

On Solid Ground: Strategic Plan 2021 — 2026

Strength, Sustainability and Innovation for Generational Change



Acknowledgement and dedication

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) acknowledges the Aboriginal lands on which we live and work. We pay our respect to our Ancestors, Traditional Owners and their Elders past, present and emerging.

This work is for the boorai and the Elders, and everyone in between.

Who is this document for

There are many terms to describe Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria. This includes First Nations People, Sovereign Nations, Indigenous Australians, Our Mob/s, Blackfellas, Traditional Owners, Our Communities, Our families etc. In this document, to be inclusive and respectful, we have chosen to use the terms Aboriginal, Our People and Our Communities. If you are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person living or receiving services in Victoria this is for you.

VACCHO is committed to welcoming and embracing the diversity of cultures, identities, gender, sex and sexuality diverse identities and expressions, experiences, beliefs, and values of all people. VACCHO believes in the right for all people to be treated with respect and dignity at all times, and that all people who work for, govern or undertake work at or visit VACCHO should at all times feel safe and included at VACCHO.

Naming this strategic plan

The title of this strategic plan, *On Solid Ground*, speaks to our need for stability and strong foundations to grow and flourish, and pays homage to our Communities' vital connection to the land and waterways.

Trees provide safe havens and homes to a diverse range of animals and birds; they also provide shelter from the harsh summer sun. This is our vision for VACCHO – we operate within a large ecosystem, provide support and leadership to our Members, growing strong partnerships with mainstream and government all for the health and wellbeing of our people.

Of course, the safety and stability we can create is only as strong as our roots and laying down strong foundations is the next part of our strategic journey.

On Solid Ground is a strategic plan that empowers us to connect and lead with Aboriginal culture, be strong in our roots and to invest in Aboriginal knowledge and innovation.



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*Smoking Ceremony, VACCHO's
25th Anniversary celebration,
May 2021.*

VACCHO's Past, Present and Future

"25 years ago, some Elders decided that our people needed a meeting place where we could come and be united. So, like animals are drawn to waterholes the people began to come, gathering together like honey ants for there was much work to be done. They fought for self-determination to make decisions on their own, and soon it became more than just a meeting place, for many it was home.

Slowly as the years passed by it began to take on shape, triumph and tribulation lying in its wake...good times are still celebrated, hard times still take their toll, but the people have kept walking on to newfound waterholes."¹

— Joanne Dwyer, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service commemorative poem

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) was formed in 1996 based on Aboriginal communities' desire to work collaboratively to provide holistic health and wellbeing services to Aboriginal Victorians and to form a collective, united voice to government.

Unlike preceding, short-lived peak bodies, largely established through bureaucratic means with little consultation, VACCHO was born on the grassroots, community-driven level – a characteristic which has ensured VACCHO's legitimacy and longevity, and one that endures to this day.

Starting in a makeshift office with three employees, VACCHO has grown from strength to strength as the recognised peak body for Aboriginal health and wellbeing in Victoria – doubling its membership and employing close to 100 staff.

To this day VACCHO's mandate remains largely unchanged: build the capacity of its membership, advocate for issues on their behalf, identify priorities for funding, and ensure Communities' health and wellbeing needs are met in a culturally appropriate manner.

"VACCHO was born of a desire to bring the entire Victorian Aboriginal community together to ensure it would speak with a united political voice; to end the factionalism that in the past has debilitated the community. [...]"

It is not this diversity that drives VACCHO – rather it is the community's commonality."²

— Michael Hemingway, VACCHO: The Long Journey

Over the past 25 years we have worked with our Members, mainstream partners and all levels of government, providing crucial platforms for Aboriginal voices, knowledge and experiences to improve health and social services, systems and functions. Our collective voice has advanced Aboriginal self-determination and systemic reform to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal communities long into the future.

We have grown, adapted and innovated according to the evolving needs of our Members and stakeholders, introducing cultural safety training and cultural audits to our partners and allies, training the next generation of Aboriginal health professionals and introducing statewide initiatives to ensure consistency, efficiency, and culturally informed services across the state.

Our Members are now recognised as the most effective prevention hubs for Aboriginal communities. They have evolved to meet a range of Community needs and aspirations, expanding to become “one stop shops” and cultural hubs for local Aboriginal communities.³

In April 2021, VACCHO celebrated its 25th anniversary – the same length of time as a generation. The social, cultural and political environment has changed significantly since our inception. With the *2008 National Apology*, the *2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart*, and the Victorian Government’s commitment to self-determination and to Treaty in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF)*, a more self-determining future with better health and wellbeing outcomes are on the horizon for Aboriginal communities.

“[The VAAF] is a new way of doing business. A new approach to Aboriginal affairs, with the voices of Aboriginal people at its heart. Because, a decade on from the Closing the Gap agreement, there is no more evident truth: we only achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people when that all important work is led by Aboriginal people.”⁴

– Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews

Our 25th anniversary has been an opportunity to reflect on past achievements and challenges, and to imagine where we want to be in the next 25 years.

There is much work to do; our first 25 years were about survival – a mentality that orients towards necessity, reaction and response. Providing integrated and sustainable service to support the holistic model of our Members and the multi-faceted needs of our people has been a challenge.

It is now time to shift gears, to be more proactive and strategic in our work if we are to restore the health and wellbeing of our people.

Over the next 25 years we will operationalise our shared commitment to self-determination. Together with our Members, we will set the priorities, allocate the resources and develop the solutions. We will focus on outcomes: an approach that will see us sharpen the focus on what matters, measure what counts and determine the future with our people.

On Solid Ground is our five-year strategic journey towards an outcomes-based approach, focusing on the foundations: we need to put down our roots and strengthen our foundations to secure the sustainability, efficiency and impact of an Aboriginal self-determining future.

Our vision calls for a transformation to the way we work.

On Solid Ground outlines our bold steps to get there.

Our Vision, Purpose and Values

Our Vision

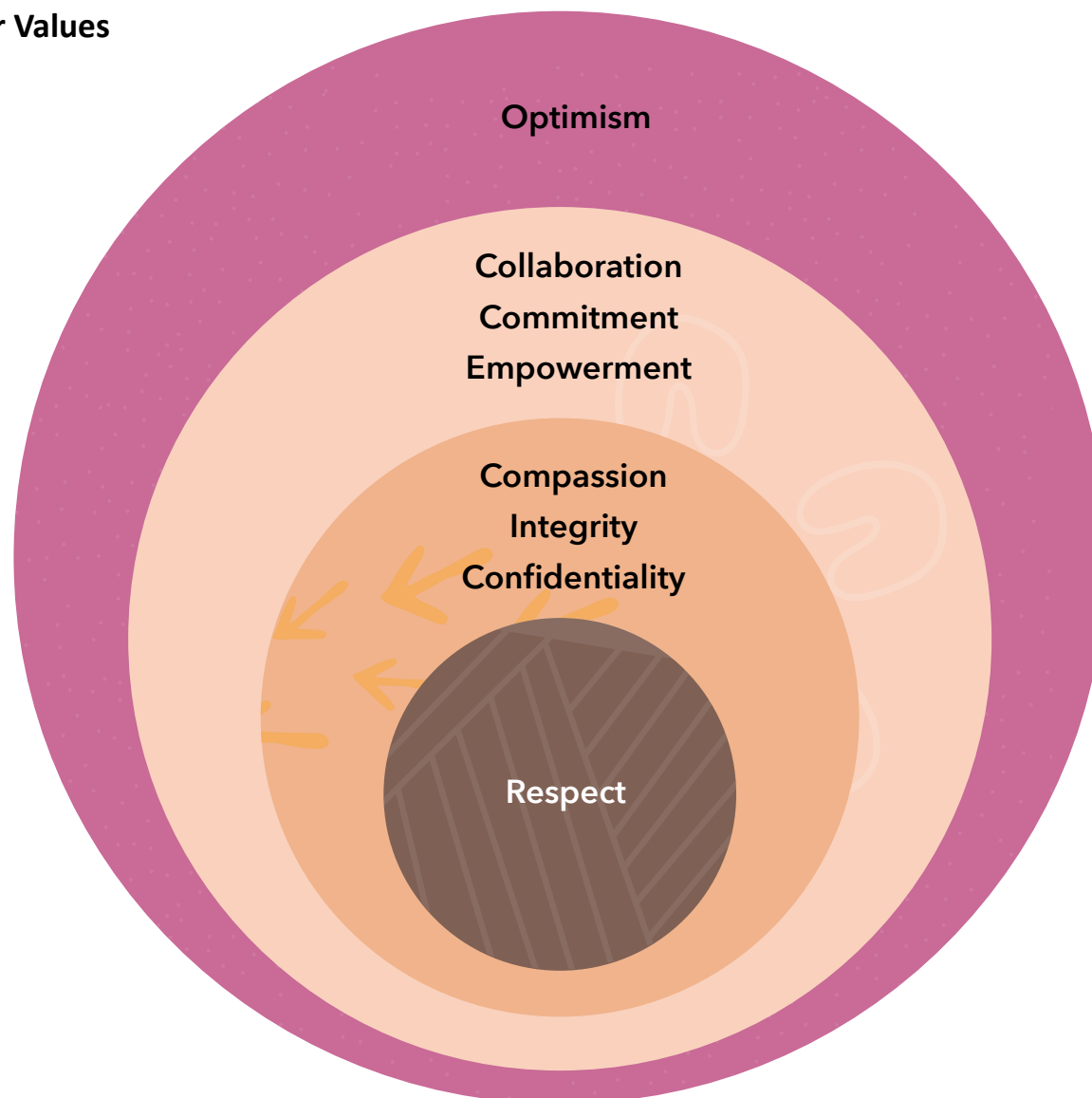
Vibrant, healthy, self-determining
Aboriginal communities

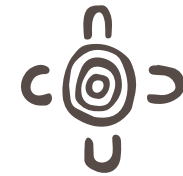
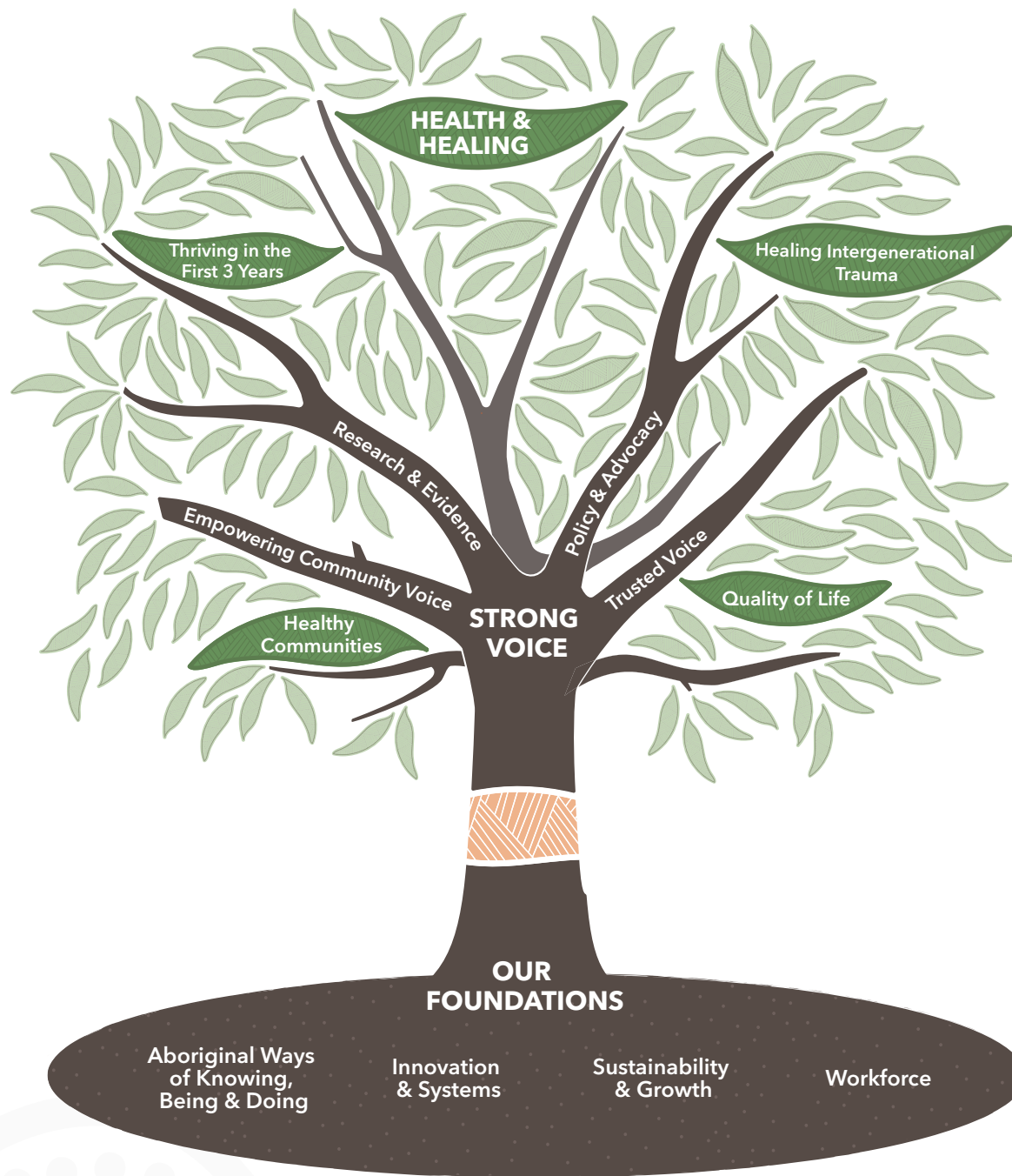
- We want to work with our stakeholders to Close the Gap on Aboriginal health and wellbeing outcomes within a generation.
- We want our Members to be thriving, locally based cultural hubs with wrap-around services from Birth to Dreamtime.
- We want to secure sustainable, long-term growth and independence according to the needs and aspirations of Community.

Our Purpose

We lead and support Aboriginal Community Control and the broader health and social services sector to deliver transformative health and wellbeing outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal communities.

Our Values





Culture & Kinship

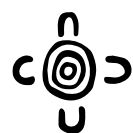


**Our Choice,
Our Way**



**Knowledge
& Innovation**

Our Guiding Principles



Culture and Kinship: see the connection and build relationships

As an Aboriginal organisation we acknowledge that culture and kinship are fundamental to Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing. We commit to embedding, promoting, and celebrating Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing across everything we do.

This means we commit to:

- doing more to leverage the health and healing benefits of culture and kinship
- putting relationships first and collaborating with our partners to maximise impact
- celebrating and embracing the diversity and authenticity of all our Community members
- developing cultural competency and leadership in our staff, valuing lived experiences and aspirations
- engaging with stakeholders to ensure culturally safe care, no matter where our people seek help or services.



Our Choice, Our Way: prepare for a self-determining future

It is our firm belief that Aboriginal self-determination is an inalienable human right, the right of our people and the future of a reconciled country.

This means we commit to:

- building capacity for self-determining Aboriginal communities
- advocating for the transfer of resources, power and authority to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)
- creating long-term pathways for a self-determining future
- developing the Aboriginal leaders of tomorrow
- promoting the need for Aboriginal self-determination in broader society.



Knowledge & Innovation: build and add value on what has been done

Aboriginal knowledge and innovation have contributed to Aboriginal communities being the longest living culture in the world. We are committed to using old and new knowledge to create impact for our Members and Communities.

This means we commit to:

- acknowledging and building on the work that has already been done
- embedding Aboriginal methodologies in our practice
- celebrating collective success and embracing strengths-based narratives
- advocating and leading the way in Aboriginal data sovereignty, and translating this data into knowledge and practice
- learning from our Elders and participating in Aboriginal reciprocity
- sharing our learnings for future generations.



(Clockwise L-R)

Jill Gallagher, CEO VACCHO; Performers from Djirri Djirri at VACCHO's 25th Anniversary celebration; VACCHO building in Collingwood, Melbourne; Performers from Koori Youth Will Shake Spears at VACCHO's 25th Anniversary celebration. Photos by Little Rocket.

Our Priorities

VACCHO's key priorities for 2021-2026 reflect our bold aspirations to bring about generational change through strength, innovation and sustainability.

To be able to reap the rewards for future generations, so that the boorai can grow up into healthy, connected, and strong people, we now need to focus on putting down strong roots. We will achieve this by prioritising:



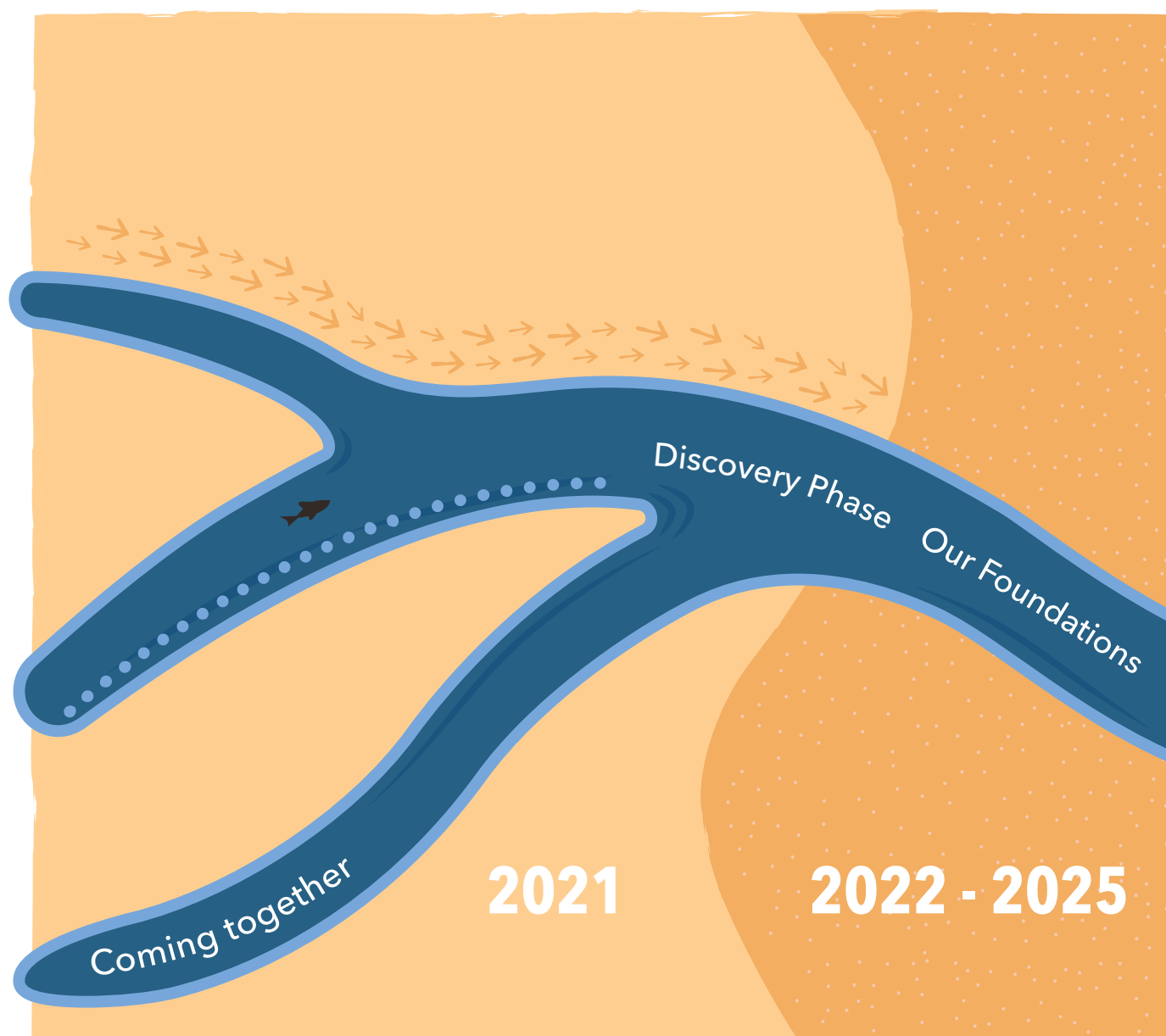
1. Our Foundations - to ensure VACCHO is a vibrant and strong organisation, who uses this strength to support its Members and workforce.

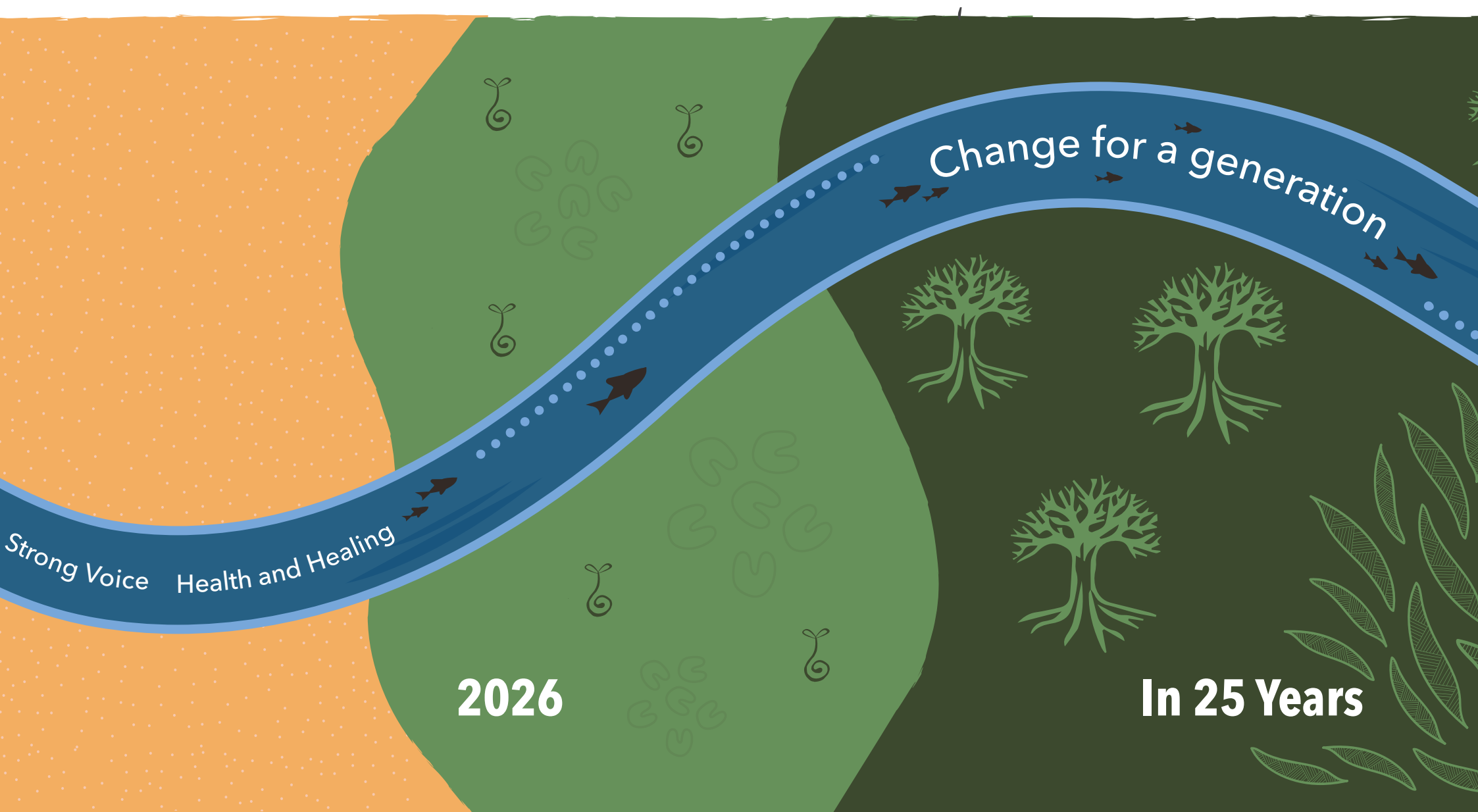


2. Strong Voice - to foster and promote Aboriginal aspirations, experience and innovation, and to strengthen VACCHO's position as an authoritative voice on Aboriginal health, wellbeing and self-determination.



3. Health and Healing - to help translate health and wellbeing evidence into practice to achieve health outcomes for the next generation.





Key Priorities for 2021-2026

Moving towards an outcomes-based approach is a journey. In the first phase of implementing this strategic plan, the priorities below will be translated into clear, measurable outcomes with indicators and targets to help us track progress.

Key Priority 1: Our Foundations

VACCHO is a vibrant and strong organisation who uses this strength to support its Members and workforce.

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
1.1 Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing	Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing are central to the way we work	1.1.1 To promote and embed Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing within the organisation and across health and wellbeing sectors	<p>1.1.1.1 Review Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing and undertake a cultural audit of practices in VACCHO and its Members including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ACCO ways of working b. Culture and Kinship connections for Community c. Healing practices d. Cultural safety <p>1.1.1.2 Develop guidelines and recommendations for how Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing can be incorporated into VACCHO and other organisations, including mainstream services</p>
1.2 Innovation and Systems	Our Members and partners can rely on us for timely response and high-quality action	<p>1.2.1 To invest in technologies and systems to increase our knowledge, efficiency and capacity to support the sector</p> <p>1.2.2 To ensure support is tailored to Member's needs</p>	<p>1.2.1.1 Develop and implement a Victorian Aboriginal Health Intelligence System</p> <p>1.2.1.2 Implement technology and systems to support our work.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Build capacity and capability in Continuous Quality Improvement and embed it in the way we work</p> <p>1.2.2.1 Enhance the process for assessing, prioritising and providing support to Members</p> <p>1.2.2.2 Develop a mechanism for measuring Member satisfaction</p>

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
1.3 Sustainability and Growth	We are a vibrant, healthy and financially strong organisation	<p>1.3.1 To oversee the transfer of resources, authority and power from government to the sector</p> <p>1.3.2 To diversify our funding base allowing us to increase our independence and invest in Aboriginal innovation</p> <p>1.3.3 To invest in our staff and organisational culture to have the skills and commitment to enact organisational values</p>	<p>1.3.1.1 Work with funding agencies to implement Outcomes Based Funding</p> <p>1.3.1.2 Work with organisations to operationalise a self-determined way of working</p> <p>1.3.2.1 Actively seek funding to address issues prioritised by VACCHO</p> <p>1.3.2.2 Diversify funding base across government funding, philanthropy and corporate support</p> <p>1.3.2.3 Increase revenue raising activities and initiatives across VACCHO</p> <p>1.3.3.1 Develop and Implement the VACCHO Health and Wellbeing Framework</p> <p>1.3.3.2 Provide cultural supervision for staff</p> <p>1.3.3.3 Ensure the organisation is inclusive for people with diverse characteristics and life experiences e.g., disability, LGBTQIA+ people, including Brotherboys and Sistergirls</p> <p>1.3.3.4 Revise policies to make VACCHO a learning organisation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undertaking training needs analysis to inform staff professional development b. Developing guidelines to promote professional development <p>1.3.3.5 Develop professional development and leadership opportunities to achieve leadership and career aspirations for Aboriginal staff.</p>
1.4 Workforce	There is a strong and able workforce, across the sector, delivering holistic health and wellbeing services to Aboriginal people	1.4.1 To develop strategies to recruit, retain and develop the Victorian Aboriginal health and wellbeing sector workforce	<p>1.4.1.1 Develop the Victorian Aboriginal health and wellbeing sector Whole of Workforce Strategy with:</p> <p>1.4.1.2 Implementation Plan</p> <p>1.4.1.3 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework</p> <p>1.4.1.4 Strategy prototyping</p>

Key Priority 2: Strong Voice

VACCHO fosters and promotes Aboriginal aspirations, experience and innovation and is an authoritative voice on Aboriginal health, wellbeing and self-determination.

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
2.1 Empowering Community Voice	Aboriginal people, including those with diverse characteristics and life experiences, are supported to contribute to the health and wellbeing decisions that impact them	2.1.1 To enhance ways for Members to communicate and influence matters that are important for their organisations and Communities 2.1.2 To increase ways for Aboriginal people, including those with diverse characteristics and life experiences, to have a say in health and wellbeing matters	2.1.1.1 Enhance the Member engagement strategy 2.1.1.2 Build Members' capacity to have a strong voice on local issues 2.1.2.1 Develop an organisational engagement strategy that includes connecting with Aboriginal people outside VACCHO's membership network 2.1.2.2 Increase mechanisms for engaging with people with diverse characteristics and life experiences 2.1.2.3 Form partnerships with organisations representing people with diverse characteristics and life experiences
2.2 Research and Evidence	We are the trusted custodians of knowledge about Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing in Victoria	2.2.1 To combine Aboriginal knowledge with research, data and evidence to expand and deepen the understanding of Aboriginal health and wellbeing 2.2.2 A. To protect the data sovereignty of Aboriginal people B. To promote research in health and wellbeing that is meaningful to Aboriginal people and has them as active partners in the process	2.2.1.1 Create a research and evidence framework that seeks, collates and interprets Aboriginal knowledge, combining it with research, data and evidence 2.2.2.1 Secure funding to implement the Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Research Accord



The Beautiful Shawl Project, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, shawl artwork by Rebecca Atkinson.

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
2.3 Policy and Advocacy	We influence decision makers to maximise our impact	2.3.1 To have clear policy priorities supported by effective advocacy campaigns to address the issues that matter to Aboriginal people	2.3.1.1 Produce regular policy position papers
		2.3.2 To be a strong voice on the priorities and needs of Aboriginal people, to assist our stakeholders in creating meaningful change	2.3.2.1 Foster partnerships across government, mainstream service organisations and broader society to influence meaningful changes that influence Aboriginal health and wellbeing 2.3.2.1 Develop advocacy campaigns to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to influencing decision makers
2.4 Trusted Voice	We are a trusted voice for Aboriginal people	2.4.1 To increase trust and engagement of Aboriginal people in VACCHO's health and wellbeing messages	2.4.1.1 Create engaging, accurate and culturally informed communication messages for Community to inform their health choices and grow their understanding of the health system. 2.4.1.2 Develop a Community communication strategy that embraces cultural expression, storytelling and creativity
		2.4.2 To strengthen VACCHO's identity as the peak body for Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing	2.4.2.1 Campaign to raise VACCHO's profile, including refreshing its brand and website

Key Priority 3: Health and Healing

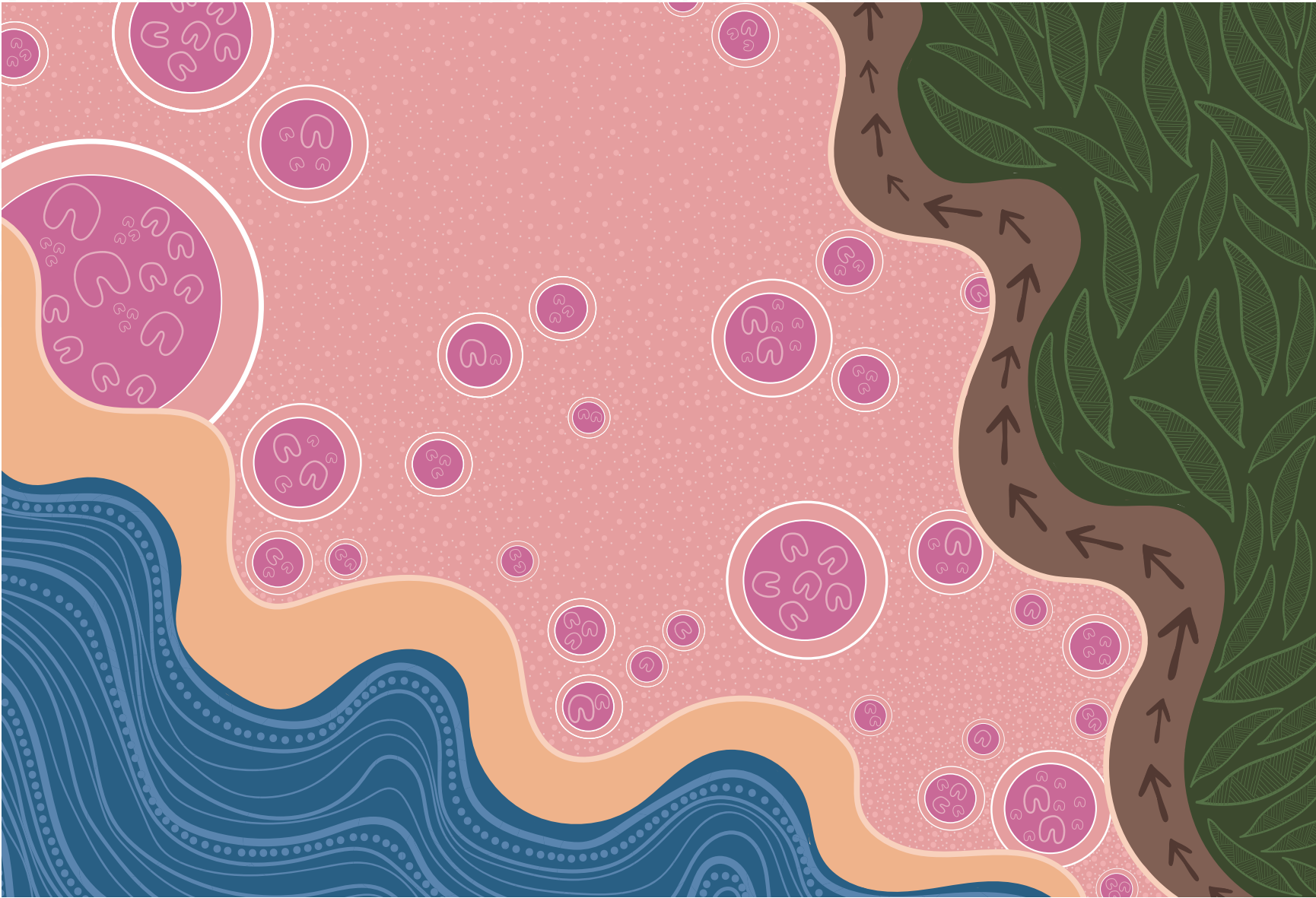
VACCHO helps to translate health and wellbeing evidence into practice to achieve health outcomes for the next generation.

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
3.0	Within 5 years, we have the knowledge, processes and tools to make impactful change in the four health and healing areas so that within a generation (25 years) we will see:	3.0.1 For each focus area below, to design and deliver effective programs using Continuous Quality Improvement methodologies 3.0.2 To draw upon Our Foundation and Strong Voice work to maximise the impact of culturally safe and strong health programs	3.0.1.1 Publish a Health and Healing report providing an overview of the four focus areas, highlighting the current issues and priorities for action 3.0.1.2 Drawing on the Health and Healing report, develop and deliver outcome-focused programs of work for each focus area, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Designing, planning and leveraging theories of change b. Delivering, monitoring and evaluating c. Reviewing and improving 3.0.2.1 Transition current Health and Healing activities to align to an outcomes-based model
3.1 Healthy Communities	Aboriginal people are healthy in mind, body and spirit	Specific objectives to be determined following completion of 3.0.1	
3.2 Thriving in the First Three Years	Aboriginal children get the best start in life	Specific objectives to be determined following completion of 3.0.1	



The Beautiful Shawl Project, Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, shawl artwork by Rebecca Clayton.

Focus Area	Goals	Objectives	Actions
3.3 Healing Intergenerational Trauma	Aboriginal people experience good social and emotional wellbeing, and have the opportunity to heal from trauma	3.3.1 To promote best practice in Aboriginal mental health	3.3.1.1 Establish the Victorian Aboriginal Centre of Excellence in Social and Emotional Wellbeing
3.4 Quality of life	Aboriginal people who are experiencing poor health or disability can live in a way that is meaningful to them	Specific objectives to be determined following completion of 3.0.1	



On Solid Ground
Madison Connors

About the Artist

Madison Connors is a proud Yorta Yorta (Wolothica), Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi woman. She was born and grew up in Kanny-goopna (Shepparton in Yorta Yorta language). Madison is an artist, a human rights advocate, and a mother. Her business, Yarli Creative, is a coming together of her yarka (children), her yakapna (family) and her mulana (spirit).

“My identity is what drives me. It’s something that is within me and comes from the heart. My connection to my environmental surroundings is my blood line and vein to this country and the community which runs deep within.

I come from a strong line of women and am following in their footsteps; I aim to embody their full form on this earth and strive to make my mob proud of the work that I create and achieve.”

Story of the Artwork

This piece is a visual depiction of Victoria, bordered on either side by the land and the sea. It speaks to the title On Solid Ground, and the land and waterways that are home to Victorian Aboriginal peoples. VACCHO’s Members, Associate Members, and the Communities they represent are illustrated across the State – centred in the artwork as they are at the core of VACCHO’s vision and purpose.

The central shape begins small in the bottom right corner, and expands outwards – representing VACCHO’s growth and development over the past 25 years since it was established in 1996. From little things, big things grow. Emu and kangaroo tracks map the journey and pathway forward as VACCHO embarks on this next phase.

The circles spread throughout the centre are a direct link to where VACCHO Members and Associate Members are placed in Victoria. Each circle has the symbol for people (upside down ‘u’ shape) inside of them representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

The colours bring together the old and the new – acknowledging the history and traditions of some of the world’s longest continuing cultures, together with the vibrant, contemporary Aboriginal cultures in Victoria today.

¹ J Dwyer, *Celebrating 25 Years of VAHS*, in M Hemingway, *The Long Journey: Colonialism, Community-Control & Indigenous Autonomy*, VACCHO (PhD Thesis, 2007). Accessed 24 March 2021.

² Hemingway, *The Long Journey: Colonialism, Community-Control & Indigenous Autonomy*.

³ Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services, Case study: Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative in *Wungurilwil Gagapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, 2018. Accessed 24 March 2021.

⁴ Victorian Government, Message from the Premier in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*, 2018. Accessed 24 March 2021.

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