

Victorian Election Platform 2022

'Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands'

VACCHO advocates for strengths-based approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our 2022 State Election Platform is based on our guiding principles of Culture and Kinship; Our Choice Our Way; and Knowledge and Innovation.

Culture and kinship are fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing. We commit to embedding, promoting, and celebrating Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing across everything we do. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is an undeniable human right, the right of our people and the future of a reconciled country.

VACCHO asks all major parties to consider the following recommendations to strengthen the health and wellbeing outcomes of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our Member organisations in Victoria provide holistic wrap-around services to address not only health concerns, but all social determinants of health. As a result, our Members act as diverse service hubs and social centers that support Community from before birth to the Dreaming.

Infrastructure

1. Establish a perpetual infrastructure fund for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), using 1.5% of land tax revenue for ten years to provide an ongoing fund for developing and maintaining facilities.
2. Commit \$25m over five years for the development and maintenance of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Information System (VAHIS).
3. Provide \$3.5m to fully fund the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021-26 which will provide scholarships, cadetships and leadership building.

Securing justice and health

4. The Victorian Government should fund ACCOs directly to provide health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, supporting the health of people during imprisonment to prevent emergencies and deaths.

Self-determination

5. Establish an independent Aboriginal Affairs Commission to evaluate services that should be delivering outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
6. Provide \$20m over five years to implement the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord.

Services safe from racism and discrimination

7. Mandate cultural safety training for all publicly funded mainstream health services, to be provided by an external Aboriginal organisation.

Social and emotional wellbeing in our Community

8. Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Taskforce as part of Victoria's Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy.



1| Perpetual Infrastructure Fund for ACCOs

Use 1.5% of land tax revenue for ten years to establish a perpetual infrastructure fund that can develop and maintain facilities for ACCOs. This would put self-determination into practice and transfer resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as committed to in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework.

Argument

The Victorian Government assessed the needs of ACCOs in 2013 and found that 17 sites needed immediate upgrades to be fit-for-purpose, with some having to operate out of houses or other converted properties. The government's report¹ calculated that immediate investment of \$147 million was required, but the report's recommendations have never been actioned. The Victorian Government's Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program had only \$3 million to allocate in 2020/21 and was ten times over-subscribed. ACCOs are suffering from a chronic lack of infrastructure funding.

Since the 2013 infrastructure report, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Victoria has increased by 73%². Demand for ACCOs is growing and will continue to grow faster than the general population. Acting now will help services prepare for the future. COVID-19 has also changed service demands, increasing the need for telehealth. ACCOs need investment in connectivity and digital infrastructure. This will allow for flexible services and collaboration with mainstream services and their digital systems.

The government estimates that 1.5% of land tax revenue would equate to approximately \$800 million over ten years³. About \$350 million would be used in the first ten years to upgrade facilities, leaving \$450 million plus interest earned (approximately \$30 million per year). This balance would fund ongoing infrastructure needs into the future, meaning no further support would be required from the government. This would be a prime example of the government's commitment to support self-determination. A once-off commitment for ten years will provide the infrastructure needed to deliver high-quality services in local areas, increasing access and preventing escalating health needs.

2| Victorian Aboriginal Health Information System

Commit \$25 million over five years for the development and maintenance of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Information System (VAHIS).

Argument

The Victorian Government helped start VAHIS. Committing to annual funding will enable statewide and localised analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, including what services are being accessed.

VAHIS will go beyond primary health care data sets to include children and family services, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, housing and justice data sets.

VACCHO will also negotiate data sharing agreements with government departments and data agencies (e.g. the ABS) to increase access to local health and wellbeing data. This will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing insights that draw on a range of data sets and inputs to be produced for the first time.

VAHIS will use contemporary data analytic solutions to improve population health and service planning to address local needs, and by identifying trends, will improve identification of which services there is growing demand for.

¹ Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (April 2013). Assessment of the Current and Future Infrastructure Requirements of Key Indigenous Organisations in Victoria. Melbourne: Department of Planning and Community Development.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Census, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics. [online] [www.abs.gov.au](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-census/2021). Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-census/2021>.

³ Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria. (n.d.). State taxation revenue. [online] Available at: <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/state-financial-data-sets/state-taxation-revenue> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2022].

Infrastructure (cont.)

3| An expanded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

Provide \$3.5 million to fully fund the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021–26. This would increase human resource support for ACCOs, provide scholarships and cadetships, and build future leaders.

Argument

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing practitioners are leaders in delivering culturally safe, trauma-informed, holistic health and wellbeing services to improve health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, ACCOs have faced mounting challenges to recruit, retain and progress their workforce, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

VACCHO developed the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021–26 in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and services, but the Strategy has only been partly funded. Initiatives that would increase human resource support for ACCOs, build leaders of the future, provide scholarships and cadetships have all gone unfunded.

VACCHO requires \$3.5 million to fully fund the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021–26 and implement these complementary initiatives. This will transform the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, enabling it to deliver culturally safe, holistic health care.

Securing justice and health

4| Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands

The Victorian Government should fund ACCOs directly to provide health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody.

Argument

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in correctional services. We are strong advocates for Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands, and this includes during imprisonment.

It has been 30 years since the last inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody⁴. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of deaths Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, totalling 517 deaths to date (an average of 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody every year nationwide – more than one death every month). In Victoria, in the last 3 months alone an Aboriginal man died in Port Phillip Prison and another Aboriginal man died in Loddon prison.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services⁵ has been commissioned by the ACT Government to provide health services seven days a week to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in adult detention. All patients receive a health check, chronic condition care plan and mental health plan as part of their initial assessment, which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have said has made a difference to their ongoing health.

VACCHO asks that the Victorian Government directly fund ACCOs to provide health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, supporting the health of people during imprisonment to prevent emergencies and deaths.

⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission (1996). Indigenous Deaths in Custody: Report Summary | Australian Human Rights Commission. [online] humanrights.gov.au. Available at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/indigenous-deaths-custody-report-summary>.

⁵ Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services. (n.d.). Homepage. [online] Available at: <https://winnunga.org.au/>.

Self-determination and accountability

5| Establish an independent Aboriginal Affairs Commission

Establish an independent Aboriginal Affairs Commission to monitor and evaluate Aboriginal-specific programs and policies, ensuring government investment is being distributed appropriately and is achieving desired outcomes.

Argument

The Victorian Government promised to establish an Aboriginal-led evaluation and review mechanism by 2023 to track the government's progress against Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework recommendations.

VACCHO recommends this mechanism should be an independent Commission with the ability to review all programs and policies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria. The Commission would report to Victoria's Parliament and the First Peoples' Assembly.

The Commission would be governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commissioners and would focus on:

- evaluating the effectiveness of Aboriginal-specific programs and policies
- reporting on outcomes delivered by Aboriginal services and mainstream services
- review and report on government investments to ensure value for money.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) conducts audits of state and local government agencies but cannot review non-governmental agencies that receive public funding. Only three of VAGO's reports since 1955 have ever focused on Aboriginal affairs.

An Aboriginal Affairs Commission would provide robust, Community-driven oversight of program and service efficacy and viability.

It is a vital component of the move towards greater self-determination, complementing progress towards a Treaty, as it would ensure transparency and accountability within a self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Lowitja Institute is working with VACCHO to develop proposals for the Commission, including budgets. Victoria's Yoorrook Justice Commission has received \$44.5 million over three years for its work, and a similar amount could be suitable for the Aboriginal Affairs Commission.

6| Fund the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord

Provide \$20 million over five years to implement the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord.

Argument

The Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions (through its Office of Health and Medical Research) funded the development of the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord to be completed in 2022. The Accord will raise ethical standards and give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a greater voice in research involving their communities.

Aboriginal people are the most researched peoples in the world. Most research methodologies and practices have emerged from western concepts that do not include other conceptual viewpoints. This means research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and social organisation have often been based on ill-informed perceptions and assumptions⁶.

The Accord is an agreement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Victorian Government, universities and TAFEs, medical research institutes and health services. Additional funding will enable VACCHO to deliver training programs and monitor implementation of the Accord to improve standards and facilitate the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in research.

⁶ National Health and Medical Research Council (2018). Ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples | NHMRC. [online] Nhmrc.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/ethical-guidelines-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>.

Services safe from racism and discrimination

7| Mandate cultural safety training

Mandate cultural safety training for all publicly funded mainstream health services, to be provided by an external Aboriginal organisation.

Argument

The Victorian Government has recognised that systemic racism and discrimination remain prevalent throughout health, human and community services⁷. Nationwide, 22% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults or their families reported being racially discriminated against by doctors, nurses and/or medical staff in 2019–20⁸.

Public agencies are required by legislation to provide a safe workplace but they are failing in this regard. In 2018, VACCHO completed a cultural safety audit of working environments within the Victorian Government which found only 12% of Aboriginal staff felt culturally safe at work; over a third had experienced racism in the previous 12 months, half on multiple occasions⁹.

In Victoria's Cultural Safety Framework, the government committed to partner with Aboriginal organisations to lead cultural safety training delivery but this has not been actioned. As part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Victorian Government has committed to embedding cultural safety in their services as well as publicly funded mainstream health services¹⁰. Action is needed now.

Aboriginal organisations are best placed to provide cultural safety training for health services due to their knowledge and lived experience. Investing in Aboriginal organisations to provide training and audits will create safer workplaces and improve access to services, helping to address health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing in our Community

8| Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Taskforce

Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Taskforce, which would be jointly led by VACCHO and the Victorian Government, as part of Victoria's Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy.

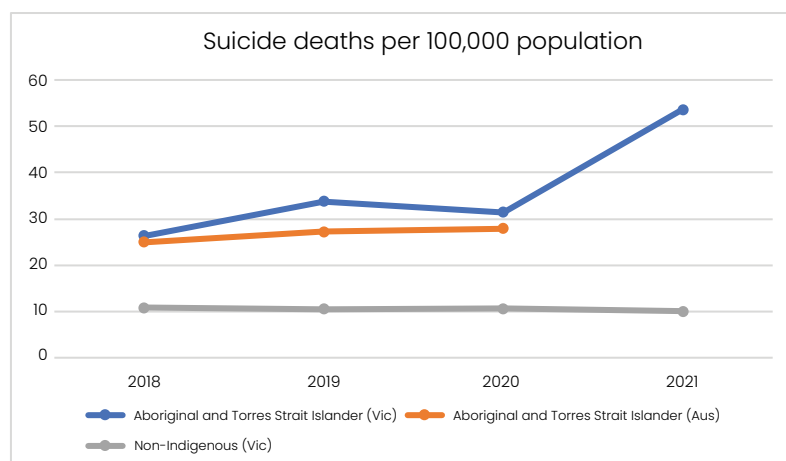
Argument

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths by suicide increased by 75% in 2021 compared to the year before, while it declined for the non-Indigenous population.

The chart below shows the rate is far higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria and across Australia. Suicide is now one of the five most common causes of deaths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; for non-Indigenous people, it is only the 15th most common.

The Victorian Department of Health is in the consultation phase of developing a Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy, to be released early 2023. It is imperative that a focused Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Taskforce is created,

with dedicated funding to develop initiatives that reduce the rate of deaths by suicide.



The Taskforce should be jointly led by VACCHO and the Victorian Government, as well as include other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. It could be modelled on Victoria's successful Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce which was able to fund and trial initiatives working closely with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

⁷ Victorian Government. (2021). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework. [online]. Available at:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework-part-1>.

⁸ Cultural safety in health care for Indigenous Australians: monitoring framework. (n.d.). [online]. Available at:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/153ec5b7-35fd-4348-9166-b13d458bfa0/Cultural-safety-in-health-care-for-indigenous-Australians-monitoring-framework.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

⁹ VACCHO. (2021). Cultural-Safety-and-Self-Determination-A-Necessary-Relationship.pdf. [online]. Available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tgpP-19A5q85yG0elt2nWYRMxsgEG7Q/view> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2022].

¹⁰ Australian Government (2020). National Agreement on Closing the Gap | Closing The Gap. [online]. www.closingthegap.gov.au. Available at:

<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>.