

Reconciliation Action Plan 2013–15

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

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Foreword

I take great pleasure in presenting VicHealth's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2013–15.

We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience significantly poorer health outcomes compared with their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the state. These avoidable health inequities 'arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness.'¹

VicHealth has a strong history of working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to meet locally identified needs in culturally appropriate ways. Our investment in health promotion in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over the past 25 years has included a range of programs and projects addressing the social and economic determinants of health and a number of risk factors that contribute to chronic disease.

VicHealth's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is one of a number of mechanisms that VicHealth will employ over the period of our new Action Agenda to ensure that we are supporting best practice in Aboriginal health promotion², both with our partner organisations and within our own organisation.

As outlined in the VicHealth resource *Life is Health is Life*, we recognise the importance of the workplace setting in promoting health and wellbeing. By continuing to improve the policies and practices of our organisation through the RAP we will work toward our aim of becoming an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The plan provides an important opportunity to ensure that we are truly 'walking the talk' and living the VicHealth values in relation to Aboriginal health promotion. The RAP identifies actions VicHealth will undertake over the coming months and years to ensure our organisation and culture is inclusive to all staff, visitors and stakeholders.

The following plan provides an overview of actions which aim to continue to reduce barriers and make advancements in relation to the three key areas below, improve the health of our employees and visitors, and assist in preventing race-based discrimination and future health problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The three key outcome areas are:

1. Relationships
2. Respect
3. Opportunities.

I would like to thank personally all individuals internally and externally who contributed to the development of this plan, particularly VicHealth's Indigenous Advisory Committee and the RAP working groups. VicHealth will monitor our progress to ensure we are a welcoming and culturally inclusive workplace and agency for all.



Jerril Rechter
CEO, VicHealth

1. Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008, *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*, World Health Organization, Geneva.
2. Given the organisation's mandate to work in Victoria, VicHealth uses the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent in relation to programs and resources. 'Indigenous' is retained when it is part of the title of a report or group.

About VicHealth

Our primary focus is promoting good health and preventing chronic disease.

VicHealth (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation) is a pioneer in health promotion – the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. We create and fund world-class interventions. We conduct vital research to advance our state's population health. We produce and support public campaigns to promote a healthier Victoria. We provide transformational expertise and insights to government.

Of all the things we do, above all we seek to make health gains among Victorians by pre-empting and targeting improvements in health across our population, fostered within the day-to-day spaces where people spend their time, and with benefits to be enjoyed by all.

For more information www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

Background to the VicHealth Reconciliation Action Plan

'The story of Aboriginal health is a story about health inequity. Aboriginal Victorian people have different life chances to other Victorians: they have a shorter life expectancy and are more likely to experience disease.' (Life is health is life, VicHealth 2011)

VicHealth undertook the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2013–15 to ensure that the principles of reconciliation and equity are central to VicHealth's practice by creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all employees, partner agencies and stakeholders.

Reconciliation Australia's RAP Program guides organisations through the process of developing business plans that document what they will do within their sphere of influence to contribute to reconciliation in Australia. While VicHealth has had an external focus on promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health for many years, the RAP ensures that the organisation is supporting best practice in Aboriginal health promotion within VicHealth itself.

The VicHealth RAP outlines VicHealth's role, as an employer of more than 70 staff, in addressing health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and supporting self-determination and reconciliation. It details practical actions the organisation will take to build stronger relationships and enhance respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

These actions are built on a proud history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for health equity which means that VicHealth:

- understands that social and economic circumstances are beyond individual control
- acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are unique, each requiring tailored health promotion initiatives based on their social, cultural, political and economic determinants

- bases all health promotion practice on evidence
- works in partnership with key stakeholders to identify and contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs
- recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in 'two worlds'
- learns from and applies the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in health promotion activities
- supports self-determination³ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in the decision-making process in all levels and sector.

VicHealth's reconciliation mission is to apply these considerations in a culturally sensitive way throughout the organisation and externally in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria. This plan will continue to formally strengthen internal policies and practices. Our organisation is committed to the implementation and ongoing monitoring of the plan in line with Reconciliation Australia's RAP program.

As a funding and partnering organisation, VicHealth is guided by the VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion. This Reconciliation Action Plan does not involve an exploration, evaluation or recommendation regarding VicHealth's role within the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector, its funding approaches, or the health promotion strategies being implemented to address health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

3. Self-determination is the right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to determine their futures without external influence.

VicHealth's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group

A RAP Working Group whose members include representatives from each unit across VicHealth was convened in late 2012 to ensure that development of the RAP had organisation-wide input and support.

While the Health Equity team at VicHealth is responsible for coordinating the organisation's efforts to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, the RAP is relevant to all units and employees of VicHealth. For this reason, the chair of the RAP Working Group is the Executive Manager, Corporate Support who is responsible for overseeing the corporate administration at VicHealth.

The 13 members of the RAP Working Group represent the four units of the organisation and operate at varying levels of seniority

(see Figure 1 below). The group is comprised of health promotion experts and employees interested in addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, self-determination and reconciliation.

As the RAP moves into implementation, Working Group members have joined smaller working groups focusing on specific issues such as program and monitoring, policy and events. VicHealth's Indigenous Advisory Committee was also consulted throughout this process to ensure our RAP is inclusive of our partners in Aboriginal health promotion across Victoria.

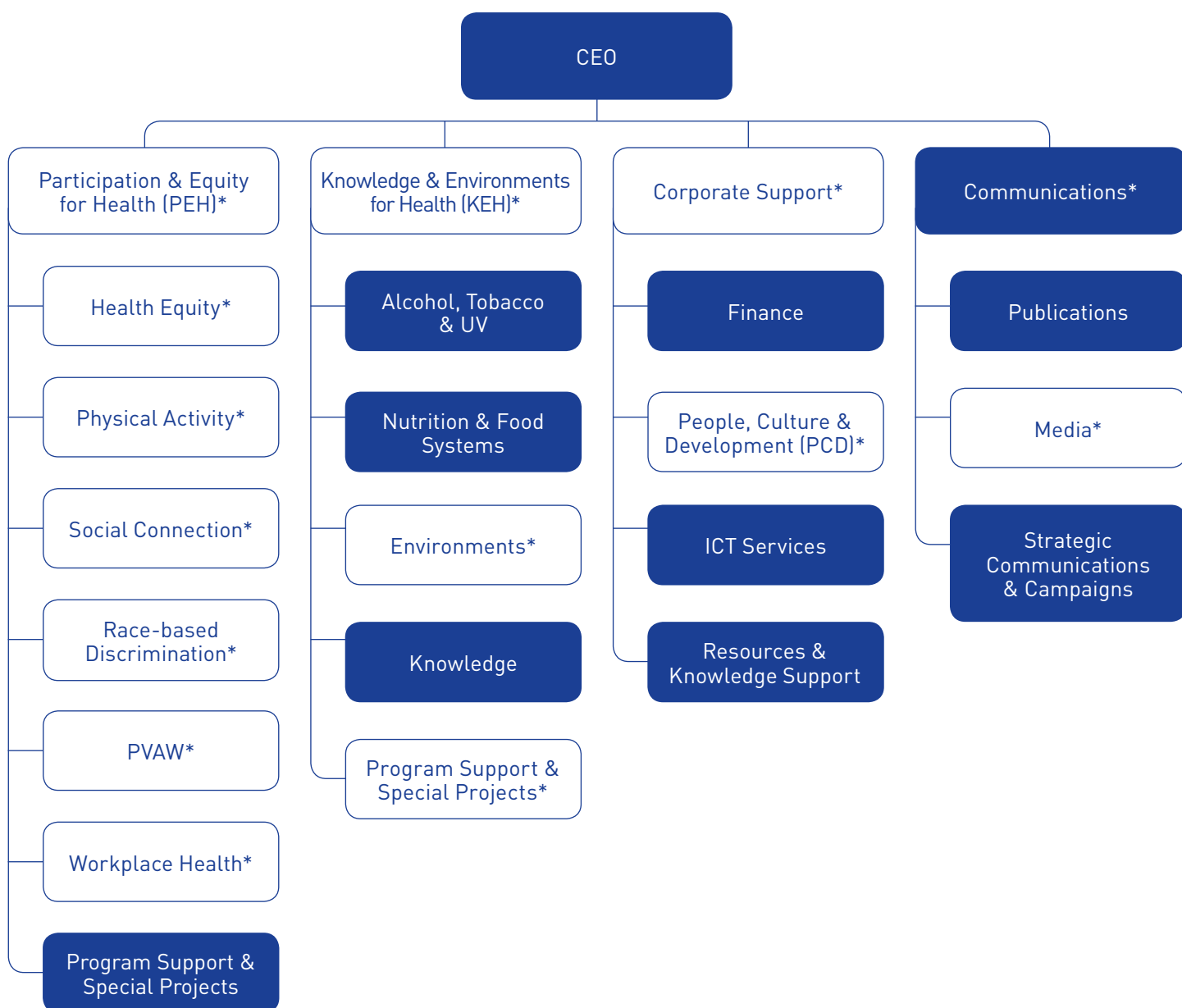


Figure 1. VicHealth's organisational chart as at July 2013 [*asterisks indicate teams or individuals represented in the RAP 2013–15 Working Group].

Key outcome areas

Three key outcome areas and associated actions are included as part of the VicHealth RAP 2013–15. All actions have been included in the relevant staff workplans to ensure that they are completed. In total, 14 actions are proposed across the three key outcome areas:

1. Relationships

Health promotion requires many people to work together with a shared vision for a healthier future.

At VicHealth we understand that a role of our organisation is to support, foster and connect with organisations and individuals to effectively promote the health and wellbeing of all Victorian communities. See Appendix 1 for a list of VicHealth partners in 2012 working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Building strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria is a priority for our organisation.

2. Respect

The cultures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia are the oldest living in the world. VicHealth believes respect must be given towards the knowledge, practices, history and understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold to this land.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures continue to contribute considerably to Australia and Victoria. VicHealth understands and acts on this by supporting and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through funding approaches and health promotion strategies. For more information regarding VicHealth's investment in Aboriginal health promotion see www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

3. Opportunities

VicHealth understands that health inequities result, in part, when groups within our population have limited access to opportunities which are health promoting, such as educational attainment and secure employment.

The Victorian Aboriginal evidence-based health promotion resource *Life is health is life* identifies a range of opportunities essential to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing but suggests Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access is currently limited by a range of individual, organisational, community and societal level issues.

VicHealth strives to tackle these issues and advocate for more equitable access to health-promoting opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

See Appendix 2 for a copy of the Victorian Aboriginal health promotion framework.

Details of the full *Life is health is life* resource can be found in the Resources and Publications section on page 13.

Outcome Area 1 – Relationships

Goal: To promote health by encouraging people to work together with a shared vision for a healthier future.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline ⁴	Desired outcome
1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are involved in contributing to decision-making in the organisation.	CEO	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an appropriate structure to allow regular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution to the organisation.
2. Celebrate National Reconciliation Week.⁵	RAP Working Group, Health Equity, PCD and endorsed by the CEO	27 May – 3 June 2013 annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise at least one internal event each year and VicHealth to support staff attending external events.
3. Develop an internal publication (based on existing publications from government, non-government organisations, community and academics sector on best practice) outlining the cultural protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and appropriate ways for VicHealth employees to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and stakeholders.	Whole of organisation led by RAP Working Group, Health Equity and Communications	October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the protocols publication to all new employees during induction and existing employees annually.
4. Develop a database to monitor communication and funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that meets our cultural protocols systems and develop an auditing system to ensure VicHealth is effectively working across the organisation to maximise our collective contribution (see also page 12 Action 1).	Program Support units in PEH and KEH	Database developed and active from February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded programs to be monitored, documented and evaluated.
5. Prepare a VicHealth Aboriginal Governance Structure policy to ensure greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the decision-making across all levels of the organisation.	Health Equity and PCD	February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to implement the policy in 2014.

4. The timeline section is in chronological order for 2013.

5. Please note, as this is a RAP, National Reconciliation Week is fundamental to VicHealth building relationships in this area which is why it has been placed in this section. Additional special events can be found in Outcome Area 2: Respect as VicHealth will contribute to these with more of a health/self-determination focus.

Outcome Area 2 – Respect

Goal: To support and respect Aboriginal Victorian communities through funding approaches and ongoing strategy in health promotion.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Desired outcome
6. Provide opportunities for all VicHealth employees to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through NAIDOC Week, Close the Gap Day, National Sorry Day and the Dream Time Game events.	RAP Working Group CEO to encourage VicHealth staff to attend	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior representatives of VicHealth to attend these events where possible and encourage other employees to do the same. Provide meaning of events through email, intranet and other mediums. Recognise our partners working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health contributing to these events through letters, newsletters, for example.
7. Engage employees in understanding the protocols around 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies to ensure there is shared meaning behind these protocols and that the protocols continue to be applied.	Health Equity, PCD, and promoted by the RAP Working Group	August 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop, communicate and implement a protocol document regarding 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' for VicHealth. Prepare a reference card to guide all VicHealth staff members on how to undertake an 'Acknowledgment to Country' and the reason for it. 'Acknowledgement to Country' to be mandatory at all VicHealth events. With significant external events (for example launches, presentations and workshops where VicHealth is a contributor) with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus, a 'Welcome to Country' must be organised.
8. Engage employees in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural learning to increase understanding and appreciation of different communities.	PCD	Training strategy developed by October 2013 for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement an available cultural awareness training strategy for VicHealth in partnership with key training providers in the area (VACCHO/Koori Heritage Trust). Monitor staff satisfaction and self-assessed changes from training.
9. Create visible 'Acknowledgment of Country' signage and art at VicHealth.	Corporate Support	August 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on 'Acknowledgement of Country' signage that is culturally appropriate and signed off by VicHealth Aboriginal advisors and RAP Working Group. Make signage visible to VicHealth visitors.

Outcome Area 2 – Respect *Continued...*

Goal: To support and respect Aboriginal Victorian communities through funding approaches and ongoing strategy in health promotion.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Desired outcome
10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art displayed at VicHealth to be reviewed, catalogued and promoted.	Corporate Support	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately acknowledge all art pieces displayed at VicHealth. • Review current process/policy. • Digitise and catalogue material appropriately. • Collaborate with appropriate staff to identify how to promote this work internally and externally where appropriate.
11. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific communications and archival protocol policy to be created.	RAP Working Group, Health Equity, and Communications	December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a policy to ensure VicHealth is using images, language and footage in a culturally appropriately manner. • Promote the need to use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific consent forms when it comes to images and footage. • Incorporate policy and use of consent forms into VicHealth's induction and training. • Ensure approval and support is always sourced from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities involved in our communications.

Outcome Area 3 – Opportunities

Goal: VicHealth strives to tackle educational obtainment, training and employment obstacles and advocate for better opportunities throughout Victoria for Aboriginal Victorians.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Desired outcome
12. Investigate opportunities for VicHealth to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities.	Executive sign off; PCD, Corporate Support and Health Equity	Ongoing from August 2013 In September 2013 the Aboriginal VicHealth Employment Guidelines will be published on the VicHealth website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an Aboriginal Employment Strategy that filters into the Employment, Diversity and Equity Policy, and which includes the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> All VicHealth job advertisements are to be promoted in the Koori Mail and Indigenous National Times or similar publications. All VicHealth job applications need to include the statement: <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are encouraged to apply.</i>
13. Provide mentoring and traineeship opportunities at VicHealth internally and through our partners.	CEO sign off; PCD, Corporate Support and Health Equity	February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include this action in the Aboriginal Employment Strategy.
14. Investigate opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers to be used when possible.	Whole of organisation – but this will be a specific requirement of the Manager of Program Support Units in PEH and KEH	October 2013 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modify procurement policies and procedures to actively consider using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Develop a preferred supplier list including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.⁶

6. This preferred supplier list can be part of a broader Social Procurement Strategy at VicHealth including local small business or green corporations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Goal: VicHealth prides itself in translating evidence into health promotion practice; therefore tracking the progress of our RAP is fundamental to upholding our values.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Target
1. Develop an 'Aboriginal investment tracker' to monitor VicHealth funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs and projects.	IT, RAP Working Group and Program Support units in KEH and PEH	December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an Aboriginal Investment Tracker with IT and the RAP Working Group. • Track funding of Aboriginal health programs with an annual report.
2. Develop a central database with findings from our Aboriginal funding programs and details of the partners involved (for internal use).⁷	Whole of organisation – the Senior Project Officer for Indigenous Health Promotions will ensure this happens for Aboriginal funding	December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include findings from the database in the Aboriginal health funding annual report mentioned above to monitor the reach and success of programs. • Archive the internal Annual Report to identify our partners and ensure we are improving our contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
3. Report achievements, challenges and program outcomes to Reconciliation Australia for inclusion in the Annual Impact Measurement Report.	RAP Working Group	Annually from March 2014 Data collection is maintained from March but write up starts in December of that year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report RAP progress to VicHealth staff and Reconciliation Australia annually.

7. Action points 1 and 2 should be applied across all investments at VicHealth with priority groups.

Resources and publications

Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is a priority for VicHealth. A range of VicHealth publications and resources which address health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and promote action are currently publicly available or in development:

Aboriginal health in Victoria: research summary (2011)

A synopsis of the latest research examining the health status of Aboriginal Victorians. It describes the burden of disease that arises from preventable chronic conditions, the risk factors that contribute to disease, and the social and economic factors that influence Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

It provides a foundation for understanding that most important issues in this area including those around nutrition and food supply, educational attainment, income, employment and housing, and land, culture and identity.

Available for download from www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Health-Inequalities/Aboriginal-health-in-Victoria---research-summary.aspx.

Print copies also available from VicHealth, phone (03) 9667 1333.

Life is health is life: the Victorian Aboriginal evidence-based health promotion resource (2011)

Life is health is life provides information and guidance for action to improve the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal Victorians. It brings together stories of promising health promotion practice from across Victoria and a review of the scientific literature.

This resource provides the evidence for effective interventions that can be used in health promotion planning. The purpose is to provide the best available information to guide service and program planning which will contribute to closing the gap in life expectancy while keeping the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal Victorians.

See www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Health-Inequalities/Life-is-health-is-life.aspx for further information.

Print copies also available from VicHealth, phone (03) 9667 1333.

VicHealth Aboriginal Health Plan (currently in development)

VicHealth is currently developing the organisation's first Aboriginal Health Plan. The plan ensures effective coordination across the organisation to address the key determinants and risk factors related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. It is guided by the Aboriginal health promotion framework included in *Life is health is life*.

The plan is expected to be completed in late 2013.

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Appendix 1: List of VicHealth partners working in Aboriginal health in 2012–13

Artistic Merit
Auspicious Arts
Brotherhood of St Laurence
CARN – The Centre
CHSA – Sports Central
City of Greater Shepparton
City of Whittlesea
Clear Horizon and Storyscape
Davidson consulting
Fitzroy Stars
Ganbina
Gippsland Lakes Community Health
GippSport
Koori Heritage Trust
Leisure Networks
Ilbijjerri Theatre Company
Mallee Sports Assembly
Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation (MAYSAR)
Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit (The University of Melbourne)
Phanktional Art
Quit Victoria
Regional Sports Assembly
Ruby's Foundation
Rugby League
Rugby Union
Rumbalara Football and Netball Club
Short Black Opera Company
South West Sports Assembly
Sport Focus
Surfing Victoria
The Black Armband Incorporated
The Torch
University of Melbourne
VACCHO
Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network
Volley Sport
Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
YMCA
Youth Support and Advocacy Service

Appendix 2: Victorian Aboriginal health promotion framework

Key determinants of Aboriginal* health in Victoria and themes for action				
History of colonisation				
Educational attainment	Family and community connections	Access to economic and material resources	Freedom from race-based discrimination	Connection to country
Socially inclusive, supportive and aspirational educational environments	Supportive personal relationships Supportive community connections navigating in 'two worlds' Strong culture and identity Aboriginal people systematically included in policy processes	Economic participation Employment Adequate housing for health	Security and respect at all levels of society Equality of opportunity Valuing diversity	Recognition and access to homelands Strong culture and identity
Key contributing factors and themes for action				
Tobacco	Physical activity		Alcohol	Access and treatment in the health system
Health promotion principles and actions				
Principles: good practice Aboriginal health promotion action		Health promotion actions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive of historical, social and cultural context 'Community-centred practice' – community owned and driven, builds on strengths to address community-identified priorities Flexible, allowing for innovation, and accountable Comprehensive with multiple strategies to address all the determinants Sustainable in terms of funding, program and governance Evidence-based with built-in monitoring and evaluation systems Builds and sustains the social, human and economic capital from a strengths-based perspective 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build healthy public policy Create supportive environments Strengthen community actions and increase community capacity to empower the individual Develop personal skills Reorient health services towards comprehensive primary health care Secure an infrastructure for health promotion Advocate and communicate Consolidate and expand partnerships for health 		
Priority settings for action				
Early childhood	Health	Education	Housing	Local community (families/clan groups)
Local government	Corporate	Sport and recreation	Arts	Media
Intermediate outcomes				
Individual	Organisational	Community	Societal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong family and community relationships Access to socially inclusive and supportive educational opportunities Access to employment Reduced experiences of discrimination Access to appropriate health care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies, practices and procedures that model good practice in Aboriginal health promotion Systematic inclusion of Aboriginal people in policy processes Committed to sustaining change Appropriately sized, well trained and supported Aboriginal workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe, supportive and inclusive environment Mutual respect and valuing of diversity Improved cohesion Committed to sustaining change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive, non-discriminatory education, employment, housing and other social policies, programs and legislative platforms that support Aboriginal health Strong leadership Social norms and practices that support Aboriginal health Appropriate resource allocation Responsive and inclusive governance structures 	
Long-term benefits				
Individual	Organisational	Community	Societal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong cultural identity Self-esteem, pride and leadership Alleviation of poverty and socioeconomic inequalities Improved health and wellbeing Control/mastery over determinants of own health Increased sense of belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom from discrimination Effective programs that are contributing to closing the gap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong cultural identity Improved productivity Freedom from discrimination Reconciliation Self-determination Less violence and crime Equality of health outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A fairer society with equality of access to opportunities and resources that support health Freedom from discrimination Equality of life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people 	



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