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## ACT





*Truly self-determining structures need to be designed by Aboriginal people, but not just replicating the existing power structures that exist in the Aboriginal community currently.*

Community forum participant, Ballarat

# The VAAF is underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination

Self-determination is the guiding principle in Aboriginal affairs. Aboriginal self-determination underpinned the development of the VAAF, as it will underpin all future action across Victoria.

Aboriginal self-determination is not a new concept. For decades, Aboriginal Victorians have fought for self-determination and their right to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and communities.

While Aboriginal self-determination means different things to different people, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) describes self-determination as the ability for Indigenous people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. It also describes self-determination as a right that relates to groups of people, not only individuals.<sup>1</sup>

While UNDRIP gives us a language to talk about self-determination, Aboriginal Victorians must not feel constrained by the definition set out in UNDRIP. Inherent to self-determination is the right of Aboriginal Victorians to define for themselves what self-determination means.

We have heard from community that Aboriginal self-determination encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own cultural values and way of life. This includes rights to:

- not be discriminated against
- enjoy language, culture and heritage
- land and natural resources
- have access to the basic necessities of life and be economically self-sufficient
- make decisions that impact their lives from a position of wellbeing and empowerment
- 'grassroots community' having ownership and responsibility for their own affairs and their own communities, including through designing and delivering policy and services on their own terms, setting their own funding priorities and holding their service providers accountable.

## There are three reasons Aboriginal self-determination underpins the VAAF

### IT WORKS

Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities. Local and international evidence shows us that self-determination is the key policy approach that has produced effective and sustainable outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

### IT IS WHAT COMMUNITY WANTS

Aboriginal Victorians have consistently and long called for self-determination as the key enabler for Aboriginal people, families and communities to thrive.

### IT IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Australia is a signatory to international law instruments, including UNDRIP, that affirm the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples.

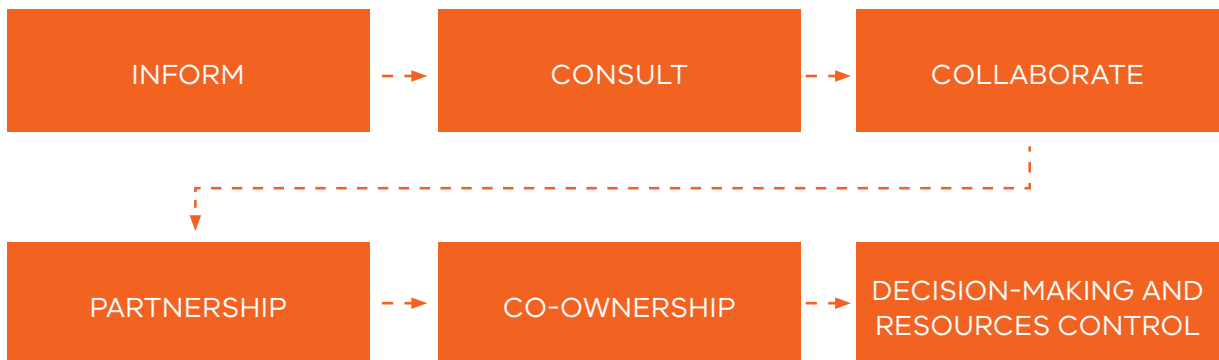
# Understanding government's efforts to advance Aboriginal self-determination

The Victorian Government recognises that Aboriginal self-determination involves more than consulting and partnering with Aboriginal Victorians on policies and programs that affect their lives.

There is a continuum that leads to Aboriginal self-determination, ranging from informing community through to transferring decision-making control. We acknowledge that different policies, initiatives and strategies across government are at different stages of advancing self-determination.

In our journey towards making Aboriginal self-determination a reality, government should continue to strive towards transferring decision-making control to Aboriginal peoples and community on the matters that affect their lives.

## Continuum towards Aboriginal self-determination



*Self-determination is about community voice, led by community, measured by community, relating to the whole community.*

Community forum participant, Mildura



# Our future action will be underpinned by 11 self-determination guiding principles

The Victorian Government's future action to advance Aboriginal self-determination will be driven by 11 guiding principles of self-determination.

The self-determination principles have been developed following extensive community engagement with Aboriginal Victorians. They set the minimum standards for all existing and future work with Aboriginal Victorians. While different policies, initiatives and strategies across government are at different stages of

advancing self-determination, these principles provide a 'common language' for what Aboriginal self-determination looks like in practice.

These principles will underpin all action to progress Aboriginal self-determination.

## Self-determination guiding principles

### HUMAN RIGHTS

Self-determination initiatives honour the norms set out in UNDRIP and Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

### CULTURAL INTEGRITY

As First Nations peoples, the rich, thriving cultures, knowledge and diverse experiences of Aboriginal people, including where they fit with family, community and society, will be recognised, valued, heard and celebrated.

### COMMITMENT

Aboriginal self-determination will be advanced and embedded through planned action that is endorsed by, and accountable to, all parties.

### ABORIGINAL EXPERTISE

Government and agencies will seek out, value and embed Aboriginal culture, knowledge, expertise and diverse perspectives in policies and practice.

### PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships will advance Aboriginal autonomy through equitable participation, shared authority and decision-making, and will be underpinned by cultural integrity.

### DECISION-MAKING

Decision-makers will respect the right to free, prior and informed consent and individual choice and will prioritise the transfer of decision-making power to Aboriginal people in areas that impact their communities.

### EMPOWERMENT

Aboriginal people will have autonomy and participation in the development, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programs that impact their communities.

### CULTURAL SAFETY

Programs and services accessed by Aboriginal people will be inclusive, respectful, responsive and relevant, and informed by culturally safe practice frameworks.

### INVESTMENT

Investment to support self-determination will be sustainable, flexible and appropriate to strengthen Aboriginal peoples' aspirations and participation, including around economic participation, economic independence and building wealth.

### EQUITY

Systemic and structural racism, discrimination and unconscious bias and other barriers to Aboriginal self-determination will be actively identified and eliminated.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

All parties responsible for delivering outcomes involving Aboriginal people will be held accountable and subject to Aboriginal-led, independent and transparent oversight.

# We will prioritise action in four key areas

While government must not define or control Aboriginal self-determination, it does control many of the systems and structures that enable it. Government must therefore transform its systems and structures to support self-determination and improve outcomes for Aboriginal peoples.

We acknowledge that the way government enables Aboriginal self-determination will continue to evolve over time, based on changing community expectations and needs. However, community has identified four self-determination enablers which government must commit to and act upon over the next five years to make Aboriginal self-determination a reality:

1. Prioritise culture
2. Address trauma and support healing
3. Address racism and promote cultural safety
4. Transfer power and resources to communities.

To help guide government's work, community has proposed broad areas in which government should prioritise its efforts.

These areas for action will require government and community to work together to develop a more detailed understanding of how such initiatives could be developed and implemented.

As detailed in the 'Evaluate' section of the VAAF, government will be held accountable for delivering on this work through an Aboriginal-led evaluation and review mechanism. The Aboriginal-led evaluation and review mechanism will include qualitative reporting on:

- efforts to progress the self-determination guiding principles
- implementation of the broad areas for action that support the four self-determination enablers.

In addition, government's self-determination action will be reported to community via an annual tabling of a whole-of-government progress report on the VAAF in Parliament.

## 1 Prioritise culture

We acknowledge that connection to family, community, culture and Country is critical to the wellbeing and positive self-identity of Aboriginal Victorians. Cultural identity is a key enabler of achieving positive outcomes and the full enjoyment of the right to practise culture.

*Self-determination has to come from strong culture first and foremost. People need to be able to regain their culture and traditions before they can self-determine.*

Community forum participant, Seymour

### Broad areas for action

Acknowledge, respect and celebrate the diversity and strength of Aboriginal culture

Support cultural pride and identity among Aboriginal Victorians

Promote greater understanding of and respect for Aboriginal culture and communities among non-Aboriginal Victorians

Acknowledge, promote and support Aboriginal people, including Elders and young people, to strengthen, connect and re-connect to culture

Support Aboriginal-led research to build the evidence base on the role of cultural determinants to help develop effective policies and services.

## 2 Address trauma and support healing

We acknowledge the long-lasting, far-reaching and intergenerational consequences of colonisation, dispossession, child removal and other discriminatory government policies, including significant intergenerational trauma. Addressing trauma and supporting healing is important because the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities is fundamental to how they engage with the structures and systems that support them to thrive.

*Self-determination is ongoing, continuous, evolving – healing needs to happen first.*

Community forum participant, Morwell

### Broad areas for action

Increase investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives that help build strong families and communities

Address historical and contemporary discrimination

Develop a new relationship of trust, including through treaty

Embed trauma-informed policy and practice into funded services, recognising the leading role that Aboriginal organisations play in providing holistic, culturally safe services to Aboriginal people and communities

Ensure mainstream organisations and the wider community understand the ongoing impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma

Support members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants

Support the strengthening of relationships within and between Aboriginal communities

Support truth-telling.

## 3 Address racism and promote cultural safety

The structures and systems established during colonisation had the specific intent to exclude Aboriginal people and their laws, customs and traditions, resulting in entrenched systemic and structural racism. Governments as well as Aboriginal and mainstream organisations and services should provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal Victorian people, families, communities and organisations to fully participate in policy development. Targeted and universal systems and services must be culturally safe, relevant, accessible and responsive to communities. This enables Aboriginal Victorians to make decisions on the matters that affect their lives.

*Government needs to be held accountable for structural racism. It's not up to Aboriginal Victorians to address this.*

Community forum participant, Melbourne

### Broad areas for action

Ensure government departments, Aboriginal organisations and government-funded mainstream services are culturally safe and relevant

Ensure government departments, government-funded mainstream services and organisations and the wider community understand the impacts of colonisation, racism and unconscious bias

Increase the Aboriginal workforce across services, including in leadership roles

Ensure the Aboriginal workforce is supported

Ensure future State Budget bids reflect the voice and priorities of Aboriginal communities, including through engagement and consultation

Address racism, unconscious bias and discrimination in government laws, policy, practice, systems and institutions

Recognise and remove the barriers to the Aboriginal community accessing services and participating fully in social and economic activity

Increase alignment and co-ordination across and between state government, local governments, Aboriginal organisations, mainstream organisations and community.



## 4 Transfer power and resources to communities

Aboriginal people know what is best for themselves, their families and communities. We acknowledge the right of Aboriginal Victorians to have decision-making control over the issues that affect their lives. Community-led, place-based decision-making and resourcing at the state and local level will enable Aboriginal communities to lead the development and implementation of culturally safe and relevant responses. It will also allow Aboriginal communities to hold government, Aboriginal organisations and mainstream services to account.

*Government needs to transfer power and resources over to community control.*

Community forum participant, Bendigo

### Broad areas for action

Strengthen Aboriginal leadership, representation, decision-making and resource allocation/distribution at the local, regional and state levels, recognising the needs of Aboriginal communities

Ensure government, Aboriginal organisations and government-funded mainstream services respond to community voices

Support and resource self-determining Aboriginal governance structures at the local community level, within Aboriginal organisations and through the pathway to treaty

Support Aboriginal organisations and communities to design, deliver and evaluate programs, policies and services to Aboriginal people and communities, in line with community preference

Ensure funding for Aboriginal organisations and mainstream organisations providing services to Aboriginal Victorians is transparent, equitable, community led, flexible, sustainable, long term and based on outcomes not outputs

Deliver ongoing capacity strengthening and resourcing of Aboriginal organisations and communities around leadership, decision-making and evaluation

Ensure there is independent, community-led and resourced accountability of government, Aboriginal organisations and government-funded mainstream services back to local communities

Support data sovereignty

Support Traditional Owner-led management and control of land, water and other natural resources

Support community members as they work to advance and enforce their human rights.