



## Tackling health inequalities: a case study

### Ensuring a successful working life is not merely a matter of finding a job

At Shepparton's Jobs 4U2, run by Ganbina Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency, the approach to improving both education and employment opportunities for young Indigenous people is very holistic – focusing on training and leadership development that acts as a springboard to true employment satisfaction well into the future.

Thanks to VicHealth funding to Ganbina for their Indigenous School-to-Work project, Ganbina CEO Adrian Appo believes that real change will come.

“Typical employment-type funded programs deal with the individual after the event; that is, once they have become unemployed and, in many cases, long-term unemployed,” he says.

With this project funding from VicHealth, Appo was able to implement a more proactive and comprehensive approach to support individuals through transitional phases of their lives – with the opportunity for longer-term engagement enabling more tangible outcomes.

“The funding also allows for strong independent research for evaluation of program impact and adjustment,” says Appo.

From an initial intake of just 25 young people, the stability and success of the program now provides a platform for strong growth, with 250 young people (commencing at age five, but being more directed at those aged 12 to 25) engaged on an annual basis.

Basically, this project is about re-engaging kids – keeping young people in school or finding them training and jobs. This avoids useless, idle time that can lead to so many problems.

The two main reasons that children need to stay in school are, says Appo, very closely linked.

With the days of the ‘unskilled job’ being all but over, Appo believes that anyone denying themselves an education also precludes themselves from the majority of solid employment opportunities.

“Secondly, youth need to develop life skills that complement their transition into a workforce – at the same time as they are gaining their education skills, they are giving themselves the time and opportunity to develop life skills,” he says.

The alternative is, Appo says, far less positive – high unemployment, low life expectancy, high levels of contact with the justice system, a high incidence of alcohol and drug misuse and high levels of youth suicide.

In 2008, Appo's work at Ganbina earned the project a VicHealth Award – presented in recognition of outstanding achievement and innovative contributions to health promotion through VicHealth-funded projects.

Since the project commenced, Appo has already seen the number of Indigenous youth in the region's secondary schools rise from a handful in 2004 to 34 students in years 11 and 12 in 2009.

But there is more to the story than mere numbers.

“Our measure of success is not how many youth we engage with but what we do with them,” says Appo proudly. “We have to be holistic. Each element of a person's life and development eventually defines who they are. It is therefore necessary that we are supportive through transition and crisis times and are realistic enough to acknowledge that they don't happen at the same time for everyone.”

What is also essential, he says, is that Ganbina assists youth in defining their goals and then provides the support mechanisms to aid them in reaching these goals themselves, rather than the program becoming simply a crutch or “another form of welfare”.

“The journey has to be the individual's – it is, after all, their goal.”

# Tackling health inequalities

There are significant inequalities in health between different groups of people everywhere, including Victoria. Those health inequalities are unfair, unnecessary and unavoidable, and they result from a range of social and economic factors that influence health. To minimise the impact of social and economic disadvantage on people's health, all of VicHealth's health promotion programs look to reduce health inequalities.

## Program investments

While working to improve the health of all Victorians, we also work to address the needs of those with the poorest health by supporting projects that work with people who have the least access or face the greatest barriers to activities that promote health. We also assist program staff to understand the levers that cause health inequalities and to design programs that most effectively reduce health inequalities.

### Centre of Excellence in Research and Practice

#### Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit

*University of Melbourne*  
\$365,000  
The Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit is one of the Centres of Excellence in Research and Practice supported by VicHealth. It is an integrated academic program in Aboriginal health, focusing on research, community development and the Teaching and Learning Program.

### Research projects to reduce health inequalities

#### ARC Linkage: auditing the Victorian Charter: Australian and international perspectives on applied human rights

*RMIT University*  
\$25,000  
This project allows VicHealth to become a project partner with RMIT, the Human Rights Law Resource Centre, the Victorian Council of Social Service, the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and the Department of Justice, and to undertake a community survey on attitudes, values and levels of support for policy and program development to tackle health inequalities.

#### Australian Health Inequalities Program

*Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne*  
\$15,000  
Dr Anne Kavanagh. The Australian Health Inequities Program addresses social and economic determinants of health and aims to build capacity in multidisciplinary population health research.

#### Understanding the impact of racism on Indigenous child health

*University of Melbourne*  
\$107,201  
This project will involve analysis of data from four existing surveys/research studies concerned with Indigenous children and young people, to explore the relationship between exposure to self-reported discrimination and health.

### Research Fellowships

#### Contribution and interactions of individual, community and environmental characteristics on health

*University of Melbourne*  
\$13,200  
Dr Margaret Kelaher. This research aims to build bridges between the body of evidence concerning individual risk factors, community-level intervention research and population health research.

#### Health inequalities, governance and participation

*Monash University*  
\$130,000  
Dr Bebe Loff. This research project aims to promote health and wellbeing from a health inequalities and human rights perspective, by examining the

legal and broader regulatory environment to determine strategies for future policy and law reform.

#### Promoting mental health of children living in low-income families

*University of Melbourne*  
\$38,365  
Dr Elise Davis. The overall aim of this fellowship is to build a cutting-edge, innovative research program in the field of mental health promotion, with a focus on child health inequalities.

#### The determinants of health in Australia: an economic framework with public health implications

*Monash University*  
\$80,000  
Dr Bruce Hollingsworth. The focus of this research is on the determinants of lifestyle and activities, and the impact of these on individuals' health. The aim is to inform public health policy so disadvantaged groups can be supported to achieve health and wellbeing.

## Key highlights

# 10

years supporting Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit focusing on Aboriginal health

# +\$1m

invested in health inequalities to inform program design across all of our strategic priorities

# 4

research fellowships supported targeting health inequalities