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The Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework identifies the key outcome of reducing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous Victorians and other members of the Victorian community. Concerted action is required in many areas and involves a number of departments working in partnership with Indigenous Victorians.

Delivery of the Framework is a high priority for the Victorian Government. We recognised the need for action to be co-ordinated across Government and in 2006 established a Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. The Taskforce ensures that we as a Government are able to drive change.

The Taskforce was led by Gavin Jennings, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, under whose leadership the Framework was initially developed and departmental action plans for the strategic change indicators commenced. Following the retirement of the former Premier and the ensuing machinery of government changes I was delighted to take on the role of leading the Taskforce.

Under the machinery of government changes led by the new Premier, the new alignment of Government functions is even better placed to deliver on the areas for action within the Framework throughout the 2007-08 financial year.

This report, our annual reporting of activities in Indigenous Affairs, allows all Victorians to see what has been achieved, what we continue to work on, and what our plans for the future are.

The Hon Rob Hulls MP
Chair of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs
Deputy Premier and Attorney-General

This report is the first against the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF) which the Victorian Government adopted in October 2006. The fundamental purpose of the VIAF is to close the gap in the life expectancy between Indigenous Victorians and other Victorians.

On average, Indigenous Victorians die 17 years younger than our other citizens. The Victorian Government is determined to close this gap. The gap represents the outcome of an intergenerational cycle of fundamental economic, social and cultural disadvantage that continues to concentrate hardship and trauma in the lives of Indigenous Victorians.

The VIAF, released last year, is directed to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Central to our approach is that success is contingent upon the quality and solidity of partnerships we build with Indigenous communities. The goal is shared by the partners as is the recognition that sustainable change is reliant upon these partnerships. The Victorian Government recognises that actions and investments taken outside partnership arrangements are not only doomed to failure but will also further disempower and deepen disadvantage.

The values that underpin the VIAF mirror those underpinning Growing Victoria Together and A Fairer Victoria. The values emphasise the need for fairness and justice.

The VIAF recognises the imperative of building the strength of Indigenous communities and in particular their human, social and economic resources. Their greater strength is vital to building the effectiveness of partnerships.

There are no easy solutions and progress will not be as rapid as Indigenous communities, the broader Victorian community and the Government want. However the building blocks are being put in place. This report charts progress achieved in the first eight months since the adoption of the VIAF.

The VIAF spells out the principles for reform, the policy framework, an accompanying performance framework and the framework for partnership co-ordination and management. The report outlines progress of partnership arrangements and early progress against each of the strategic areas for action.

Our strategic areas for action incorporate measures designed to tackle many of the drivers of the disadvantage cycle as well as better responses to the outcomes of disadvantage. Each chapter on the strategic action areas specifies current performance that allows Victoria to measure progress.
Building better life chances, improved quality of life and platforms for better life expectancy begins with babies and young children. Healthy pregnancies and quality early childhood experience are vital and Chapter 4 reports on initiatives we are taking to improve perinatal and early childhood development outcomes. Literacy and numeracy attainment and educational achievement are vital for life outcomes and Chapters 5 and 6 outline current initiatives in these areas.

Family violence and justice system outcomes are major factors impinging on the quality and security of life for many Indigenous Victorians. Chapters 7 and 8 outline current measures designed to improve service responsiveness.

Access to traditional lands and encouraging improved platforms for economic development are essential to improved economic and social well-being outcomes for Indigenous Victorians. Underpinning all government and community effort is the need to build Indigenous capacity, to build the human, economic and social capital of Indigenous communities through building the capability of Indigenous organisations, institutions and individuals to be self reliant and effective. Chapters 9 and 10 outline current initiatives and progress.

This report is the first against the measures outlined in the VIAF. There are many data gaps. The Government expects that future reports against the framework will progressively provide more detailed data that will enable Indigenous and other Victorians to closely monitor progress.

The report is limited to outlining progress against the VIAF in 2006-07 and does not represent a full inventory of government actions and initiatives in Indigenous Affairs. For example the Department of Human Services’ new Aboriginal Services Plan 2008-2010 provides comprehensive coverage of government effort in that department in areas such as alcohol and substance abuse, mental health, chronic disease and primary health.

Similarly initiatives by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development are promoting significant change in outcomes for Indigenous students. On the basis of the findings of a current review, this department is developing a major strategy for Indigenous education in Victoria.

We will continue to invest and work with Indigenous Victorians to achieve the VIAF objectives. The progress we are achieving provides strengthened hope for the future of Indigenous Victorians and therefore all of us.

The Hon Richard Wynne MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Chapter 1
Profile of Victoria’s Indigenous Community

The Victorian Government is committed to improving the life expectancy of Indigenous Victorians. In October 2006 the Government released the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF) to underpin and define efforts across government and the community in meeting this goal. The VIAF identified three areas where sustainable, long-term improvements are required. These are:

1. Safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity;
2. Positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm; and
3. Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

The VIAF requires action across many areas of government activity. To ensure that there is co-ordination of effort, and to provide whole of government leadership, the Government established a Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs to direct the implementation of the VIAF.

This report outlines the Victorian Government’s actions over the 2006-07 financial year with a particular focus on progress achieved in the first eight months since the adoption and release of the VIAF, covering the period November 2006-June 2007. In future years there will be an annual report against the VIAF.

The Victorian Government places a high priority on delivering real and measurable results for Indigenous Victorians. In this first report against the new framework, the Government outlines current performance. It is recognised that in some areas current data is limited, old or simply not yet available. Government departments acknowledge that over time there is a need to improve data collection to ensure that we are able to measure and monitor performance. In the coming year there will be a sustained effort to develop and improve the performance framework.

It is important to note there are many other Victorian Government programs that make significant contributions to the quality of life of Indigenous Victorians that are not directly covered by the Framework. Such areas include housing services, specific Indigenous programs and mainstream Government programs that are sensitive to the needs of Indigenous Victorians.

Further detail on the contribution of those programs operating outside the immediate objectives of the VIAF can be found in departmental annual reports and specific publications such as the Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Aboriginal Services Plan 2008-10. The DHS annual publication, Aboriginal Services Plan: Key Indicators also reports on progress of the comprehensive programs and initiatives administered by that department.
A Vibrant and Strong Culture

Indigenous culture and heritage has been and will always be a fundamental part of Victoria’s identity. By working with Indigenous communities we can provide more opportunities for all Victorians to recognise, respect and celebrate the contribution of Indigenous Victorians to the fabric of this State.

Indigenous Victoria

Indigenous Australia is the oldest living culture in the world. The land that is now Victoria has an ancient and proud Indigenous history stretching back many thousands of years.

When the first Europeans arrived it is estimated that there were between 20,000 and 60,000 people speaking over 30 languages living throughout the place we now call Victoria.

Victoria’s Aboriginal cultural heritage tells the story of how and where the ancestors of Victoria’s Indigenous communities lived for tens of thousands of years. This heritage is a link between the past, the present and the future and is an important part of the identity of Indigenous Victorians as well as the collective identity of Victoria generally.

The 2006 Australian Census reports there are over 30,000 Indigenous Victorians living in the State.

There are over 30 distinct local Indigenous communities across the State that are based on location, language and cultural groups, and extended familial networks. In comparison to the rest of the highly urbanised Victorian population, almost half of Victoria’s Indigenous residents live outside Melbourne.

There are significant differences between Victoria’s Indigenous population and other Victorians. Victoria’s broader population is ageing where in sharp contrast Victoria’s Indigenous population is young. Over half are under 25 years of age and over a third are under 15 years old. By comparison 32% of the non Indigenous population are under 25 and nearly 20% are under 15 years of age. This difference in age structure reflects a number of factors, including a lower life expectancy and higher fertility rates.

Diagram 1 depicts the age structure of Indigenous and other Victorians.

Diagram 1 - Age distribution of Victorian Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Population in 2006

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing Victoria 2006. Cat no.4705.0
There are also significant differences in family structure with proportionately higher single parent families in Indigenous communities - 38% of Indigenous families are sole parent families, compared to 15% of non Indigenous families.

The role of Indigenous children is central to Indigenous society. Indigenous communities place a high degree of importance on their children having a strong identity. The VIAF incorporates a similarly strong focus on strengthening the future of young Indigenous Victorians.

Indigenous community leaders are highly active in a number of roles that range from health and well-being to advocacy and education to economic development. Victoria has over 170 Indigenous community controlled organisations many of which provide support and services to Indigenous communities. These organisations are well served with the efforts of many Indigenous leaders.

Achieving the sustainable improvements sought through the VIAF is contingent on partnerships between these organisations, the Victorian Government and the broader Victorian community.

Exploring the Gaps

The level of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians is not confined to communities living in remote parts of Australia. Indigenous Australians experience unacceptably lower rates of life expectancy in all States and Territories, in cities, regional centres and rural and remote areas. Victoria is no exception.

All State and Territory governments and the Commonwealth Government have endorsed the goal of overcoming Indigenous disadvantage within the Council of Australian Governments. Along the way to achieving the goal of overcoming disadvantage, governments are committed to reporting on progress through the national report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*. The report identifies indicators to guide action and monitors performance against the indicators.

When we look at areas such as health, education and employment there are significant gaps where Indigenous Victorians do less well than non-Indigenous Victorians. Bridging these gaps, particularly in relation to life expectancy is central to the Victorian Government’s work with Indigenous communities.
Health and Well-being

The most telling gap in health and well-being between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians is life expectancy. The gap can be thought of as the accumulation of a lifetime of disadvantage. Indigenous Victorians, on average, die 17 years younger than non-Indigenous Victorians.

The lifetime of disadvantage begins at birth where Indigenous babies are more likely to be of low birthweight. It continues into early childhood where Indigenous children have lower rates of use of kindergartens.

The cycle further continues with the risks of child abuse. Reports of child abuse are increasing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians. However in 2005-06, Victorian Indigenous child abuse substantiations were more than nine times the rate per 1,000 children than non-Indigenous Victorians.

Long-term illnesses and chronic diseases are also more prevalent for Indigenous Victorians. They are more than three times more likely to have diabetes than non-Indigenous Victorians.

Education

There are significant disparities in education outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians. Around 14% of Indigenous Victorians report their highest level of education as being Year 9 or below.¹ This is almost double the rate for other Victorians. Under a quarter of Indigenous Victorians have completed year 12 compared with almost half of other Victorians.²

Income and Employment

Educational outcomes strongly influence future earnings. Indigenous Victorians are over-represented in low income Victorian households and under represented in high income households. Around 60% of Indigenous households are on low incomes (the lowest and second lowest quintiles).³

There are also significant gaps between the labour market experience of Indigenous and other Victorians. The rate of unemployment for Indigenous Victorians is well over twice as high as the overall rate for Victorians.⁴

Incarceration and Crime

Indigenous Victorians are 12 times more likely to be placed in adult prison than non-Indigenous Victorians. Moreover, Indigenous youth aged 16 and younger are 12 times more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Indigenous youth.

Indigenous Victorians are also more likely to be victims of crime, and are three times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Indigenous Victorians.

These are some of the highly significant gaps that feed into the cycle of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Victorians. Each cycle feeds into another.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004-05, Cat. no. 4715.0.55.005 (unpublished); ABS National Health Survey 2004-5; Summary of Results, Cat. no. 4362.0 (unpublished) reported in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2007.
⁴ ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004-05, Cat. no. 4715.0.55.005 (unpublished); ABS National Health Survey 2004-05, Cat. no. 4362.0 (unpublished) reported in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2007.
Overview of the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework

On average, Indigenous Victorians die 17 years younger than non-Indigenous Victorians. This significant gap in life expectancy must be reduced.

An Enduring Commitment

The Victoria Government’s primary goal in Indigenous affairs is to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians. This requires a sustained effort by the Victorian Government in partnership with Indigenous communities in Victoria.

The VIAF is founded on a generational approach and focuses on improved child health and safety outcomes; justice before the law; improved school participation, attainment and completion rates; and better employment outcomes. Progress in these areas represents important building blocks in raising life expectancy and quality of life, and their achievement will guide Government effort and investment in Victoria over the coming decade.

Policy Background

In 2005, the Victorian Government released its flagship social policy statement, *A Fairer Victoria*, which was targeted at overcoming disadvantage experienced by many Victorians through specific interventions and new ways of working with communities. *A Fairer Victoria* reinforced the Victorian Government’s commitment to improving the lives of all Indigenous Victorians and led to a new policy of working with Indigenous people, *Building a New Partnership with Indigenous Victorians*. This commitment underpinned development of the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* (VIAF).
Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework

The VIAF embodies the Victorian Government’s commitment to improving the life expectancy of Indigenous Victorians. The logic underpinning the Framework is that by focusing efforts the Government will lay the groundwork for achieving sustainable, long term improvements in the Victorian Strategic Areas for Action over the medium term.

The priority outcomes outlined on page 10 mirror those of the nationally-endorsed Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework and link to its headline indicators.5

In the short to medium term the focus for action is on matters within the control or immediate influence of the Victorian Government.

These are reflected in the following Strategic Areas for Action:

1. Improve maternal health and early childhood health and development.
2. Improve literacy and numeracy.
3. Improve year 12 completion or equivalent qualification and develop pathways to employment.
4. Prevent family violence and improve justice outcomes.
5. Improve economic development, settle native title claims and address land access issues.

Each area contains change indicators that will measure the Government’s progress in reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

Achieving improvements in the change indicators in each of the Strategic Action Areas is the basis for improving outcomes.

This report identifies current performance and long term indicators based on achieving performance levels equivalent to those enjoyed by the Victorian community as a whole.

These indicators provide a way to measure progress in achieving the priority outcomes of the VIAF. Diagram 2 depicts how the VIAF operates.

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5 The Headline Indicators are: life expectancy at birth; rates of disability and/or core activity restriction; years 10 and 12 retention and attainment; post-secondary education participation and attainment; labour force participation and unemployment; household and individual income; home ownership; suicide and self-harm; substantiated child protection notifications; deaths from homicide and hospitalisations for assault; victim rates for crime; imprisonment and juvenile detention rates.
Diagram 2 – Improving the Lives of Indigenous Victorians, Strategic Policy Framework

**Goal**
To improve life expectancy and quality of life for Indigenous Victorians

**Victoria’s Indigenous Community**

**Victoria’s Strategic Areas for Action**

**Goal**
To improve life expectancy and quality of life for Indigenous Victorians

**Priority Outcome 1**
Safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity

**Priority Outcome 2**
Positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self harm

**Priority Outcome 3**
Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities

**Government Leadership and Co-ordination**

**Victoria’s Strategic Areas for Action**

**OID Strategic Areas for Action**

- Early school engagement and performance (preschool to year 3)
- Positive childhood and transition to adolescence
- Substance abuse and misuse
- Functional and resilient families and communities
- Effective environmental health systems
- Economic participation and development
- Early child development and growth (prenatal to age 3)
Chapter 3

A Commitment to Partnership

The problems facing Victoria’s Indigenous people require a sustained and co-ordinated effort across all levels of government and the community. By working in partnership we can achieve improved social, economic and cultural outcomes for Indigenous Victorians.

Building a New Partnership with Indigenous Victorians is a core strategy of A Fairer Victoria.

This concerted effort requires more than can be achieved by single departments or Ministers alone.

The Government is committed to putting in place new arrangements, reforms and local strategies which strengthen and empower the partnership between it and Victoria’s Indigenous community.

Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs

The actions outlined in the VIAF run across multiple areas of the Victorian Government. The Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs (MTAA) drives action and provides whole-of-government direction. It has a continuing focus on outcomes for children and young people.

The Taskforce was established in 2006 and comprised:

- Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (chair)
- Attorney General
- Minister for Children
- Minister for Education
- Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment.

The Taskforce:
- drives implementation of the VIAF within a whole of government framework across the Victorian Government;
- focuses Government action to improve outcomes in the strategic areas of action of the VIAF;
- leads and drives change across Government in addressing Indigenous disadvantage and bridging the gap between well-being outcomes of Indigenous and other Victorians; and
- galvanises departments and agencies to meet the challenges posed by Growing Victoria Together, A Fairer Victoria, the New Representative and Community Engagement Arrangements and portfolio specific plans to address Indigenous disadvantage.
Diagram 3 – VIAF Co-ordination and Management Framework

Community Leadership

- Premiers Aboriginal Advisory Council (PAAC)
- 8 Regional Indigenous Councils (RIC)
- 38 Local Indigenous Networks (LIN)

Government Leadership

- Premier
- Ministerial Taskforce for Aboriginal Affairs
- Secretaries Group for Aboriginal Affairs

Representation and Engagement

**Premier’s Aboriginal Advisory Council and New Representative Arrangements**

Following the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Victorian Government was left without a mechanism for consulting with Indigenous communities. The 2006/07 Victorian Budget committed funding to develop new community engagement and representative arrangements. The result is a graduated three-tier structure for Indigenous governance comprising 38 Local Indigenous Networks, eight Regional Indigenous Councils, and the Premier’s Aboriginal Advisory Council. Diagram 3 shows how this new structure works with the Victorian Government.

In 2006/2007 work commenced to put these governance arrangements in place in the Loddon Mallee, Gippsland and Barwon South West Regions. All Local Indigenous Networks and Regional Indigenous Councils are expected to be in place by 2009/10. The Premier’s Aboriginal Advisory Council will include Regional Indigenous Council and Indigenous peak body representation.

The Local Indigenous Networks and Regional Indigenous Councils will provide a new opportunity for existing leaders, help identify new leaders, and provide a way for Indigenous Victorians to participate, contribute, and be recognised for their contribution to the broader community. They will also strengthen the capacity of Indigenous people to participate in mainstream planning processes managed by local government, local services and other local community organisations.
Whilst the new representative arrangements for Indigenous Victorians are set up, an interim Premier’s Aboriginal Advisory Council has been established. The Government has invited the former Tumbukka and Binjirru Regional Council Chairs and the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to participate as interim Council members until the new representative arrangements are fully established.

**Core Principles**

All projects undertaken by Government within the VIAF are directed by Government-Community Partnership Principles. These principles require that public servants demonstrate a respectful and collegiate approach to working with Indigenous leaders in all Indigenous policy and program development. The principles are derived from the work of Fiona Stanley AO on key elements of good practice in Indigenous affairs. They are:

– a holistic community centred approach, locally and regionally driven that includes a ground up process for planning and priority setting;

– developing partnerships within and across Indigenous services, communities and government, which foster prevention initiatives;

– establishing an agreed framework for joint planning across government agencies and sectors to promote community well being;

– creating funding frameworks which are accountable but flexible in accommodating local need;

– engaging in a process of community participation that actively engages and supports community leaders and stakeholders at the local level;

– investing in the development of culturally appropriate and evidence-based prevention resources which can be implemented on an Indigenous population-wide basis;

– supporting all prevention responses through evaluation; and

– ensuring ongoing training and development of Indigenous personnel.

These principles are applied through partnerships with the community and underpin Victoria’s approach to preventing the circumstances that give rise to accumulated disadvantage.

**Partnership in Action**

**Departmental Secretaries’ Local Partnership Projects**

In February 2007, Victorian Departmental Secretaries agreed to lead specific local activities to improve outcomes against the priority areas for children and young people identified by the Ministerial Taskforce. Locations have been selected that have concentrated Indigenous disadvantage indicators and high Indigenous populations. Four Secretaries will work in partnership with local Indigenous communities to establish local projects in Frankston/Casey, Mildura, Whittlesea and East Gippsland.

The Secretaries will work with local Indigenous leaders and community members to oversee implementation of practical measures to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Secretaries will also resolve blockages to local progress in raising outcomes for children and young people. The Secretaries’ group will also work collaboratively across Government to ensure that other Government initiatives support local efforts to address Indigenous disadvantage and are linked to appropriate services.
Departmental Partnerships

Improved Indigenous outcomes require effective partnerships between departments and Indigenous communities. A number of partnerships were formed prior to the VIAF. Considerable community and public sector effort has gone into the development and implementation of these plans. Some of the major plans currently in place are described below.

Aboriginal Justice Agreement
(Department of Justice)

The first phase of the Victorian Government’s Aboriginal Justice Agreement, launched in 2000, remains a formal agreement between Government and elected members of the Indigenous community. It addresses the ongoing issue of Indigenous over-representation within all levels of the criminal justice system and aims to improve access to justice-related services and promote greater awareness in the Indigenous community of civil, legal and political rights.

Launched in 2006, the second phase of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement includes a commitment to:

– further develop a shared vision and agreed priorities for action within government and community sectors;

– empowering local Indigenous communities to become involved in justice policy planning and service delivery; and

– further develop stronger and more sustainable approaches to tackling the many issues associated with over-representation of Indigenous people in the Victorian justice system.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement’s objectives are crime prevention and early intervention; strengthening alternatives to imprisonment; reducing re-offending; reducing victimisation; building responsive and inclusive services and strengthening community justice responses.

YALCA: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium
(Koorie Education Policy)

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. has a 20 year relationship with the Victorian Department of Education (now Department of Education and Early Childhood Development). In 2001 the Association and the Victorian State Government recommitted to the principles of the Partnership in Education, under a new policy framework, YALCA: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium, Koorie Education Policy. All education strategies and programs which are developed for and by Indigenous people are expected to support YALCA aims.
Wurreker Strategy
(Office of Tertiary Training and Education)

The Wurreker Strategy was formulated after intensive consultation with the Indigenous community. Wurreker is the central strategy for Indigenous vocational education and training policy development and service delivery in Victoria. Wurreker both informs and responds to national and state strategies that relate to Indigenous post-compulsory education and training.

(Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development)

This strategy was developed following regional and metropolitan forums with Indigenous communities and businesses and key state and federal government departments and agencies. The strategy complements similar Victorian Government initiatives in areas such as land and culture, community well-being and justice.

Indigenous Partnership Framework 2007-2010
(Department of Sustainability and Environment)

The Department of Sustainability and Environment’s Indigenous Partnership Framework weaves inclusiveness of Indigenous perspectives into all aspects of the department’s business.

In acknowledging the intrinsic connection that Victoria’s Indigenous people have to country, the department uses the framework as a guiding policy for action.

The Aboriginal Services Plan 2008-2010
(Department of Human Services)

The Aboriginal Services Plan 2008-2010 outlines commitments by the Department of Human Services to improve outcomes for Indigenous people. Developed in consultation with representatives of Indigenous communities and Indigenous community organisations, it builds on the successes of the 2004 plan and targets DHS efforts in agreed priority areas.

The plan recognises that real progress for Indigenous people can only be achieved if culture and identity underpin strategies to address disadvantage. With this in mind, DHS has committed to working with other government departments, mainstream agencies and Indigenous communities on initiatives to improve the physical, spiritual, cultural, emotional and social well-being of Indigenous Victorians.

Indigenous Partnership Framework 2006
(Department of Primary Industries)

Keerna expresses the Department of Primary Industries’ commitment to strengthening opportunities for Indigenous participation in primary industries. Through its Indigenous Partnership Action Plan, the Department of Primary Industries aims to:

– improve engagement and service delivery to Indigenous communities, landowners, primary industry enterprises and Indigenous businesses;
– enhance partnerships with Indigenous communities, industries and Government agencies;
– increase Indigenous capacity in primary industries businesses and enterprise development;
– and improve Indigenous access to employment and training opportunities within DPI and the primary industries sector.
Chapter 4

Area for Action 1: Improve maternal health and early childhood health and development

We will work in partnership with the Indigenous community to give mothers and their babies the best start to life.

Action Area 1 Objectives:

1.1 Reduce reported smoking and alcohol use in pregnancy by Indigenous mothers.
1.2 Reduce the Indigenous perinatal mortality rate.
1.3 Decrease the percentage of Indigenous babies with birthweight below 2500g.

The early years are critical to the long-term health and development of all children and their future life chances. Across a range of measures the health and well-being of Indigenous mothers and their babies are significantly worse than those experienced by other Victorians. Closing the gap in life expectancy and quality of life commences with giving mothers and babies the best possible start to life.

Snapshot

– Consistent with Victorian estimates, just over half (51%) of the Indigenous population aged 15 years or over were cigarette smokers in Australia in 2002. 52% of Indigenous mothers reported smoking at some time during pregnancy.

– Pooled data over the years 2003-2004 indicate 15.3% of Indigenous babies were low birthweight compared with 6.8% of other babies.

– Perinatal deaths for babies born to Indigenous mothers in Victoria between 1998 and 2005 were 14.9 per 1000 compared to 10.0 for non-Indigenous mothers.

6 Available Victorian data on smoking and alcohol use in pregnancy is limited
10 DHS Aboriginal Services Plan - Key Indicators Report 2005/06
Perinatal Mortality

Babies of Indigenous mothers are more likely to suffer perinatal deaths\(^\text{11}\) compared to babies of non-Indigenous mothers. Perinatal deaths for babies born to Victorian Indigenous mothers between 1998 and 2005 varied between 14.8 to 33.2 per 1000 population compared to a variation of 10.0 and 12.5 for non-Indigenous Victorian mothers.\(^\text{12}\) The wide fluctuations in the rate of perinatal mortality for the Indigenous population reflect the small size of the population and data quality.

Many factors impact upon perinatal mortality rates including the uptake and quality of antenatal care, the effectiveness of obstetric and neonatal services and infant care in the community, as well as social factors such as poverty. Infections including sexually transmitted infections and dental infections, particularly if left untreated, can have a significant detrimental effect on both fertility and perinatal mortality and morbidity.

Birthweight

Babies born to Indigenous women are more than twice as likely to be low birthweight than babies born to non-Indigenous women. Pooled data over the years 2003-2004 indicate 15.3\% of Indigenous babies were low birthweight compared with 6.8\% of other babies.\(^\text{13}\)

Measure of Current Performance

Current Performance - 15.3\% of Indigenous babies are born under 2.5 kilograms compared to around 6.8\% of total Victorian babies.

Low birthweight babies\(^\text{14}\) are at greater risk of dying during the first years of life (AIHW, 2004) and experience a greater risk of hospitalisation, neonatal death, physical and neurological complications and the development of psychosocial problems into adulthood. Teenage mothers (under 20 years) are more likely to have low birthweight babies and are generally less likely to have completed school or to be employed. One in five Indigenous mothers gives birth when less than 20 years old with 19\% being under 17 years of age. In 2005, 20.6\% of Indigenous mothers were under 20 years old compared to 2.6\% of non Indigenous mothers.

Alcohol and Smoking

In Australia in 2002, 51\% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years or over were cigarette smokers\(^\text{15}\) which is consistent with Victorian estimates. Of particular concern, 52\% of Indigenous mothers reported smoking at some time during pregnancy.\(^\text{16}\)

A strong association exists between smoking in pregnancy and low birthweight, as well as an association with premature birth, stillbirth and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The risk of a low birthweight baby is reduced if a woman quits smoking in her pregnancy (within the first three months).\(^\text{17}\)

Alcohol consumed by pregnant women can harm their unborn babies and result in some cases of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. Foetal Alcohol Effects and Alcohol Related Neuro Developmental Disorder refer to effects on a baby who has some but not all Foetal Alcohol Syndrome features. Babies severely affected by Foetal Alcohol Syndrome are at risk of dying before they are born.

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\(^\text{11}\) The perinatal period starts at the beginning of foetal viability (28 weeks gestation or 1000g) and ends at the end of the 7th day after delivery. Perinatal includes stillbirths and early neonatal deaths.

\(^\text{12}\) Department of Human Services 2007, Aboriginal Services Plan: Key Indicators 2005/06, DHS

\(^\text{13}\) Department of Human Services 2006, State of Victoria’s Children Report 2006, DHS

\(^\text{14}\) Low birthweight is defined as babies weighing less than 2500g.


There is inadequate Victorian data about alcohol consumption by pregnant Indigenous Victorians. The WA Aboriginal Child Health survey however found birth mothers of an estimated 22.8% of Indigenous children drank alcohol during their pregnancy. This is significantly lower than the estimated 40-50% of pregnant women who drank alcohol in the total population. However, the survey suggests that those Indigenous women who do drink are more likely to do so at hazardous levels.18

**Additional challenges in improving maternal health and early child health**

Addressing maternal health and early child health issues is compounded by social issues. Of the 57 Indigenous women using the Koorie Maternity Program at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service in 2004-05, 55% had significant housing problems (overcrowding, unsuitable housing or homelessness at some point during pregnancy) and/or were using substances during pregnancy (64%). Additionally 82% of these women had significant social issues such as family violence, involvement with child protection, lack of support, social isolation and mental health issues.19

18 The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2004: The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People. Perth: Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

19 Koori maternity service annual report to DHS (2004/5) from Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (unpublished)

**Diagram 4 – Aboriginal Children using Maternal and Child Health Service 1999/00 - 2005/06**

Source: Aboriginal Services Plan Key Indicators, Department of Human Services 2007
What we are doing

The level of access of Indigenous children to maternal and child health services is improving.

Koori Maternity Strategy

The Koori Maternity Strategy is delivered through the Koori Maternity Program in 11 Aboriginal community controlled Health Services and provides a range of services. Indigenous maternity health workers are also employed to work with clinical staff at the Co-operative and/or the local hospital. Evaluations of the maternity program indicate:

- more women access antenatal care and access this care earlier;
- women had improved and more flexible relationships with mainstream services;
- there were better social networks for young women and their families and an improvement in continuity of care;
- improved outcomes for babies including less pre-term births and low birthweight babies; and
- women using the program were more likely to feel confident about looking after their baby in the first week at home and less likely to have wanted more help or advice with breastfeeding or other issues.

The In Home Support for Aboriginal Families Initiative

This program operates at five sites across Victoria and aims to improve the health, development, learning and well-being of Indigenous children 0-3 years. It also aims to strengthen support and improve parenting capacity for Indigenous parents and their families that is respectful of their cultural identity.

Best Start

The Victorian Government’s Best Start program is an early childhood prevention and early intervention initiative that aims to improve the health, development, learning and well-being of all children between the ages of 0-8 years across Victoria, from pregnancy through to transition to school. Of the 30 Best Start sites, six are Indigenous specific. The other 24 give some priority to engagement with Indigenous communities in their area.

Sexually Transmitted Infections Initiative

Sexually transmitted infections can impact on fertility and perinatal morbidity. The Government is working in partnership with key Indigenous groups and health service providers to improve testing, treatment and prevention programs within Indigenous communities. Improved reporting of communicable diseases for Indigenous Victorians will improve data on infection rates including sexually transmissible infections.

Case Study One

Koori maternity services at Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

Through the Koori maternity program at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), a midwife and Aboriginal health workers provide holistic antenatal and postnatal care during pregnancy and in the post birth period for Aboriginal women in the community. The midwife is formally recognised as an accredited shared antenatal care provider with the Mercy Hospital, the Royal Women’s Hospital and Sunshine Hospital and is working on reaching a formal agreement with Northern Hospital. Flexible arrangements mean that hospital visits during pregnancy are kept to a minimum, while women with complex health problems can attend the hospital as needed and VAHS is able to provide transport. The women attend Boorai classes and receive counselling and referrals for broader psychosocial issues as needed. In 2006-07 41 women attended the service and 27 women gave birth with the support of the program. The dental service within VAHS has been a leader in recognising the link between oral health and birthweights and gestation and provides dental care to women during pregnancy.

Next Steps

The Victorian Government in partnership with Victoria’s Indigenous communities will continue to develop the evidence base of what is effective in improving maternal and early health and development outcomes. This does not preclude taking action where warranted. The evidence of harm arising from smoking or poor oral health in pregnancy is clear and warrants immediate action for pregnant Indigenous mothers.

The following measures directly target achieving better outcomes for Indigenous children.

Aboriginal Child Health, Development and Well-being Survey

The 2007 Victorian State Budget included a commitment of $2.9 million to conduct a comprehensive study into the health and well-being of young Indigenous Victorians aged between 0 - 18 years of age. The funding will support the development and implementation of a survey to be conducted in 2008-09. The survey results will be available by June 2009.

The survey will include interviews with the families of approximately 3,000 children aged 0-18 years focusing on the health, development and well being of Indigenous children and young people. The survey will also provide a unique opportunity to obtain robust data on women’s smoking, drinking and drug taking behaviours, including during pregnancy. The data will be used to drive action at a state-wide and local level to target strategies which can be shown to reduce tobacco, alcohol and drug use in pregnancy.

Smoking and alcohol use in pregnancy

Building on the Koori Maternity Strategy, the Government will develop new measures to address Indigenous smoking rates in pregnancy. Priorities will include development of an effective stop smoking intervention to be offered to all Indigenous pregnant women, supporting pregnant Indigenous women to stop smoking within the home environment and focus on reducing alcohol and drug-use in pregnancy by sharpening the focus of current initiatives on healthier lifestyles in pregnancy.

Early identification of dental disease

Early identification and treatment of dental disease in pregnant women is another priority. This will comprise training of the Indigenous and mainstream health workforce; improving collaboration with dental services; and development of improved referral pathways to facilitate urgent and immediate treatment for pregnant Indigenous women.

Promoting a healthy pregnancy

Improving the health and well-being of Indigenous children and mothers during pregnancy is a focus during implementation of the Victorian Government’s recently developed health promotion priorities for 2007-2012. Work on the seven priority issues, which include physical activity and accessible and nutritious food, aims to improve overall health and well-being and reduce health inequalities.
Go for your life

Six communities are being funded to implement the ‘Go for your life’ Health Promoting Communities: Being Active and Eating Well projects in recognition of the relationship between health inequity and socio-economic status, social exclusion and locational disadvantage. One of these projects will be at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative in North Geelong for a three-year period from July 2007-June 2010.

Preventing sexually transmitted infections

The ‘Snake’ condom campaign is being expanded to encourage local Indigenous youth to access their local health service and purchase Snake Condoms to help prevent STIs.

Action Area 1 Objective:

1.4 Increase the Indigenous four year old kindergarten participation rate.

Current Situation

Snapshot

- In 2007, 79% of Indigenous four year olds participated in preschool compared with 94% of the Victorian four year old population.
- Data collected in 2007 from funded kindergarten programs indicates that 501 Indigenous four-year-old children are currently attending a funded kindergarten program in 246 funded locations.
- Indigenous children face a much higher risk of educational disadvantage.

The early years of life are critical to children’s life trajectories. It is important to identify and reduce early risk factors. Negative influences such as poverty, family conflict, abuse or neglect, or undetected or untreated illness can delay or disrupt learning and social and emotional development, and have long-term adverse consequences. Indigenous children are more likely to experience such stresses.

Children who attend quality structured centre-based early childhood programs (preschool) are more likely to experience a successful transition to school, better educational attainment over the life course and improved cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

The participation rate for Indigenous children attending kindergarten is lower than that of non-Indigenous children. In 2007, 79% of Indigenous four year olds participated in preschool compared with 94% of the Victorian four year old population.

Funded kindergarten program data from April 2007 indicates that 501 Indigenous four year olds attended in 246 funded locations. Of those Indigenous children who did attend kindergarten, 83% attended non-Indigenous kindergarten services and 17% (87 children) attended five Indigenous kindergartens and two Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services.

Measure of Current Performance

Current Performance - more than 79% of Indigenous four year olds participate in preschool compared with overall participation of 94% of Victorian four year olds.

What we are doing

The Government subsidises 10 hours per week of kindergarten programs for all four year olds, with a parental co-payment and an additional fee subsidy for children who are, or whose parents or carers are, concession card holders.

Maternal and Child Health Service

The Victorian Government’s Maternal and Child Health Service provides universal access and participation for all children from birth to school age, and further supports vulnerable families through additional visits under flexible funding models or through the enhanced Maternal and Child Health service.

There has been a continued increase in the number of Indigenous children accessing Maternal and Child Health services. Access has increased from 1,665 children in 2002-2003 to 2,256 children in 2005-2006. This is partly due to the provision of outreach visits to Indigenous community controlled organisations. Maternal and child health nurses play an important role in linking Indigenous children with the Koori Early Childhood Education
Program workers and/or local early childhood activities including playgroups and kindergartens.

**Encouraging access and participation in local kindergartens**

Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers and Koorie Preschool Assistants play an active role in encouraging and supporting the access and participation of Indigenous children and their families in local kindergartens.

**Next steps**

The Government is committed to further developing strategies that will increase the participation of Indigenous children in kindergarten programs and support their smooth transition to school.

The 2007 Victorian State Budget made a number of significant investments in the early years encompassing:

- all four year olds whose parents or carers are concession card holders will be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy including Indigenous children. Kindergarten is now effectively free for these children.
- up to 10 hours per week free access to kindergarten for Indigenous three year olds where parents or carers are concession card holders ($2.7 million);
- expanding the Koorie Early Childhood Education program ($4.1 million); and
- providing support in an initial three sites to Indigenous parents preparing their children for preschool through home-based early childhood enrichment programs ($1.8 million).

Given the dispersed nature of the Indigenous population, most Indigenous children attend local mainstream kindergartens. To build kindergarten participation a strong, assertive, culturally appropriate inclusion program is required. The Government will consult with key stakeholders on the kindergarten participation of Indigenous children.

**Action Area 1 Objective:**

1.5 Reduce the rate of Indigenous child protection substantiations

**Current Situation**

**Snapshot**

- In 2005-06 the rate of Indigenous substantiations in Victoria was 68 per 1000 compared to 6 per 1000 for other children.
- Victoria’s Indigenous children experience more life stress events in any given year than other children

Abuse and neglect of children is closely linked to pervasive socio-economic disadvantage in Victoria’s Indigenous population. In order to tackle the cycle of poverty and disempowerment, consideration must be given to treating the effects of trans-generational trauma.
Government departments are developing models of practice with Indigenous children and families that address behaviours that arise out of sustained trauma. Whilst a focus on the child is essential in reducing substantiation rates, this sits inextricably within the context of a whole family’s need for support. Making children safer is best achieved by strengthening and supporting Indigenous families.

Indigenous children experience more major life stress events than other children. Protecting them in the face of these events and assisting them build resilience are clear priorities. This is closely linked to ensuring that the welfare of their parents and carers is such that they are able to provide primary care of a high quality to their children. Improving nutrition, educational levels and supports available to vulnerable parents and their children are crucial components of the Government’s strategy.

The rate of child protection substantiations is a key measure of the overall safety and well-being of children.

In 2005-06 in all States and Territories except Tasmania, the substantiation rate for Indigenous children was higher than the rate for other children. In Victoria the rate of Indigenous substantiations was 68 per 1,000 compared to 6 per 1,000 for other children.

The following diagram outlines substantiation rates for Victoria.

What we are doing

Child Protection

The Victorian Government has invested significant effort in improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of Child Protection and related services. The Protocol between the Department of Human Service’s Child Protection and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association and the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation has been operational since 2002. The Protocol is implemented through the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service, which works closely with and provides consultation, advice and information to Child Protection on all reports and significant actions and decisions regarding Indigenous children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Performance – the rate of Indigenous child abuse substantiations is 68 per 1,000, compared to 6 per 1,000 for all Victorian children.</td>
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Diagram 5 – Rate of Child Protection Substantiations 1999/00 - 2005/06

Source: Aboriginal Services Plan Key Indicators, Department of Human Services 2007
Every region now has funds to enable local Aboriginal community controlled organisations to appoint community conveners as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Decision Making Program. This program enables extended family and respected Elders to participate in decision making and case planning about the safety, stability and development of Indigenous children within the child protection system.

Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration programs aim to prevent the placement or enable the return home of Indigenous children by improving safety and care standards within the family. Aboriginal Family Preservation works intensively with families in their own home while Family Restoration offers the additional resource of a residential facility for the whole family.

Other measures of progress

As the child protection system becomes more focused and responsive it is possible that in the short term the rates of substantiation will go up rather than down. Already, Victoria with a robust and well-structured child protection service has a higher rate of Indigenous substantiations than most other states.

The Department of Human Services is also closely monitoring the number of reports of child abuse and neglect that it receives. As Child FIRST teams become better known and community confidence develops in these services, (full statewide roll-out will be completed early 2009) it is expected that the over-representation of Indigenous children at all phases of the child protection system will begin to reduce. Children and families in need of support and guidance will receive supports earlier both through improved early years services that engage more effectively with vulnerable Indigenous families and through Child FIRST linking families into local family services. Capacity also now exists to provide longer term support for particularly vulnerable families where required.

The department will report on its progress against a range of measures including child protection reports, substantiations and re-substantiations through the annual Aboriginal Services Plan Key Indicators Report.

Integrated Family Services

Victorian reforms to child protection and family services provide three major elements in dealing with families for whom professionals or family members have concerns.

- Child FIRST teams provide a single point of contact and quick assessment. Families are either referred to a family service agency or for investigation by child protection.
Family service agencies provide a range of social work and parenting supports to families, and are resourced to sustain support for long periods where this is needed.

Family services focus on high-need families, but have some capacity to support lower-need families who might approach the agency.

The Indigenous Family Services (Innovations Programs) improve families’ experience of getting help early when they encounter difficulties by improving the cultural sensitivity and accessibility of mainstream family support services and other service agencies.

Since 2001 resources have been increased to the Indigenous family services sector for the delivery of services to Indigenous children and families. Services focus on those families who have been identified to child protection services.

Capacity Building

As part of the implementation of the new child and family legislation an additional $1.4 million was committed in November 2006 to assist Indigenous community controlled organisations build their capacity to deliver a range of child and family welfare services.

The Victorian Government also funds a range of universal, specialist and targeted supports that are available to all families. Indigenous families have not always been able to take full advantage of universal services such as maternal and child health services, kindergartens and schools. Universal service providers are now developing mechanisms to improve their usefulness, flexibility, and cultural inclusiveness for Indigenous families.

Maternal and Child Health

Most Indigenous families are in touch with, and supported by, Maternal and Child Health nurses in the first 2-3 years of childhood, although the rate of participation appears significantly lower than for the whole population. For higher-need Indigenous mothers, an ‘in-home support’ service is now being introduced in areas building on the Koori Maternity Strategy and extending support over the first three years.

Aboriginal Best Start partnerships have been established in some areas with a high Indigenous population, bringing together Indigenous community organisations and a broad group of early childhood professionals.

Next steps

Victoria’s Indigenous family violence strategy is reported on in detail in Chapter Seven.

The Victorian Government will commence working with relevant Indigenous organisations to develop strategic plans to identify their service delivery directions over the next five years. Some organisations will elect to deliver a range of services. Others may elect to focus their direct service delivery on preventative services while building relationships with mainstream or other Indigenous organisations which focus on services for children who cannot live safely at home. Alternatively, the solution may relate to local arrangements that involve two or more Indigenous organisations working closely together or with local mainstream service providers so that it is easy for families to access a range of services and supports between them.
Chapter 5

Area for Action 2: Improve literacy and numeracy

*Education is fundamental to a child’s welfare and development. We will continue to work in partnership with the Indigenous community to ensure that the learning outcomes for all Indigenous children improve and over time match those of all students.*

**Action Area 2 Objectives:**

- 2.1 Improve school attendance rates for Indigenous students.
- 2.2 Improve literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5 and 7 for Indigenous students.

**Current situation**

**Snapshot**

*Attendance*\(^{21}\)

In 2006:
- average attendance rate for Indigenous primary school students was 87.7% compared with 93.2% for non Indigenous primary school students
- average attendance rate for Indigenous secondary schools students (years 7-10) was 82.5% compared with 90.6% for non Indigenous secondary school students.

**Attendance**

The 2006 attendance data for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Victorian Government schools included only those schools that reported at least one Indigenous enrolment.

While average Indigenous school attendance rates in Victoria compare well with other States and Territories, there is still a significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates.

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\(^{21}\) All snapshot figures refer to Government schools

\(^{22}\) All literacy and numeracy benchmark data in document has been sourced from the National Report on Schooling: years 2002 - 2005
This is particularly evident in years 7-10. Median attendance rates bottom out at year 9, and then improve for the later years of schooling. This pattern is evident for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance**

- Average attendance rate for Indigenous primary school students is 87.7%.
- Average attendance rate for Indigenous secondary school students (years 7-10) is 82.5%.

Understanding that there is some circularity to the issues of attendance and literacy and numeracy is key to improving outcomes. Improved attendance can result in improved literacy and numeracy. Improved literacy and numeracy skills can provide the confidence for ongoing engagement and attendance.

Victorian schools with improving attendance rates for Indigenous students have a higher “take up” of the following strategies considered by schools as effective:
- home visits by teachers and principals;
- whole-school and targeted attendance programs that include monitoring and follow-up with students and families;
- parenting and parent support programs; and
- joint programs with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

**Literacy and numeracy**

From 2002-05, the proportion of Victoria’s Indigenous students achieving the national benchmarks in reading, writing and maths increased significantly. The greatest improvement was in year 7 reading (65% of Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks in 2002 compared with 85% in 2005). The smallest improvement was in year 7 numeracy (59% of Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks in 2002 compared with 67% in 2005).

Despite these improvements, outcomes for Indigenous students are still not on a par with those for the non-Indigenous student population. There is an over-representation of Indigenous students failing to meet national benchmark standards in both reading and maths.

Data collected by the Victorian Department of Education and

Early Childhood Development indicates that Indigenous students are coming into the Prep year of schooling less prepared than non-Indigenous students, particularly in regard to reading. However, by year 2, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students narrows markedly.

**Diagram 6 – Victorian Indigenous Students Reaching the Numeracy and Literary Benchmarks, 2003-2005**


23 Council of Australian Government’s National Reform Agenda 2007, Victoria’s Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes.
24 Rothman, S. & McMillan, G [2003], Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy, Australian Council of Educational Research
Measure of Current Performance

**Reading:**
- 84% of year 3 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in reading
- 74% of year 5 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in reading
- 85% of year 7 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in reading

**Numeracy:**
- 92% of year 3 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in numeracy
- 90% of year 5 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in numeracy
- 67% of year 7 Indigenous students reached the national benchmark in numeracy.

What we are doing

The Victorian Government’s Blueprint for Government Schools (2003) provides the framework for better outcomes for all students, including Indigenous students. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is implementing the Blueprint in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI). This partnership is formalised in YALCA: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium (2001).

The following initiatives, both general and targeted, illustrate current measures designed to improve outcomes for Victorian Indigenous students.

All Victorian primary schools are provided with funding to support year 1 students that fall within the lowest 20% in each school. A large proportion of primary schools deliver the Reading Recovery program, a short-term, early literacy intervention program which helps Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in year 1. The Making a Difference literacy development program for middle years’ students is offered from years 5-9. Indigenous students needing additional support are included in this program.
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is currently working with its regional offices on the development of Regional Koorie Action Plans. The plans improve accountability for Indigenous students’ results at a regional and school level.

The It’s Not OK To Be Away initiative is an attendance strategy that places regular school attendance as a prerequisite for improving educational outcomes. Local Indigenous-focused versions of this initiative such as ‘Deadly and Cool - Stay in School’ and ‘It’s Cool to be at School’ and ‘What’s the Time - School Time’ have been developed by regions.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development currently has a number of strategies to support improving the educational outcomes for Indigenous students which are currently being considered in the broader context of the Review of Educational Outcomes for Koorie Students. (Refer to the section on Next Steps).

There are many factors not directly attributed to the school environment that need to be addressed in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous students. These include health, housing, employment and other supportive resources. Effective links between the school and community, in combination with an engaging curriculum that reflects Indigenous culture, have been demonstrated to improve Indigenous education.

The Koori Early School Leavers and Youth Education Program is an initiative of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (Phase 2) designed to divert young people from the youth justice system by focusing on the key risk factors, particularly lack of engagement with school or other learning opportunities.

Next steps

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has undertaken a comprehensive review of its strategies in relation to Indigenous education. This review has included:
- international and national research;
- an in depth data analysis on the current performance of Indigenous students in Victoria;
- academic and literature research on what works;
- extensive community and professional consultation; and
- independent analyses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the two current major strategies engaged by the Department for Indigenous students.

On the basis of the review findings, a Forward Strategy for Indigenous Education in Victoria will be developed which will give confidence that improved Indigenous education outcomes can be achieved. Some of the key findings indicate that a successful Indigenous education strategy will have the following elements:
- strong and explicit accountability mechanisms with a culture of high expectations;
- recognition, respect and celebration of culture through practice and curriculum;
- intensive support, monitoring and evaluation of transition points through early childhood to post compulsory years;
- strong focus on school and community partnership agreements; and
- dedicated workforce that is appropriately skilled and supported within a structure of clearer responsibilities and accountabilities.
Part 2

Chapter 6

Area for Action 3: Improve year 12 completion or equivalent qualification and develop pathways to employment

Completing year 12 can unlock greater education, training and job opportunities for school students. By working in partnership with Indigenous communities, we can provide greater support for Indigenous students to complete year 12 and gain the best start to their professional careers.

Action Area 3 Objectives:

3.1 Improve transition to year 10.
3.2 Increase completion of year 12 or equivalent qualifications for Indigenous students.

Current Situation

**Snapshot**

**School**
- In 2006 the apparent retention rate\(^{25}\) for Indigenous students:
  - from year 7 to year 10 was 91% compared with 98% for non-Indigenous (an improvement from 81% in 2005 for the Indigenous students);
  - from year 10 to year 12 was 47% compared with 82% for non-Indigenous;
  - from year 7 to year 12 was 38% compared to 80% for non-Indigenous students;
- In 2006, 84.3% of Indigenous students completed their VCE compared with 96.7% of non Indigenous students.

**TAFE / VET**
- In 2006 there were 4,751 Indigenous students in the TAFE sector, an increase of 9% on the previous year.
- Study outcomes for the Indigenous students were:
  - pass rate (in modules or competencies) of 70% compared to 81% for non-Indigenous;
  - failure rate of 19% compared to 13% for non-Indigenous;
  - completion rate of 71% compared to 82% for non-Indigenous.
- In 2006, 47% of Indigenous student enrolments were in Certificate I and II level programs, 26 % were in Certificate III and IV while 5% were in Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas.

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\(^{25}\) The term ‘apparent retention rate’ recognises that retention rates are influenced by factors that are not taken into account by this measure such as: students repeating year levels; interstate migration; transfer of students between education sectors or schools, and; students who have left school previously, returning to continue their school education. The apparent retention rates are therefore seen as a relatively poor measure of performance as they also do not count the numbers of students who successfully complete Year 12 or equivalent outside the school sector, in TAFE or ACE. The apparent retention rate refers to full-time students only.
Young people who leave school before year 12 are less likely to participate in the labour force and more likely to experience periods of unemployment and receive lower wages. Early school leavers are also more likely to face health-related problems such as stress and anxiety due to job uncertainty.

Learning in formal and informal settings enhances human capital, defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the knowledge, skills and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being. With this in mind, the Government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities and organisations to increase the number of Indigenous students completing year 12 or equivalent qualifications and to develop pathways to employment.

Despite an overall improvement in Indigenous apparent retention rates in schooling, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains wide particularly in the post compulsory years of schooling. In 2006, the difference in year 7 to year 10 apparent retention rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students was 7 percentage points.

Sources:

26 Access Economic Pty Ltd [2005] “The economic benefit of increased participation in education and training” pg.6
27 Vinson, T. [2007], Dropping of the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia pg.21
28 OECD (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development) [2001], The Well-being of Nations: the Role of Human and Social Capital, OECD, Paris, pg.18
For year 10 to year 12 the difference was even more significant at 39 percentage points, although at this point a number of alternate pathways are chosen by students.

In 2006 there were 530 Indigenous students enrolled in VCE/VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) with over one quarter of Indigenous students in the post compulsory years enrolled in VCAL. This has remained relatively stable over the past six years. In relation to VCE completions, the rates for both Indigenous and non Indigenous students have remained relatively stable between 2002 and 2006; however the completion rate for Indigenous students is about 10 percentage points lower than that for non-Indigenous students.

In 2006 there were 1,061 young Indigenous people (14-19 years old) participating in TAFE/VET. Ten percent of these were undertaking VCE or VCAL. In general, young Indigenous people are more likely to enrol in Certificate I and II level programs rather than Certificate III and above and are more likely to fail or not complete their courses.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance –**
- From year 7 to year 10, the apparent retention rate for Indigenous students was 91%.
- From year 10 to year 12, the apparent retention rate for Indigenous students was 47%.
- From year 7 to year 12, the apparent retention rate for Indigenous students was 38%.
- 84.3% of Indigenous students completed Year 12 VCE.
- The completion rate for Indigenous students in the TAFE sector was 71%.

**What we are doing**

Initiatives aimed at improving year 12 completion (or equivalent) and literacy and numeracy are closely interconnected.

**General approach**

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a suite of initiatives aimed at increasing retention to year 12 or equivalent. This includes:
- the Managed Individual Pathways Program which assists students aged 15 and above to navigate a pathway to further education and training or work;
- work experience and structured workplace learning as part of the careers program of schools;
- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning which has proved effective at encouraging students at risk of disengagement to remain at school;
– the Local Learning and Employment Networks who are developing holistic support for teenage parents who wish to continue their schooling;
– the twenty-four transition support workers under the Youth Transition Support initiative who assist disengaged young people aged 15 to 19 access a sustainable education, training or employment option; and
– the School Focused Youth Service that co-ordinates preventative and early intervention strategies for young people delivered through the 41 school community clusters.

From all of these approaches, progress is being achieved, particularly in year 10. However, more is required particularly in year 12 retention rates, even allowing for alternate streams including the TAFE sector.

Targeted approach

The Government’s commitment to addressing year 10 retention and year 12 Indigenous completion (or equivalent) is evident in its partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and adoption of the YALCA and Wurreker Strategies.29

The Department of Education and Early Childhood is also supporting a number of approaches which include:
– supporting principals to participate in Indigenous education leadership training;
– piloting the implementation of individual learning plans through one region; and
– supporting local projects identified by the regional education committees.

The Office of Training and Tertiary Education funds 23 Indigenous Liaison Officers across TAFE campuses, has developed an annual state Indigenous Koorie Training Plan; Indigenous-controlled training centres, a range of training providers for specific Indigenous Training programs, and provides tagged funding to TAFE Institutions for additional training delivery to Indigenous students.

Eight Wurreker brokers are promoting links at the regional level between secondary schools, local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, Local Learning and Employment Networks, TAFE and Higher Education Institutions.30

Next steps

As outlined in the previous chapter, the review undertaken by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will form the basis of a new Forward Strategy for Indigenous Education in Victoria.

29 Chapter three provides more detail on the YALCA and Wurreker strategies.

30 The Wurreker strategy for Indigenous VET brings together key community, training and employment representatives to undertake annual planning around priorities for the delivery of training that focuses on employment outcomes.
Action Area 3 Objective:

3.3 Increase Indigenous participation in State-funded employment programs. [note that Action Area 3.3 is combined with Action Area 5.1]

Current Situation

Snapshot

– In 2006, unemployment rates\(^{31}\) for Indigenous Victorians were:
  - 24.3% of male Indigenous Victorians aged 15-24 were unemployed;
  - 25.1% of female Indigenous Victorians aged 15-24 were unemployed;
  - compared with non-Indigenous Victorians aged 15-24 of 11.4%.
– In 2004-05:
  - 30.1% of Indigenous people worked in occupations requiring ‘skill level 4’ compared to 25.6% of the non-Indigenous population. The proportion of the Indigenous population working in skill level 1 jobs (eg managers and professionals) was 18.6% compared to 29.3% for non-Indigenous workers.

Measure of Current Performance

Current Performance – Indigenous unemployment rate is 15.7%.

What we are doing

The Workforce Participation Partnerships is a $24 million Victorian Government initiative helping jobseekers facing employment barriers to find real jobs in areas with skills and labour shortages.

In 2006, Indigenous unemployment was nearly three times that of non-Indigenous people.\(^ {32}\) The unemployment rate for Indigenous Victorians was 15.7%.\(^ {33}\)

Where Indigenous Victorians participate in the workforce, they are over-represented in occupation groups requiring relatively lower levels of skill. In 2004-05, 30.1% of Indigenous people worked in skill level 4 jobs (eg. intermediate production, transport and intermediate clerical, sales and service) compared to 25.6% of the non-Indigenous population. The proportion of the Indigenous population working in skill level 1 jobs (eg managers and professionals) was 18.6% compared to 29.3% for non-Indigenous workers.\(^ {34}\)

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31 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2006
32 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2006
33 Data from work undertaken by Access Economics commissioned by the Department for Planning and Community Development in August 2007. It is based on latest available data which includes the 2001 and 2006 Census.
Projects are locally based and are developed in consultation with local employers. As at 30 June 2007:

- 28 partnerships had been funded that include Indigenous job seekers;
- over 100 Indigenous jobseekers had commenced employment;
- and around 60 Indigenous jobseekers had achieved sustainable employment outcomes.

The Youth Employment Scheme improves the employment prospects of young people in Victorian Government departments and has placed 45 young Indigenous people into departments and agencies over the last 2 years.

The Public Tenant Employment Program is a statewide initiative of the Office of Housing creating employment for people in public housing. The program has provided employment for 26 Indigenous people, which is 15% of total people employed in the program.

The Lake Tyers initiative is a partnership between the local Indigenous community, Victorian Government departments, Victoria Police, Commonwealth agencies and local government. One objective is to lift employment, learning and local economic activity. There has been a significant increase in the number of employment and training activities in the Lake Tyers area. For the period 2005-07, 35 people have been employed (18 full time, 16 part time and 1 casual).

### Indigenous Training and Recruitment Initiatives (Intrain) program

Intrain is a scholarship program within the Department of Human Services to assist Indigenous students studying in the areas of health and/or community services, to ultimately make the transition from education to employment. Twenty four students out of a possible total of 29 have been employed indicating an employment success rate of 82%.

### Next steps

Two current programs will be extended:

- The Youth Employment Scheme has a target of 450-550 placements per year over the next four years. Up to 60% of those will be allocated to disadvantaged groups.
- A new employment initiative at Lake Tyers has been proposed that will provide learning and training for 20-25 young people aged between 16 and 24 and increase the opportunities for participation in community apprenticeships and traineeships. Up to 10 adults will also be targeted.

The Government through its Workforce Participation agency and the Indigenous Issues Unit of the Department of Justice will continue to further incorporate employment and training opportunities into initiatives aimed at preventing offending, re-offending and encouraging court diversion for Indigenous people.

### Case Study Two

**Koorie Youth Careers Project Shepparton**

Shepparton’s Indigenous community - the largest in Victoria outside Melbourne - has an estimated unemployment rate of 80%.

The Koorie Youth Careers Project is working with local employers to identify skill shortage areas and train and support young Indigenous people to take advantage of these employment opportunities.

Delivered by Ganbina Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency with funding from the Victorian Government’s Workforce Participation Partnership program, the project provides career assessment, training and work experience and supports participants into ongoing jobs.

While still in its early days, the Koorie Youth Careers Project has provided mentoring to 21 young Indigenous people, training 20 Indigenous young people, and 12 young people have been placed in jobs.

The project is one of 100 Workforce Participation Partnership projects across the State working to address Victoria’s skills shortages by increasing people’s capacity to work and reducing barriers to their participation in our labour market.
Chapter 7
Area for Action 4 (Part 1): Prevent Family Violence

We are committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities to reduce the impact and incidence of family violence.

Action Area 4 Objectives

4.1 Increase in police responding to and taking action on any Indigenous family violence incident reported to them.
4.2 Reduce repeat police call outs for Indigenous family violence incidents.

Strategic Area for Action 4 has been divided into two parts: (a) family violence and (b) improving justice outcomes. This chapter deals with family violence while chapter eight covers reducing over-representation in the criminal justice system.

Current Situation

Snapshot

– Indigenous women are:
  - five times more likely to call police to attend a family violence incident, \textsuperscript{35}
  - 20% more likely than non-Indigenous females to be involved as an aggrieved family member in multiple family incidents in a 12 month period, \textsuperscript{36} and
  - sixteen times more likely to seek support from the integrated family violence service system. \textsuperscript{37}

– Indigenous family violence is present in 64% of notified cases of child abuse

– Indigenous children are around 10 times more likely to be victims of abuse - usually emotional abuse or neglect. \textsuperscript{38}

Family violence undermines aspirations for children, families and communities to learn, develop, be healthy and fulfil their potential.


\textsuperscript{36} The ABS SIQ was introduced into the LEAP collection in September 2002. Due to the fields location in LEAP, the response to this question cannot be linked back to the involvement where the question is asked. With respect to this collection, persons are to be considered as identifying as Indigenous if they answered yes to the SIQ at least once irrespective of when asked.


\textsuperscript{38} Department of Human Services 2006, State of Victoria’s Children Report 2006, DHS
Indigenous women are five times more likely to call police to attend a family violence incident, 20% more likely to call police to re-attend subsequent incidents and 16 times more likely to seek support from the integrated family violence service system. Violence is a significant threat to the health and well-being of Victorian Indigenous victims, particularly women.  

The foundation to Victoria’s response to Indigenous family violence is the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Report (2003) prepared by Victoria’s Indigenous leaders. Confronting the impact of violence is critical to maintaining the survival of the social norms and mutual respect which lie at the heart of Indigenous culture. Indigenous leaders will not accept behaviours which normalise or sanction violence against vulnerable members of their community. The position of the Taskforce was clear in the final report: “safety and security of victims of violence is the number one priority”.

**What we are doing**

The long term response to Indigenous family violence is an Indigenous-Government partnership to develop a ten year plan to prevent and eliminate Indigenous family violence. This partnership is led by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, which comprises senior Government representation and Indigenous community leadership through the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups and Indigenous service providers.

While the ten year plan has been under development the Government has made significant investments to tackle immediate challenges.

Commencing in 2002-03, funding of $7.6 million over four years was allocated to support the development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. Early advice to Government from the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce identified that to reduce family violence, the knowledge and understanding of the causes and drivers of Indigenous family violence would need to improve as would prevention and service responses.

This work commenced with the funding to establish Indigenous Regional Action Groups and the Community Initiative Fund to build the leadership and capacity of Indigenous communities to prevent and respond to family violence.

Regional Action Groups have been empowered to become effective decision-making bodies on strategies to address family violence issues at the local level. Training incorporating knowledge building and skills development has been provided to members so they fulfill their leadership role.

Annual grants under the Community Initiative Fund complement the Regional Action Groups. The Fund supports the implementation of community-based projects that raise awareness of and responses to family violence. In 2006-07, 33 local projects were funded.

**Mildura Indigenous Awareness Campaign**

Victoria Police and the Indigenous community in Mildura have developed a media campaign to prevent family violence by highlighting the impact of violence on community members. The campaign features television advertisements, brochures and posters which feature local Indigenous people and aims to provide culturally appropriate information about sexual assault and family violence. Strong relationships between Indigenous leaders and Victoria Police have been forged through the project.

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39 The Health Costs of Violence, VicHealth 2004
Lake Tyers Community Renewal Program

This program is addressing violence in the Lake Tyers community by using a holistic approach to reduce Indigenous disadvantage based on long term and sustained community renewal strategies. The high level of violence was an urgent presenting issue when the program commenced. The program has reduced police call-outs from an average of 25 per month (for the three months before the intervention) to an average of 1.25 call-outs for the first four months of the 2007 calendar year.

Healing and Time Out services

Healing was identified by the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce as a key component of the response to reduce the incidence of family violence in Indigenous communities. Holistic healing which takes account of the trauma of inherited grief and loss was identified as important not only to victims, but also as a key component of addressing the violent behaviours of perpetrators.

The Victorian Government provides approximately $1.6 million per annum for Indigenous Healing and Time Out services. Four Indigenous Healing Services will provide a holistic approach to addressing family violence in Indigenous communities.41 Four Indigenous Time Out services will refer Indigenous people who use violence against family members to a place to access support to help them manage their violent behaviour.42 These services are currently being developed through a community led approach to ensure local and culturally relevant services meet locally identified needs.

To assist in the healing process the Victims Support Agency has worked to improve access for Indigenous victims to victims of crime services and entitlements through the Indigenous Victims Support Program.

A Way Forward - Violence Against Women Strategy (Victoria Police)

This Strategy provides Victoria Police with a platform for development of initiatives and its key role in system-wide family violence and sexual assault reforms. Ongoing strategies include Indigenous specific initiatives.

Improving the System Response to Family Violence

Reducing Indigenous family violence in the long-term requires that incidents are responded to and appropriate and effective action is taken.

The Victorian Government’s Integrated Family Violence Services reforms initiated a new approach to family violence in Victoria. The broad reforms were supported by $35.1 million over four years in the 2005-06 Budget.

All agencies, including human services, police and justice services are required to work together to provide co-ordinated responses at the local level. Integration is also required between a range of family violence specific and other support services to ensure that unified and streamlined responses are provided to victims of family violence.

A key challenge has been to ensure that the broader family violence reforms also provide more effective responses for Indigenous Victorians. Improving access to services for Indigenous Victorians is one of the family violence reform priorities.

Regional Integrated Family Violence Committees which have been established throughout Victoria can address Indigenous access issues. These committees are responsible for driving and monitoring implementation of the new approach to family violence at a regional level and include representatives from Indigenous organisations, including providers of Healing and Time Out services, and groups like Regional Action Groups.

41 The Healing services are to be based in Loddon Mallee South, East Gippsland, North & West Metropolitan and Eastern Metropolitan Regions.
42 The Time Out services are in Loddon Mallee North, Hume, East Gippsland and North & West Metropolitan Regions.
An effective response by police to family violence incidents is critical. In 2004 Victoria Police introduced the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence which details that police must respond to all incidents of family violence, emphasising the safety and support of victims. The code recognises the unique nature of family violence in Indigenous communities. Victoria Police have programs to improve relationships with Indigenous communities (see Chapter 8) and have commenced work on ensuring that responses to Indigenous family violence incidents are effective.

Improving access to Court services for Indigenous clients is also important over time. Ensuring victims and offenders receive the services they need can contribute to reducing family violence. Indigenous outreach support is a part of the courts reforms associated with establishing the Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria at Ballarat and Heidelberg. The division has provided specialist court services and referrals to key family violence organisations for over 1,300 victims and 1,000 offenders, including some Indigenous victims and offenders.

Reducing the impact of family violence involves improving the safety of victims. Analysis of the pilot of the Common Risk Assessment Framework suggests that Indigenous women and children are at a high level of risk. Staff have received cultural diversity training to improve Indigenous access in the Specialist Family Violence Service at Melbourne, Frankston, Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates’ Courts. This program simplifies access and increases the safety of women and children victims.

**Next Steps**

**Ten Year Plan**

In 2007-08 the Government will work with the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to finalise the a year plan to reduce Indigenous family violence and will continue to focus on:

- Improving prevention by considering how the work by VicHealth to develop a primary prevention framework for intimate partner violence can be applied in Indigenous communities.
- Improving the safety of Indigenous victims by including an Indigenous focus in the delivery of the Government’s $2 million investment to improve the treatment of victims through the Safer Families Training Program. Safety of victims will also be improved in Melbourne, Barwon and Gippsland regions with funds provided to the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service for an additional lawyer to assist Indigenous Victorians apply for intervention orders.
- Improving the effectiveness of family violence services for Indigenous people by piloting local Indigenous specific protocols for police responding to family violence incidents in two rural and one metropolitan locations.
- Support to Indigenous men from Indigenous men’s services and mainstream services will be improved when the Indigenous Men’s Resource and Advisory Service commences.
- Accountability for violence by funding Swinburne University and No To Violence to develop a training program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community workers to engage Indigenous men in the process of addressing their use of family violence.
- Implementation of an Indigenous Male Adolescents at Risk Project will assist adolescent males who have come to the attention of the justice system for exhibiting aggressive or violent behaviours to take responsibility.
- Research to better understand Indigenous family violence by running local place-based focus groups to collect evidence on successful prevention activities and effective service responses.
- Reform outcomes for Indigenous Victorians will be investigated as part of a study to evaluate the family violence reforms in Victoria.
Chapter 8

Area for Action 4 (part 2): Improve justice outcomes

We will work with Indigenous communities to decrease the number of Indigenous people in Victoria’s jails and reduce the over-representation of Indigenous people in the State’s justice system.

Action Area 4 Objectives:

4.3 Reduce the number of times Indigenous youth are processed by police (arrest + summons + caution).
4.4 Increase the proportion of Indigenous people cautioned when processed by police.
4.5 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous people remanded in custody.
4.6 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous adults sentenced to prison rather than other orders.
4.7 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous adults/youth who are convicted within two years of their previous conviction.

Current situation

Snapshot

– In 2006, Indigenous Victorians were 12 times more likely to be placed in adult prison compared to non-Indigenous Victorians.
– Indigenous Victorians are more likely to be victims of crime and are three times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Indigenous Victorians.
– Indigenous youth aged 16 and younger are currently around 12 times more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Indigenous youth.

The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Royal Commission) found that the over-representation of Indigenous people in the custody of police, prisons and juvenile detention centres resulted in a high number of Indigenous deaths. It also found common patterns in the lives of those whose deaths were investigated. Those who died had high levels of unemployment, poor education, poor health, alcohol abuse and long histories of contact with the criminal justice system. It concluded extreme disadvantage of Indigenous people in Australian society led to prolonged contact with, and subsequent over-representation at, all levels of the criminal justice system.
Indigenous people still experience harsher outcomes at each stage of progression through the criminal justice system from first contact through to post release. They are less likely to be cautioned and diverted from the system, more likely to be remanded when awaiting trial, more likely to be sentenced to prison than non-custodial sentences, more likely to be held in maximum security facilities and more likely to be returned to prison within two years of release.

At 30 June 2006, Indigenous Victorians remain 12 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be placed in adult prison. At 30 June 2005 Indigenous young people were involved with the juvenile justice system at 11 times the rate of non-Indigenous males and 23 times the rate of non-Indigenous females respectively.

There is a high rate of victimisation amongst the Indigenous population. In 2002 Indigenous Victorians were more than three times more likely to report being a victim of crime than non-Indigenous people compounding the stress they experience as a result of disadvantage, discrimination and dispossession.

What we are doing

Aboriginal Justice Agreement

The Victorian Government's policy for responding to over-representation in the criminal justice system is the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA). The core aims of the AJA are to reduce initial contact with the justice system, improve outcomes for Indigenous people at all stages of the system from cautioning to post release and to reduce re-offending by increasing the use of diversionary options.

The commitment to these core aims was renewed with the adoption of Phase 2 of the AJA in 2006. An additional $26 million was provided by the Victorian Government in the 2006-07 Budget to progress Phase 2 and to strengthen the effort in reducing over-representation. This includes a range of actions reported in this chapter that directly address over-representation. It also includes indirect measures. Importantly, funds were provided in Phase 2 to strengthen the successful partnership established between the Government and the Indigenous community under the AJA.

Under the AJA the Aboriginal Justice Forum was established to forge and sustain key justice partnerships at the local, regional and statewide levels. The foundation of the justice system’s relationship with Indigenous communities is the regional partnerships developed through the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees. Together with the Forum this partnership has been successful in enabling the Indigenous community and the Government to jointly set policy direction and monitor all AJA-related activities. This partnership has been enhanced through the establishment of Local Justice Action Committees in 2006-07. Local committees enable local Indigenous communities to work closely with justice agencies to devise local solutions to justice issues.
**Action Area 4 Objectives:**

4.3 Reduce the number of times Indigenous youth are processed by police.
4.4 Increase the proportion of Indigenous people cautioned when processed by police.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance** – Indigenous Victorians are 3 times less likely to be cautioned compared with other Victorians.

Indigenous people are over-represented as a proportion of people being arrested and processed by police and under-represented in terms of their likelihood of being cautioned rather than charged.

Cautioning decreases the likelihood that young people (in particular) will become entrenched in a cycle of offending.

Preventing initial contact with the criminal justice system is also important. The Early School Leavers and Youth Employment Program and the Frontline Youth Services have been set up to reduce the likelihood that Indigenous youth at risk of contact with the criminal justice system will actually come into contact with the criminal justice system. The former is an intensive outreach support program that assists Indigenous young people at risk of disengaging from the education system to remain in education or supported training and transition outcomes or other options.

For young Indigenous people who do come into contact with the justice system, projects are being developed to improve access to cautioning. The Pilot Cautioning Program between Victoria Police and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service has improved access to cautioning options that divert them from the criminal justice system. Pilots in Mildura and Wellington will be used to develop more consistent cautioning practices across the State.

The Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer Program has been introduced to build local relationships between the Indigenous community and police. The Liaison Officers also support the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel Program, and deliver cross cultural training. This program is complemented by the work of Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers in reducing negative contact with police.

**Action Area 4 Objectives:**

4.5 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous people remanded in custody.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance** – Indigenous people are 23% more likely to be remanded in custody than other charged Victorians.

Indigenous offenders are under-represented in being granted bail.

The Koori Youth Intensive Bail Support Program aims to reduce the number of young Indigenous people detained prior to sentencing. The program provides intensive outreach support to assist young people comply with bail conditions or conditions placed on deferred sentences.
**Action Area 4 Objectives:**

4.6 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous adults sentenced to prison.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance –**

Indigenous Victorians are currently 12 times more likely to be imprisoned than other Victorian offenders.

A network of adult and children’s Koori Courts has been implemented across Victoria, achieving reduced re-offending. This is in addition to the Aboriginal Liaison Officer Program and cultural awareness training for court staff and Magistrates in the mainstream courts system.

The other preventative measures outlined in other parts of this section contribute to this indicator.

**Action Area 4 Objectives:**

4.7 Reduce the proportion of Indigenous adults/youth who are convicted within two years of their previous conviction.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance –**

Re-imprisonment rates of Indigenous Victorians are 37% higher than other Victorian former prisoners.

Indigenous people are more prone to recidivism, and conviction within two years of their previous conviction. Indigenous prisoners, on average, were 37% more likely to re-offend and re-enter prison within two years of release between 2001/02 and 2005/06.

The Koori Pre and Post Release Services Programs aim to reduce the likelihood that young Indigenous people will return to custody once released. This program supports the planning required to ensure smooth transition between custody and the community. Post release, intensive cultural support is available to young Indigenous people to help reduce the likelihood of non-compliance with post-custodial orders. Cultural programs also operate in Custodial Centres that increase the knowledge and engagement of young Indigenous people with their culture.

The Koori Youth Justice Program was established in 1992 and has expanded over the years to all DHS regions. In 2006-07 there were 16 community workers, three custodial workers (one in each custodial centre) and a central program adviser.

The role of the Koori Youth Justice workers, based mainly in Indigenous Co-operatives, is both preventative and responsive. Clients include young people who are the subject of orders from the criminal division of the Children’s Court, young adults in the dual track system, young Indigenous people who are at risk of offending and those who have committed minor offences and received Police diversion or caution.

Programs are in place to reduce recidivism by tackling the underlying causes of offending behaviour. The Marumali program assists individuals to heal and manage the distress and trauma of dealing with the intergenerational impacts on prisoners of the Stolen Generations.

Research shows that people who get into trouble with the law often have difficulty solving problems in their everyday lives. The Koori Cognitive Skills Program assists Indigenous offenders to improve problem solving skills.

**Next Steps**

Additional programs scheduled for implementation in 2007-08 are expected to improve justice outcomes under the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement*. They aim to:

– reduce the number of Indigenous people imprisoned as a result of breaching community-based orders by delivering the Koori Offender Mentoring & Support Program in four additional locations;

– reduce the proportion of Indigenous people who return to prison soon after release by delivering a Bridging Support Program through Corrections Victoria to properly prepare and support Indigenous prisoners in returning to communities;

– reduce progression into the justice system for minor infringements and breach of orders by improving management of Indigenous offenders undertaking mandated community work, liaising with the Sheriff’s office to ensure appropriate restoration of unpaid fines through the Local Justice Worker Program; and

– reduce the proportion of Indigenous offenders sentenced to prison by implementing an additional Koori Court in 2007/08.
Chapter 9

Area for Action 5[^1]: Improve economic development, settle native title claims and address land access issues

We will work in partnership with Indigenous communities to help achieve land justice for Victoria’s Traditional Owners and access to land and natural resources for all Indigenous Victorians.

Action Area 5 Objectives:

5.1 Increase Indigenous participation in State-funded employment programs [See Action Area 3.3 chapter 6].
5.2 Increase the proportion of Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands

Current situation

Snapshot

- The area of Indigenous owned or controlled land in Victoria has marginally increased from 93.99km² in 2003 to 95.22km² in 2005 to 100.0 km² in 2006.
- In 2006 the area of land covered by Indigenous Land Use Agreements was over 67,000 km².
- For many Indigenous Victorians formalisation of access to traditional lands is a potent symbol of political recognition and acknowledgment of the prior custodianship of Victorian lands.

This section is directly related to economic development and participation of Indigenous people in the economy. It also recognises the importance of land and economic development in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Land provides an economic base, offers opportunity for social advancement, supports the ability to maintain and manage culture, and contributes to addressing other areas of Indigenous disadvantage, including health and well-being. Access to traditional land in particular also supports the ability to restore kinship ties, maintain and manage Traditional Owner cultures whilst enhancing natural resource management.

There is a close relationship between economic participation, living standards and well-being. The extent of economic participation also influences how individuals interact as well as the ways in which family and community function. The settling of native title claims and addressing land access issues directly acknowledges the importance of cultural and social connection to land for Indigenous people.

The national *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework* considers measures related to employment and the extent of Indigenous owned or controlled land under the Economic Participation and Development Strategic Action section.

[^1]: Action Area 5.1 is covered in Chapter 6 under Action Area 3.1
The Victorian Government has been active in improving the environment for employment and business growth. Community building initiatives include actions to promote wider economic participation of disadvantaged Victorians.

The Government has developed a number of Indigenous-specific programs that address Indigenous economic participation. In particular, in 2005 the Government established the Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program to help meet the cultural, economic, social and environmental interests of Indigenous people by involving them in land and natural resource management, sustainable tourism and new business opportunities. The Koorie Business Network also provides support to Indigenous enterprises particularly in the area of marketing.

The first strategic change indicator reflects the important role the State plays in improving employment policy and labour market outcomes for Indigenous Victorians. (This indicator is addressed in Chapter 6.)

The second strategic change indicator reflects the importance of access to traditional land for Indigenous people through access for Victorian Traditional Owners. Connection to country is an issue that resonates deeply for all Indigenous people.

There are three measures which viewed together represent the indicator. These are:

- The proportion of Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands.
- The proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over living on, or allowed to visit their homelands.44
- The proportion of Indigenous people in Victoria who recognised traditional lands is lower than in most other States and Territories, and between 1994 and 2002 decreased from 72.4% to 63.3% (Indigenous Australia 74.8% to 69.6%).

A similar pattern is evident for the proportion of Indigenous Victorians who lived on traditional lands. This was lower than in most other States and Territories and decreased from 23.0% to 14.5% between 1994 and 2002 (Indigenous Australia 29.2% to 21.0%). The proportion of Indigenous people in Victoria who were allowed to visit traditional lands remained constant at 46.6% between 1994 and 2002.

### Registered Indigenous Land Use Agreements

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<td>12.0 km²</td>
<td>12.4 km²</td>
<td>67,043 km²</td>
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The number and area of land covered by Indigenous Land Use Agreements is an important measure of access to traditional lands. These agreements are negotiated under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) and may represent either a formal determination of native title or an alternative mechanism to resolve native title issues. The Agreements can formalise negotiation rights over the use and management of land for Traditional Owners.

In 2006 a significant increase in the area of land covered by Indigenous Land Use Agreements occurred in Victoria reflecting resolution of native title claims.

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Area of Indigenous owned or controlled land

The area of Indigenous owned or controlled land relates to land held collectively or communally by Indigenous communities, or on behalf of Indigenous communities by Government. The measure is an important indicator of economic participation and development as well as being a measure of social and cultural relationships to land. It includes ownership or control of land by Traditional Owners but importantly it can also encompass collective or communal ownership or control which may have an increased importance in areas of higher dispossession. Indigenous owned or controlled land in Victoria has marginally increased from 93.99km² in 2003 to 95.22km² in 2005 to 100.0 km² in 2006, but when represented as a proportion of the State (0.04%) trails other States and jurisdictions (NSW 0.5%, NT 45(+)%, Qld 2.9%, SA 20.7%, Tas 0.8% and WA 14.4%).

What we are doing

Over the last decade, the Victorian Government has taken specific measures to increase access to traditional lands within the framework of resolving native title claims.

Following the litigated decision in the Yorta Yorta case that found native title did not exist, the Government negotiated a non native title agreement with claimants. The State entered a formal co-operative management agreement with the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation that provides the group with an advisory role in the management of designated areas.

The Victorian Government reached a mediated outcome with claimants in the Wimmera that lead to recognition of native title rights in 2% of the claim area and also established an Indigenous Land Use Agreement providing for their involvement in management of Crown land in a larger area. A mediated outcome was also reached with Gunditjmara claimants that recognised specific native title rights in the entire claim area.

The Victorian Government was the first jurisdiction to provide statutory recognition of Indigenous communal ownership of land through the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 (Vic). This Act provided a form of recognition of the historical familial relationships to land through a shareholding structure responsible for managing the grant of freehold title at Framlingham and Lake Tyers. It also granted ownership of land directly to Indigenous community organisations.

Access to traditional lands by Indigenous people has also been supported through partnership strategies developed by the Department for Sustainability and Environment, Department for Primary Industries and Parks Victoria. New Victorian Indigenous cultural heritage legislation has also provided Indigenous people with opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes pertaining to land and cultural heritage.

Planning began in 2006-07 with the objective of developing an alternative and improved settlement process that is more efficient and effective for all parties concerned. The Government’s objectives in developing the framework are to:

– build stronger partnerships with Indigenous Victorians and resolve long-standing land grievances;
– strengthen communities and cultural identity through durable and long-standing settlements; and
– increase economic and social opportunities.

The framework will give access to similar rights and entitlements to those obtained under the native title process but via a less
cumbersome process. It will be developed jointly between Traditional Owners and the Victorian Government in the spirit of Reconciliation and will seek to meet the aspirations of Traditional Owners, recognising their unique connection to country. It is anticipated that the elements of the framework will be determined over the next 12 months.

Next steps

The Victorian Government is continuing to improve access to land and economic development opportunities for Indigenous Victorians.

While the Victorian Government will continue to assist Traditional Owners who wish to pursue a native title claim, it is important that an alternative process that is more applicable to Victorian conditions is explored. To this end, the Victorian Government is actively working with Traditional Owners to develop an alternative framework for resolving land claims and improving access to land.

The Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program which provides mechanisms for enhancing land or cultural based economic development opportunities will be further developed.

Case Study Three

Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape

The Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape in south west Victoria was listed on the National Heritage Register in July 2004. It contains evidence of Gunditjmara people systematically farming eels in what is considered to be one of Australia’s earliest and largest aquaculture ventures. The Gunditjmara people are key players in caring for their Country, particularly in the management of land and biodiversity. The recent Federal Court native title settlement will bring about the return of Lake Condah and the co-management of the Mt Eccles National Park. The Gunditjmara native title holders are represented through the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

The Gunditjmara, through the Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, successfully manage the Tyrendara Indigenous Protected Area located 20 km south of Lake Condah, also part of the of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape. Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation is also a registered employment provider and preferred contractor, winning key pest plant and animal control contracts as well as the Koala Population Management program.

Indigenous people are employed in the region with natural resource management agencies such as Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation launched the Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project in 2002. The major goals of the project include restoration of Lake Condah, the restoration of the Lake Condah Church site and gaining World Heritage listing for the Budj Bim landscape.

Restoration of Lake Condah involves re-flooding the lake which was drained in 1954. This would revitalise the biodiversity and ecology of the area and enable re-use of the traditional eel trapping and harvesting systems. Benefits to the community and the local economy will flow from the restoration through the development of sustainable primary industries and cultural tourism.

The development of a whole of government approach has focused agency involvement with the project, clarified processes and departmental requirements to achieve the mutual objectives.
Chapter 10

Area for Action 6: Build Indigenous capacity

We will work in partnership with Indigenous communities so they have continued and sustained access to strong economic opportunities, assistance to improve governance and employment and training activities.

Action Area 6 Objective:

6.1 Increase workforce participation by Indigenous people in the public sector in ways which can drive improvements in the Victorian Strategic Areas for Action.

Current situation

Snapshot

- In 2006, 0.6% of Victorian public sector employees were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.
- Most Government departments have developed Indigenous specific employment strategies, including training scholarships, aimed at increasing the participation of Indigenous people in the public sector.
- A number of departments have incorporated cultural training to improve the cultural competencies of non-Indigenous staff.

The Government recognises that having skilled Indigenous people in the public sector helps increase awareness and understanding of key Indigenous issues in the public sector. The Government has continued to focus on increasing workforce participation by Indigenous people in the public sector. In 2006, Victorian public sector employees who were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin remained steady at 0.6%. This was a continuation of the effort made in 2005 which saw an additional 142 Indigenous people employed in the public sector and 72 employed on traineeships, scholarships and cadetships.

Measure of Current Performance

Current Performance – 0.6% of Victorian public sector employees are Indigenous people.

What we are doing

Most Government departments have continued to target employment information to Indigenous communities, incorporated cultural awareness programs into their corporate training calendars and provided scholarships or cadetship programs. Other activities for the period 2006-07 included the following strategies.
Department of Sustainability and Environment

In 2007, the Department of Sustainability and Environment increased the number of its Indigenous staff from 47 in the previous year to 62. This increase was achieved through the development and implementation of the Department of Sustainability and Environment Indigenous Employment Plan.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice put in relevant recruitment and retainment strategies which has seen its Indigenous staff grow from 10 in 2000 to approximately 50 in 2006.

Parks Victoria

Between 2005 and 2006 there was a 6% increase in Parks Victoria’s Indigenous staff. Parks Victoria has a total of 51 Indigenous staff which represents 5.2% of their total permanent workforce.

Department of Primary Industries

In 2005-06, the Department of Primary Industries provided employment opportunities to 34 Indigenous people in a variety of areas including business administration, human resources, horticulture and agriculture, and policy.

Department of Human Services

Since 1999 the Department has offered scholarships to tertiary students to complete their undergraduate degree. In the last five years, 34 scholarships have been awarded. Nine students are completing their studies with 24 now working in the health and community services and public sectors.

The Public Health Branch provides scholarships in Masters and Doctoral degree level public health training. As at June 2007, 22 Indigenous students had been in receipt of a scholarship allowance, nine had graduated with a Masters of Public Health degree and one had graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Public Health.

Victoria Police

Victoria Police has developed an Indigenous Employment strategy as well a Koorie Youth Future Employment Experience Program to further increase the number of its Indigenous employees. Victoria Police currently has 12 unsworn and 10 sworn Indigenous employees.\(^{47}\)

The Koori Youth Future Employment Experience Program will also provide Indigenous youth the opportunity to gain corporate, strategic and front line policing views.

The Bairnsdale Police will adapt a Koorie Youth Future Employment Experience Program locally in partnership with the local Koori Education Development Officer.

Next Steps

Over the next year, departments will continue to build on current progress and develop policies and structures that will help maintain and increase the workforce participation by Indigenous people in the public sector.

The Department of Human Services (following consultation with Indigenous staff and their managers) is developing an induction process for new Indigenous staff. The process will help new Indigenous staff connect with relevant people, solve problems and help them and their managers understand and deal with some of the challenges they might face.

Victoria Police is developing a Recruit Traineeship / Mentoring Program to recruit and retain Indigenous police applicants. This will be developed in partnership with the community with an option of entry being via unsworn members.

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\(^{47}\) These numbers are based on the choice of employees to identify themselves as Indigenous.
The Department of Sustainability & Environment will develop and support the capacity and capability of Traditional Owners and Indigenous people to be involved in the management of departmental programs and services towards promoting an understanding within the department of Indigenous community aspirations that can be incorporated into land and resource management.

**Area Action 6 Objectives:**

6.2 Increase the proportion of board members of large Indigenous organisations ($1m plus funds per annum) having undertaken rigorous governance training.

6.3 Increase the proportion of Indigenous Co-operatives and other organisations meeting statutory obligations.

**Current situation**

**Snapshot**

- In the three years to 31 May 2007:
  - 90% of Indigenous Incorporated Associations and 92% of Indigenous Co-operatives in Victoria were compliant with reporting requirements.
  - 77% of all Incorporated (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and 54% of all Co-operatives (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in Victoria were compliant with reporting requirements.

- There are some key issues challenging Aboriginal controlled organisations that impact on their ability to meet statutory obligations.

- The Victorian Government is working in partnership with the Indigenous community to build their capacity.

Aboriginal community controlled organisations deliver a wide range of health, community and other services for Indigenous communities across the State. The sector is diverse with around 160 registered organisations (99 under the State and 61 under the Commonwealth legislation) including peak bodies, large (multi service) organisations and smaller organisations undertaking a variety of service delivery roles such as health, child care and housing. The success or failure of these organisations will have a proportionally greater impact on the well-being of the Indigenous community and their efficiency and effectiveness is therefore pivotal to improving a wide range of outcomes.
Confirmation that an organisation is financially sound and is meeting regulatory and statutory reporting requirements is central to the evidence base for an assessment by funding agencies of an organisation’s ‘risk rating’.

In the three years to 31 May 2007, 90% of Indigenous Incorporated Associations and 92% of Indigenous Co-operatives in Victoria were compliant with reporting requirements. In this same period 77% of all incorporated organisations and 54% of all Co-operatives in Victoria were compliant with reporting requirements.

There are still however some key issues challenging Aboriginal community controlled organisations that impact on their ability to meet statutory obligations. These include:

– difficulties in recruiting and supporting qualified staff;
– reliance on government funding with associated processes that are often complex and administratively burdensome;
– capacity in Boards of Management to understand and manage contemporary governance requirements, and manage the differences between mainstream public administration and Indigenous cultural values and expectations; and
– difficulties that can arise from inadequate internal processes.

Supporting ways to build the capacity of the sector is a strategic investment for not only the organisations themselves but for the communities they service and support.

**Measure of Current Performance**

**Current Performance –**

– more than 90% of Indigenous Incorporated Associations are compliant with reporting requirements;
– more than 92% of Indigenous Co-operatives are compliant with reporting requirements.

**What we are doing**

Governance capacity and skills is included as a strategic change indicator in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework and the Victorian Government is working in partnership with the Indigenous community to build their capacity and skill level so they have continued and sustained access to strong economic opportunities, assistance to improve governance and employment and training.

Recognising the challenges that Indigenous organisations face, State and Commonwealth Government departments are working with organisations to help build a strong sector into the future.

The Positioning Aboriginal Services for the Future project is focusing on identifying the key elements required to build a strong sector into the future and what steps can be jointly taken to achieve this vision.

**Managing in Two Worlds - Governance training program**

In recognising the governance and management issues challenging board members and key administrative staff in Indigenous Organisations, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria in partnership with the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations and Consumer Affairs Victoria developed the Managing in Two Worlds Governance training program.

**Government and organisations working better together**

Building and sustaining the capacity and viability of Aboriginal community controlled organisations is a priority and one that has been raised at virtually all Aboriginal Human Services Forums since their outset in June 2002.

The Department of Human Services established a project in 2005 to:

– improve the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled organisations to maintain strength and stability;
– deliver culturally appropriate services consistent with funding agreements; and
– meet government accountability requirements.

**Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy**

The Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy focuses on leadership development within the Victorian Indigenous community. Enhancing leadership capacity will result in stronger contemporary Indigenous culture and build the capacity for collective leadership and partnering with Government to address issues affecting Indigenous Victorians.
As part of this strategy, the Victorian Leadership Network has been established. In addition the Victorian Youth Advisory Council represents issues pertaining to young Indigenous people in the policy process.

**Victorian Indigenous Funding Agreement**

*A Fairer Victoria* committed the Government to change the way it works with Indigenous communities by introducing single funding agreements with Indigenous organisations. In 2007-08, Victorian Government agencies and departments are adopting the *Victorian Indigenous Funding Agreement* to reduce the administrative burden associated with funding to Indigenous community organisations.

The *Victorian Indigenous Funding Agreement* means that Indigenous Boards receiving funding from multiple Government departments will have more certainty about how to manage funding, more time to focus on service delivery and more consistent processes for addressing issues that arise in the funding partnership.

**Building the capacity of Aboriginal Housing Victoria**

The Department of Human Services continues to support Aboriginal Housing Victoria’s transition to independence. In 2006-07, governance, business planning and organisational systems were established to build capacity to manage tenancies of the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program.

A three tiered communication strategy was implemented which informed tenants of the changes by direct mail, community forums and individual contact. Tenants views were sought to determine whether the Indigenous community supported the changes to the program. The tenant response to the changes has been overwhelmingly positive and it is anticipated that the first tenancy transfers to Aboriginal Housing Victoria will take place in early 2007-08.

**Next Steps**

In the May 2007-08 Victorian State Budget the Victorian Government made available an additional $5.1 million over four years to continue initiatives to build Indigenous capacity, including:

- ongoing delivery of the governance training program and the Certificate IV course, with a minimum of four governance training sessions (average 20-25 participants per session) and two Certificate IV courses per year (about 15 participants per course).
- providing support for successful participants in the Governance Training Program to progress to the Certificate IV and Diploma stages; and
- streamlining administrative arrangements for Indigenous community organisations through the introduction of *Victorian Indigenous Funding Agreements*. 