the lead-up to Summer, we worked with the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to develop a heat safety social media campaign.

#### What we did

- Developed simple and informative resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Designed and produced 1760 brochures and magnets and two videos for social media: *Is it getting hot in here?* and *Heatstroke*.
- Delivered the resources to Member organisations and to Community at events.

#### Our impact

- Increased awareness of various health and safety risks during heat waves.
- Increased knowledge on how to identify the signs and symptoms of heatstroke, emergency contact numbers and services to help if someone is affected by heatstroke.





## Outcome 3.1.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives

### FoodPATH

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria disproportionately experience food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease. The project aims to empower Aboriginal communities in Victoria to identify the factors influencing food choice and develop food policy solutions. This year we focused on implementing the recommendations from VACCHO's FoodPATH Report, published in 2023, which developed food policies for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and was produced in collaboration with ACCOs and Deakin University.

#### What we did

- Published a collaborative paper *Food Policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (FoodPATH): A systems thinking approach* in the Food Policy Journal by ELSEVIER.
- Launched a FoodPATH policy statement and Community report to advocate for the 10 government and Community recommendations.
- Presented the research findings at events including the *Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise*, *Lowitja Institute 3rd International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference* and *2024 Global Food Governance Conference*.
- Launched a grant program called Our Food Connections – \$10,000 grants to support Member's food and nutrition initiatives for Community.

#### Our impact

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food policies were informed by Community voice for the first time in Victoria.
- Increased awareness and knowledge of the research findings across a range of different stakeholders, including government, ACCOs, public health sector.
- Achieved \$220,000 funding VicHealth and philanthropy to provide Members with resources to implement food and nutrition initiatives.
- Awarded the *Deakin Research Partnership Impact Award*.

### Promoting consent, safe sex, and healthy relationships

Sexually transmitted infections have been accelerating in Aboriginal Communities in recent years. Our statewide campaign aimed to empower young Mob around safe sex practices.

#### What we did

- Multimedia *Got A Condom?* campaign.
- 50 infographic posters distributed for *Got A Condom?* campaign across the state.
- Designed, developed, and distributed 4425 condom packets across the state.

#### Our impact

##### Feedback from Mob:

*"Cool designs and great packaging."*

*"Great campaign, relatable to the youth."*

*"Doctors loved them. The boxes are so much easier to give out. I use them!"*

*"Useful as we are doing a screening clinic. People feel comfortable as it has a flag on it."*



## 3.2 Prioritise early years

### 3.2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong

#### Pre-term birth collaborative: KMS

Koori Maternity Services (KMS) recognised that many Safer Care Victoria improvement initiatives did not centre Aboriginal health or consider the KMS workforce. Aboriginal women experience stillbirth and preterm birth at twice the rate of other population groups in Victoria, but the two key initiatives to reduce stillbirth and pre-term birth did not include a First Nations focus. So we partnered with Safer Care Victoria to ensure that Aboriginal maternal health is elevated and centered in quality improvement, and to drive reform across the system.

#### What we did

- Supported the establishment of a pilot project between Mungabareena Aboriginal Co-op and Wangaratta hospital to test the four pillars of the RISE framework, which drives reforms through pillars:
  - Redesign the health service,
  - Invest in the workforce,
  - Strengthen families; and
  - Embed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community governance and control
- Three presentations on the drivers of Pre-term Aboriginal births to over 800 maternity sector workers at Safer Care Victoria's Maternity and Newborn learning network and to 200 Maternity Service in partnership with Barwon Health.
- Worked with Safer Care Victoria on the National Preterm Birth Prevention initiative, participating in national and local meetings and presenting at statewide forums.

#### Our impact

- Improved maternal health workforce knowledge of the health disparities among Aboriginal women and Boorais, and the value of working in partnership with the ACCO sector to address the situation.
- VACCHO's advice and recommendations were reported to be instrumental in inspiring changes at a number of maternity hospitals participating in the National Preterm Birth Prevention Program. They reported they are keen to build upon this work and widen the number of hospitals embracing Aboriginal-led, culturally safe models of care.

#### Feedback:

*"You gave us such a meaningful and powerful presentation, elevating the profile of Aboriginal Health and the importance of partnership in healthcare."*

*"Absolutely brilliant presentation. I felt empowered to make change in our health service and improve the education we provide to families."*

*"This event not only inspired me to make changes in relation to pre-term birth but also reminded me about the resources available in other regions that I have not reached out to for my hospital's growth and leaning."*



## Outcome 3.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

### A Nest for Aboriginal children and their families

Through the Balit Durn Durn Centre VACCHO has committed to action and operation on recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Recommendation 33.4 is to co-design a wrap around intensive Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) services for Aboriginal children from 0-11 years and their families, so that their needs will be met, in a culturally informed way, at the right time, in the right place. We have called it The Nest.

#### What we did

- Five Expert Advisory Group (EAG) meetings with representatives from seven ACCOs and three mainstream organisations, plus eight one-to-one meetings with individual EAG members.
- 14 family engagements - eight metro, six regional; with nine 'testing back' engagements.
- Five engagement workshops with SEWB and Mental Health Workforce.
- Design Retreat workshop with 37 Participants from 14 ACCOs and seven mainstream organisations.
- Two 'testing back' workshops with design retreat participants and EAG.

#### Our impact

- The Nest model is informed by knowledge and expertise of our Knowledge Holders that take into consideration the family and kin role in supporting child's wellbeing.
- The Nest model is reflective of communities' needs and provide a solution to the barriers ACCOs face in acquiring specialist services.
- The Nest model has been signed and endorsed by Community.
- The Nest model is embedded in the Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.

### Young ones and cancer

The project aims at understanding the barriers and enablers, needs/wants regarding treatment and/or cancer journey for young ones impacted by cancer.

#### What we did

- Developed, distributed, and promoted Aboriginal workforce survey and families survey.
- Consultations with key stakeholders such as Canteen.
- Face-to-face interviews with three families affected by cancer.

#### Our impact

- VACCHO and other involved stakeholders increased their knowledge about the barriers for young people to access cancer treatment, including cultural safety and the strengths they can draw on during treatment including strong family support, a sense of belonging and continuity during the cancer journey.



## Outcome 3.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

### Increasing access to culturally safe, preventative oral healthcare

Tooth decay is the most prevalent oral disease in Australian children and higher rates are seen among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Tooth decay has a significant impact on children's health, development, and quality of life. VACCHO has been advocating for culturally safe preventative oral health care for many years.

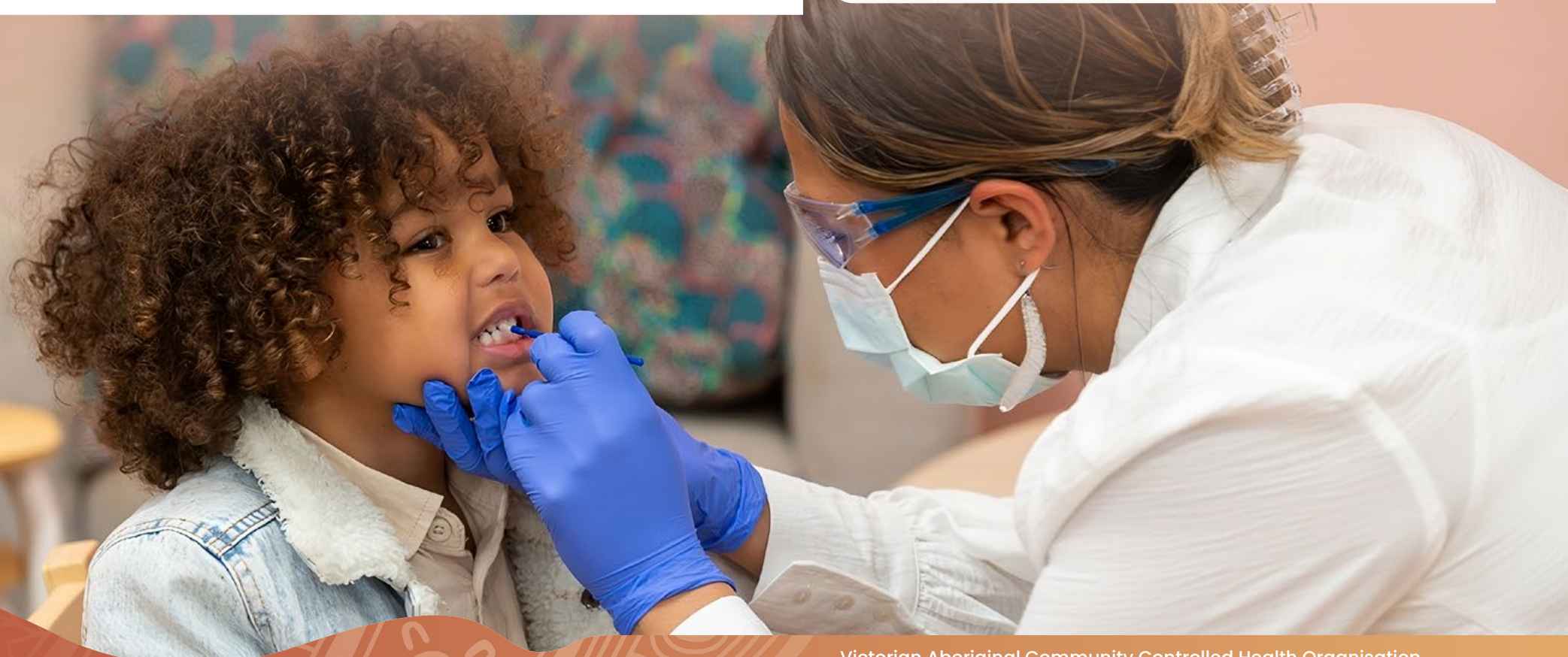
This year, ACCOs from the Loddon Mallee area were successful in developing a trial in the use of Fluoride Varnish application; an effective, evidence-based approach to reduce tooth decay among children by about 40%. Our statewide advocacy led to rule changes so that Aboriginal Health Practitioners in Victoria are now able to possess and administer fluoride varnish after completing training through the Fluoride Varnish Program.

### What we did

- In partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria, trained eight Aboriginal Health Practitioners in Fluoride Varnish administration in April 2024, for a total of 16 trained since 2022.

### Our impact

- Increased access to culturally safe, preventative dental services.





### 3.3 Ground healing in Culture

#### Outcome 3.3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

## Designing a Healing Centre

Aboriginal communities have long sought places of healing, to protect and heal from intergenerational and ongoing impacts of colonisation. Designing the Healing Centres is part of VACCHO's commitment to action and deliver Recommendation 33.1 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The design process draw upon their diverse strengths, knowledges and experiences of our Communities.

## What we did

- 3,599 community hours of engagement in co-creating Healing Centres, with 250 participants
- Five Knowledge Holder gatherings with 38 Aboriginal participants, each run as a retreat on Country.
- Six Community Yarns (142 people, 22 metro, 120 regional).
- A Design Retreat with 28 participants – 96% Aboriginal, representing 19 services; 58% ACCOs.
- Two workshops to determine the governance model and criteria for determining locations; 25 participants and one testing workshop for draft model – 50 participants.

## Our impact

- The Healing Centre model is informed by the Aboriginal community's knowledge and expertise.
- The Healing Centre model, including how Victorian centres should be run and governed, has been signed and endorsed by Community.
- We are closer to turning the Aboriginal community's long-held desire for healing centres into a reality in Victoria.





## Outcome 3.2.3 Strong and healthy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

### Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal Families Wellbeing

The number of Aboriginal children being taken into statutory care is still increasing. VACCHO seeks to influence positive change by amplifying the voices of Aboriginal families and empowering families to shape policies and practices that promote their social and wellbeing, self-determination, and prosperity. We have established the Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal Families Wellbeing to do this through research, programming, advocacy, and collaboration.



**About the artwork:** *'Empowering Generations: Celebrating the Strength of Aboriginal Families'* by Djab Wurrung, Kirrae Wurrung and Peek Wurrung artist Tarni Jarvis.

This inspiring artwork brings to life Jill Gallagher's vision of the strength of generations spanning 65,000+ years. It represents and celebrates Aboriginal families, ancestors, Culture and future generations.

#### What we did

- Developed the Centre's focus areas as:
  - Fostering a transformative shift in the narrative surrounding Aboriginal families
  - Challenging and dismantling deficit-driven and racist perspectives
  - Celebrating the strengths, resilience, and Cultural richness of Aboriginal families
  - Making recommendations for service improvements and system reforms to prioritise Aboriginal families
  - Building a robust evidence base and case for investment in Aboriginal family wellbeing services.
- Launched the Centre of Excellence in November 2023.

#### The impact/changes we expect to achieve as the project progresses

- Decision-makers will be informed by strategies provided by the Centre to address the high number of Aboriginal children in care.
- Aboriginal families, along with all families in Victoria, will greatly benefit from the integration of a comprehensive, person-centered, and trauma-informed Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing approach within the child and family services system.



### 3.4 Improve care pathways

#### Outcome 3.4.3 Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing poor health and/or disability have quality of life

### Inaugural Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit

Our Elders play an important role and hold a prominent place in our Communities and families. They hold and share our Culture's knowledge and bring their wisdom and lived experiences to help address the issues Aboriginal communities are facing.

In recognition of the 2023 NAIDOC theme, *For Our Elders*, in October 2023 VACCHO and Victorian Committee for Aboriginal Aged Care and Disability (VCAACD) held the inaugural Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit. More than 100 Aboriginal Elders from across the state joined 500 attendees for key note addresses, panel discussions, and artistic performances.

Program highlights included Aunty Fay Carter OAM's reflections on life and her aspirations for future generations, Uncle Jim Berg's original poems, Aunty Pat Anderson AO talking about the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Aunty Vicki Couzens on language revitalisation, and the deadly Uncle Herb Patten playing songs on the gum leaf.



Pictured left to right: Aunty Ros Pevitt, Uncle Jim Berg, Sheree Lowe, Aunty Gina Bundle, Aunty Fay Carter.

#### What we did

- Successfully raised funds for the summit through exhibition partners and sponsors.
- Covered costs of travel, meals, and accommodation for all Elders attending.
- Co-ordinated transport with VCAAD so Elders from rural and regional areas could attend with carers and family.

#### Our impact

- The Elders experienced a safe space to share their experiences, stories, and challenges they face in the current aged care system, and aspirations.
- VACCHO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the philanthropic sector and local councils have better understanding of Elders' needs and challenges, and how to build healthy Communities that support the ageing Aboriginal population in Victoria.

#### Feedback from Summit participants:

*"Insightful, fulfilling, connecting, learning, full heart - full cup."*

*"Fantastic, Insightful conference. Plenty of food for thought that I will take back to my workplace."*

*"It was enlightening, these events remind us we are not working in silos and we need to revitalise with knowledge and support."*

## Outcome 3.4.3 Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing poor health and/or disability have quality of life

### Support during the Journey to the Dreaming

The *Journey to the Dreaming* provides care, preparation and support for people living with a life-limiting illness and their families. It supports Community members to live the best life possible and, if needed, prepare them, their families, and Community for their Journey to the Dreaming, including palliative care and end-of-life care.

### What we did

- Partnered with Gunditjmara Elder Aunty Janice Lovett from Brown Owl Yuuiitch Peetch, to hold community yarns about the Journey to the Dreaming. Six groups of Elders throughout Victoria participated in Yarns, including 38 women and 14 men.
- Launched an initiative to embed more Cultural strengths within the Journey to the Dreaming. We sourced 900 possum, kangaroo, and wallaby pelts to distribute to AHLOs for people who are on their Journey to the Dreaming, with 523 distributed already.

### Our impact

- VACCHO and key stakeholders, including Palliative Care Victoria, have developed better understandings of how to support Mob during the Journey to the Dreaming. This has included identifying needs and preferences and features of a culturally safe Journey to the Dreaming.
- Strengths and weaknesses of currently available Journey to the Dreaming resources and services were identified.



## Person of Impact: Aunty Marg

Aunty Margaret Clark (Aunty Marg) is a proud Muthi Muthi woman who has dedicated her life to supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in education, out-of-home care, community services, health and aged care. She has been a pillar of our VACCHO Mob for over a decade, stepping up and being a leader in Aged Care, Population Health, and Community, while providing advice and guidance wherever she goes.

Aunty Marg has had a lot of adventures and experiences, moving about Australia (and the world!) to make a difference. She is a mother of one, and after her daughter was born deaf, Aunty Marg became deeply involved in advocacy and events for the deaf community as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

In 1993, Aunty Marg began work in Victoria for the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), where it wouldn't be uncommon to think she was in charge. Over the past 26 years, Aunty Marg has made invaluable contributions to Aboriginal community organisations in Victoria, which include the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, Link-Up Victoria, and the Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL). While at the AAL, Aunty Marg's research into the Aboriginal men and women who have served with the Armed Forces since the 1880's was a pivotal contribution and this research is proudly displayed at the AAL headquarters for the Anzac Day Aboriginal Dawn Service every year.

Aunty Marg says, "For me, there are three main areas in my life that give me strength and courage to go on when the odds are against me. The first, is our Elders who I admire and respect; I shudder to think where we'd be today if not for them and their fight for Aboriginal rights. My second, is my passion for genealogy and, in particular, my own Aboriginal family history. I have a need to find out who my Ancestors are; who determined my Aboriginality, Culture, spirit and, of course, my genetics. Last, but not least, is my writing—both personal and at VACCHO".

Apart from her many achievements in her career, Aunty Marg has become a highly respected and well-loved member of Community, especially at VACCHO. She has formed an incredibly tight bond with VACCHO CEO, Dr Jill Gallagher AO, and the two often travel the world together whenever they can.

Dr Gallagher says that Aunty Marg missed her calling as a travel agent, as she is particularly skilled at planning their trips, from flights to accommodation to what activities they'll do, and finding the good deals.



Aunty Marg isn't just the person of impact for this year for VACCHO but has always been a person of impact wherever she goes. She is a dedicated worker who genuinely cares 100% about what happens to Elders and how they access care facilities. She is a pillar of VACCHO and of the Community. Aunty Marg embodies the spirit of service, Culture and support.

As Dr Jill Gallagher affectionately says, "She's strong, staunch, and crusty."

## The Balit Durn Durn Centre FY24 Impact <sup>1</sup>

After years of advocacy and a Royal Commission<sup>2</sup>, our voices were heard and the Balit Durn Durn Centre – centring Aboriginal excellence in social and emotional wellbeing – came to life in 2022.

Social and emotional wellbeing or 'SEWB' is the language we use. It is more inclusive and holistic than the current western definition of mental health. It's where we want to be.

We are working to transform Victoria's mental health system. Our work is grounded in Culture, and Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. We elevate the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria to reform and redesign mental health and wellbeing for our people.

Community voice leads us and we respond. From that solid ground, we work with our government and non-government partners and allies to ensure SEWB services are accessible, safe, and embedded across service delivery in Victoria.

### Our vision:

*Drawing on our rich cultural heritage across 65,000+ years of knowledge, we work with purpose to support and lead sector-wide change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing. We strengthen our collective resilience, today and into the future by connecting Communities, using evidence-based practice and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing.*

### How we work:

**Grounded in Culture:** ceremony, cultural practices, places and spaces matter and connect us to our 65,000 years+ heritage as the world's longest living culture

**Decolonising:** We work to dismantle and decolonise systems to ones that respect, embrace and celebrate Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing

**Collaboration:** We know that everyone comes with different knowledges, experiences and skills and we all have a part to play.

**Collective decision making:** We bring communities together and foster relationships to reach common goals

**Flexibility:** We all have lived experience. We are advocates, carers, survivors and warriors doing our best to show up for our families, our work, and our people.



<sup>1</sup> Balit Durn Durn means strong brain, mind, intellect and sense of self in Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung language. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people for the use of their language.

<sup>2</sup> The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System delivered its final report on 3 February 2021 and was tabled in Parliament by the Victorian Government on 2 March 2021. Recommendations within the report led to the establishment of the Balit Durn Durn Centre and support key elements of its activity.



## Outcome 1: Mental Health Reforms are decolonised

Mental health services are not designed to meet cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise the rights of Aboriginal communities to self-determination, the evidence that self-determination is key to closing the gap in health outcomes, and the protective role of Culture.

### What we did

- Ran targeted consultations, including people with lived experience, living in various regions, and other demographic groups.
- Undertook approximately 10,000 hours of 'live / in-person' Community consultations to co-design projects.
- Finalised a co-designed family centred, intensive, social and emotional wellbeing model for children aged 0-11.
- Finalised a co-designed healing service and practice framework.
- Established a Knowledge Holder group to direct an Aboriginal-led response to suicide prevention.



### Our impact

- Aboriginal-specific recommendations from the Royal Commission into Mental Health are now translated to reflect Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.
- The design of our initiatives is enhancing understanding of strengths-based, holistic, and preventative approaches, rather than those that only respond to crises.
- The Balit Durn Durn Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework is becoming a recognised framework nationally for health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Increased opportunities for Community to participate and engage in formal and self-determined feedback processes to contribute and reform SEWB initiatives.

## Outcome 2: Aboriginal Community makes decisions on matters that impact them

Decision making in Aboriginal culture is a communal process. It draws upon the diverse strengths, knowledges, and experiences of the collective to make informed decisions. Being able to make those decisions is also a right that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people.

All key projects of the Balit Durn Durn Centre are informed by Knowledge Holder and expert advisory groups. These drew on the strength of our Culture, lived experiences, and expertise.

### What we did

- Sustained a Healing Centre Knowledge Holder group of 18 members and convened five two-day gatherings to discuss ideas and make decisions on the design of initiatives.
- Sustained a Suicide Prevention Knowledge Holder group of 20 members and has convened three two-day gatherings.
- Sustained one expert advisory group, with 10 stakeholders representing seven ACCOs and three mainstream health services. This group convened five times.

### Our impact

- Knowledge Holders are empowered to exercise self-determination in deciding and shaping the language, scope of engagement, themes, and design of our models.
- Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing are reflected in the design of services and supports.
- Increased opportunities and mechanisms for Communities to exercise their rights to make informed decisions about matters that impact them.

## Outcome 3: A strong and supportive social and emotional wellbeing workforce

The SEWB workforce in our Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations are at the frontline of our Communities' recovery from the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and other mental health issues. Over 200 people strong, they are working with Mob to support their holistic social and emotional wellbeing.

### What we did

- Co-ordinated an annual training needs assessment, which provides expansive data for our annual planning.
- Provided a total of 17 training sessions in 14 locations, with 211 participants.
- Facilitated two gatherings for the SEWB workforces to connect, network, and learn every year.
- Visited and engaged with workers in their workplaces to discuss their wellbeing and any additional supports they need.
- Hosted a bi-monthly online Community of Practice to check in, connect and stay up to date with sector news, best practice, and any other developments.
- Surveyed the workforce to ascertain the need for training and upskilling.
- Commissioned and coordinated fit for purpose training courses to upskill the sector.
- Co-ordinated scholarships for 48 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students to complete qualifications in psychology, social work, youth work, art therapy, counselling, and mental health (20 awarded in 2024).
- Responded promptly to any emerging issues with the workforce via phone or email.





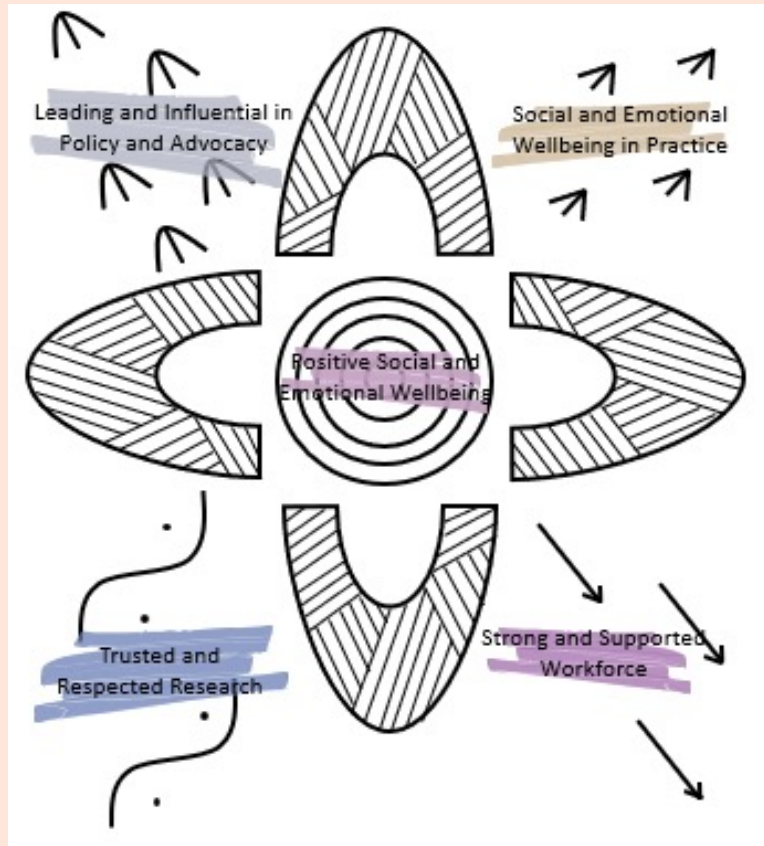
## Outcome 4: A strategic direction for the Balit Durn Durn Centre

The Balit Durn Durn Centre created its first Strategic Plan in 2024. It was developed and tested by team members, governance members, SEWB workforce, government representatives, and other stakeholders within the Aboriginal SEWB sector.

The Plan maps out our three-year strategic journey to establish our position as a central hub of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while acknowledging Aboriginal experiences.

### Our impact

- Participants in SEWB gatherings rate our gatherings at 4.5 to 4.7 stars out of five.
- Increased scholarships opportunities for Mob to get into the field (20 in 2024 with more to come).
- Sector workforce is highly engaged in development, evidenced by 87% response rate to our annual training needs assessment.
- The sector's knowledge is strengthened; training participants reported increased knowledge and understanding of suicide prevention and how to respond to mental health crises.
- Increased culturally safe and self-determining mechanisms and support systems to address emerging and ongoing workforce matters.



### What we did

- Completed a comprehensive co-design process focussing on capacity building through the support of a third-party consultant.
- Fortnightly sprint workshops for a six-month period.
- Two collaborative testing workshops.

### Our impact

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria, government, and the broader mental health sector have increased understanding of a self-determined strategy and pathway to improve social and emotional wellbeing services across the sector.

*Artwork created during the workshop by Balit Durn Durn Centre team member Jemarli Atkinson. This represents four people sitting around a campfire and signifies connection, family and meeting place to heal.*

## VACCHO Policy and Advocacy Submissions 2023–24

### **Balit Durn Durn Centre Response to the Independent Review of Compulsory Mental Health Assessment and Treatment Criteria and Alignment of Decision-making Laws consultation paper.**

JULY 2023

The submission addressed the dominance of Western biomedical models in compulsory mental health assessment and treatment, highlighting their frequent misalignment with Aboriginal concepts of health and wellbeing. It stressed the critical need to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and methodologies into decision-making processes, given the disproportionate impact of compulsory treatment and assessment on Aboriginal communities.

### **Final Submission into the Coronial Inquest to the Death of Michael Suckling**

AUGUST 2023

VACCHO submitted that this death was a result of systemic and generational disadvantages of Aboriginal people, including inadequate prison healthcare, including mental health, limited knowledge of prison conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Department of Justice and Community Safety's reliance on privatised prisons. A key recommendation was to fund ACCHOs to provide healthcare in prisons.

### **Balit Durn Durn Response to Victorian Department of Health Strategy towards elimination of seclusion and restraint**

SEPTEMBER 2023

The submission addressed the dominance of Western biomedical models in seclusion and restraint, highlighting their frequent misalignment with Aboriginal concepts of health and wellbeing. There is a critical need to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and methodologies into decision-making processes.

### **Victorian Ombudsman Investigation into Healthcare Provisions for Aboriginal People in the Adult Prison System**

OCTOBER 2023

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Victorian adult prison system face a range of deeply entrenched issues that contribute to poor social and emotional wellbeing, exacerbate trauma and trauma responses, poverty and social disadvantage. Extremely poor healthcare within the prison system perpetuates injustice.

### **Productivity Commission's Draft Review into the National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

OCTOBER 2023

VACCHO's submission called for stronger recommendations and calls for accountability and the inclusion of definitions of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

### **Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission on Land, Water and Sky**

NOVEMBER 2024

Victorian Aboriginal peoples' cultural identity, health, and wellbeing is deeply rooted in enduring connection to Country. Recommendations included investment in caring for Country initiatives, to investigate and revise land acquisition procedures, and to address stigma through an Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing model.

### **Submission to the COVID-19 Royal Commission Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry**

JANUARY 2024

Four key areas are essential to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 response and for planning future responses: the failings of mainstream health to communicate and engage with vulnerable, remote, and diverse Community members, ACCHO's success in adjusting their service delivery, social and emotional wellbeing impacts during lockdown and after, and the cost of missed prevention and early intervention opportunities.

### **Commonwealth Early Years Strategy**

FEBRUARY 2024

VACCHO's response endorsed SNAICC's submission and called for dedicated Aboriginal Early Years funding, extending beyond the current mainstream system to include support from the antenatal stage. This included advocating for Koorie Maternity Services and culturally appropriate early years education.



## VACCHO Policy and Advocacy Submissions 2023–24

### **Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission on Social Justice**

FEBRUARY 2024

VACCHO delves into the pervasive barriers hindering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' access to mainstream health services, with racism standing out as a key obstacle. We provided a narrative of the enduring impacts of over 150 years of colonisation and systematic racism and highlighted the urgent need for concrete action to rectify systemic inequities.

### **Balit Durn Durn Centre Submission to the Victorian Governments 10-year Plan for Change Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2024–2026**

FEBRUARY 2024

The submission emphasised the need to support Aboriginal families, defined broadly to include Kin networks. It highlighted that family violence reflects the enduring impacts of colonisation, displacement, and cultural disconnection. Investing in cultural strengthening programs, prevention programs, and youth engagement is crucial for Aboriginal families to address family violence and rebuild cultural identity and resilience.

### **Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission on Health, Housing and Education**

FEBRUARY 2024

Examples, evidence, and case studies of 250 years of colonisation, systemic racism, and discrimination that has led to the health disparities, funding disparities for the ACCO sector, and the life expectancy gap that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live with. We also highlighted progress and innovative solutions from the ACCO sector and offered a detailed set of recommendations.

### **Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Tobacco and Vaping Controls**

APRIL 2024

VACCHO highlighted the health impacts of vaping and tobacco use and recommended improving accessibility to Nicotine Replacement Therapy products, strengthening regulation and supporting the ACCO sector to develop and deliver vaping and tobacco control initiatives as relevant for their local Community.

### **Parliament of Victoria Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators**

MAY 2024

The submission highlights some of the key concerns, issues, and barriers to family violence perpetrator data collection within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context in Victoria, including the importance of imbedding principles of Indigenous data sovereignty into any form of data collection and use.

### **Parliament of Australia Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Affairs' (JSCATSI) Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians**

JUNE 2024

The submission focused on two barriers to economic self-determination for ACCOs. Firstly, that government funding models do not match the holistic Victorian ACCO Model, reducing the potential positive impact for Community. It urged resourcing that 'meets the Model'. Also outlined are issues with the current funding for ACCO traineeships, which make them unviable for many ACCOs to offer. We recommend a new model.

### **Response to Human Rights Commission Investigation on Opportunities for Reform of Youth Justice Systems**

JUNE 2024

The response focused on impacts of colonisation, racism, and intergenerational trauma and how they intersect with youth justice and child protection systems. We recommended a prevention focus, keeping kids out of care and supporting families, an Aboriginal SEWB lens, cultural connection and continuity.

## VACCHO External Committee Representation 2023–24

- Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF)
- Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Koori Caucus
- AHWPF Cultural Safety Working Group
- AHWPF Enabling Steps Working Group
- AHWPF Funding Reform Working Group
- AHWPF Infrastructure Project Control Board
- Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF)
- AHHF Blueprint Steering Committee – Aboriginal-specific Homelessness System Project
- Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJC)
- Aboriginal Justice Forum Caucus (AJC)
- AJC Women’s, Families and Victims Working Group
- AJC Youth Working Group
- AJC Youth Working Group – Youth Justice Primary Healthcare Quality sub Working Group
- AJC Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing sub-Working Group
- AJC Policy and Legislative Change Collaborative Working Group
- AJC Rehabilitation and Reintegration Collaborative Working Group
- AJC Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Working Group
- Aboriginal Maternal Child Health (MCH) Steering Committee
- Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum (ASGF) – Korin Korin Balit Djak
- Aboriginal Sector Governance Forum Caucus
- ASGF – Data Sovereignty Working Group
- ASGF – Funding Reform Working Group
- ACCHO sector State Peak CQI Network
- Australian Alliance for Indigenous Genomics (ALIGN) Indigenous Governance Committee
- Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal Digital in Health (CEADH) Steering Committee
- Child & Family Health and Wellbeing Locals – Evaluation Advisory Group
- Child Link Stakeholders Working Group
- Closing the Gap – Ngaweeyan Maar-oo – Victoria Partnership Forum
- Closing the Gap – Ngaweeyan Maar-oo Caucus
- Closing the Gap – Ngaweeyan Maar-oo Policy Network
- Closing the Gap – Ngaweeyan Maar-oo Treaty Working Group
- Closing the Gap – Ngaweeyan Maar-oo Expenditure Review
- Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum
- Dhelk Dja Caucus
- Dhelk Dja Caucus- Sub Working Group 5: Aboriginal-led and informed innovation, data and research
- DJIRRA/VALS CP Reform working group
- Evaluation of the Women’s Custodial Health Model working group
- Fair Jobs Code Working Group (Vic government)
- First Peoples Child Protection Notification Scheme Working Group
- GenV First Nations Advisory Group
- Governance of Indigenous Data Working Group
- Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee (HSHPIC) and HSHPIC Community Peaks meetings
- Lived and Living Experience Working Group
- Marrung Central Governance Committee
- NACCHO CEO Forum
- NACCHO Health Communication Network Meeting
- NACCHO Policy Subcommittee
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Collaboration
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Collaboration – National Health Agreement Working Group
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Protection AHPC Sub-Committee
- Services Agreement Working Group
- VACCHO-Mental Health and Wellbeing Division Partnership Meeting
- VAHS Board Subcommittee – Quality and Clinical Governance
- Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy Strategic Working Group
- VCOS Peaks and Statewide Member Forum
- Victorian Committee for Aboriginal Aged Care and Disability (VCAACD)
- Victorian First Nations Vocational Education and Training Alliance
- Victorian Legal Aid (VLA) First Nations Helpline Steering Committee



# Cover artwork

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sage Andrew is a young, queer, Aboriginal artist living on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung country in North Melbourne, Australia. They were raised on Gubbi Gubbi land, and their family has been welcomed by the Gangulu mob in their mother's hometown. Their artwork is both a joyous exploration of identity, and a means of reconnecting with heritage and history. Sage is an artist, a hairdresser in training, and above all a young creative with more pies than they have fingers for.

'My artwork is the product of a decade of radical self exploration and acceptance in the face of conformity. I've always been unashamed to show my true colours thanks to the encouragement and eccentricity of my family both blood and chosen Mob. Creating and sharing my art has become a way to connect with Community, Land, and myself. I am so excited to continue contributing my skills and abilities to capture unique stories for the benefit of the Aboriginal communities of Naarm and Australia.'

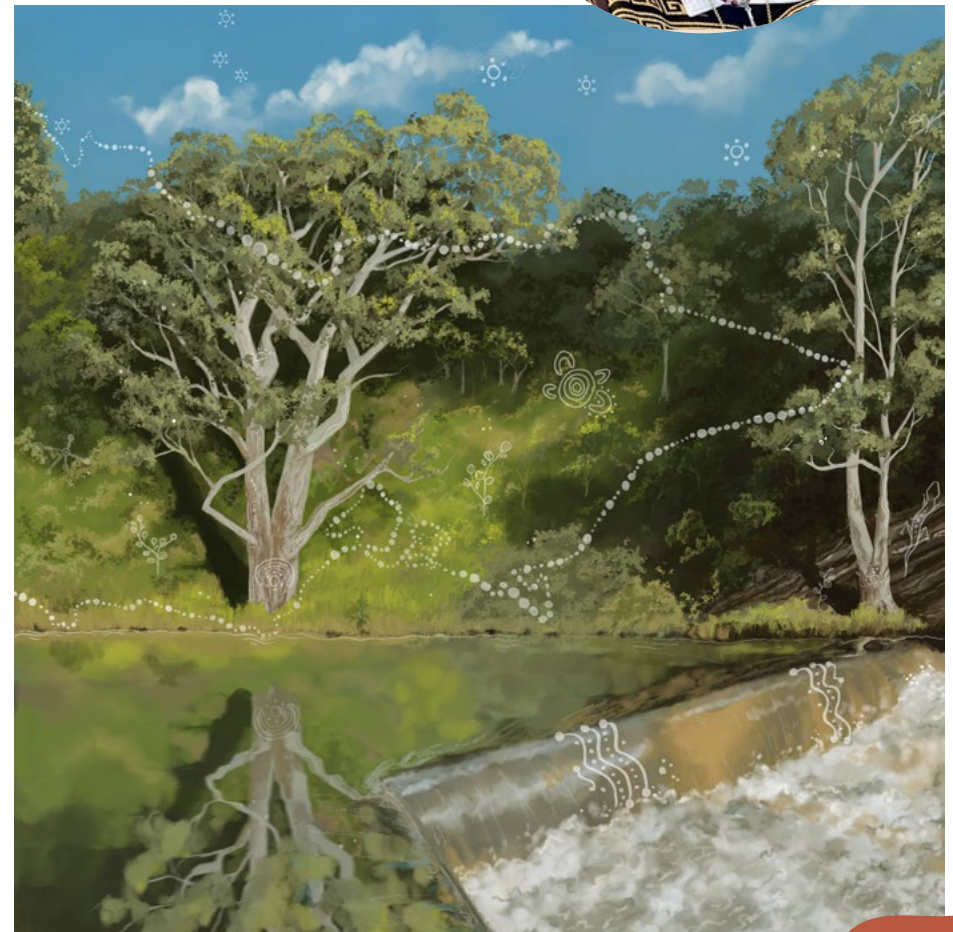


## ARTWORK STORY

Sage has created an artwork to encapsulate the essence of resilience and healing embodied in the theme "65,000 Years Strong" through interweaving contemporary mediums of art with traditional symbolism, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous cultures. Depicted is the Birrarrung (Yarra) river drawn from life at Dights Falls, a meeting place of pre-colonial Wurundjeri peoples. The piece has a sense of unity, allowing nature and culture to feel at home in modern technology, highlighting that Indigenous culture and our connection to it is ongoing, living, and profoundly resilient. Mingling the organic world with technology is also a tribute to the work VACCHO is doing to harness both culture and progress.

As viewers engage with the artwork, they are invited on a visual odyssey, guided by intricate details and powerful symbolism that honour the past, celebrate the present, and inspire hope for the future. A viewer can find information within this artwork; the lizard on the rock face, the campsite on the hillside, and ancestors in the trees and sky echoing the deep-rooted connection to land that has sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia. Incorporated subtly into the artwork is a translucent outline of Victoria, inspired by the map showing the Members of VACCHO. The recent Voice Referendum in October 2023 serves as a catalyst for action and empowerment, further fuelling the artist's passion to kindle and share the wealth of a culture "65,000 Years Strong."

Within the Report, standalone motifs and illustrations have been incorporated to link the content with the cover. The wurun (Manna Gum) is represented flowing and curling in complimentary patterns to show the simple grace and beauty of the natural world. Throughout the document traditional Aboriginal symbols have been included, one of which highlights the "journey" that VACCHO and its Members have travelled through the years. This journey has many resting places, and many people surrounding and supporting, representing the path forged by VACCHO. These natural, artistic elements serve as a resting place for the eye, and reinforce the importance of the work documented in the report. Through symbolism, colour, and imagery, Sage's artwork celebrates the richness and diversity of our culture, while acknowledging the challenges faced and the ongoing journey towards healing and empowerment through Community.







***Vibrant, healthy, self-determining  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities***

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