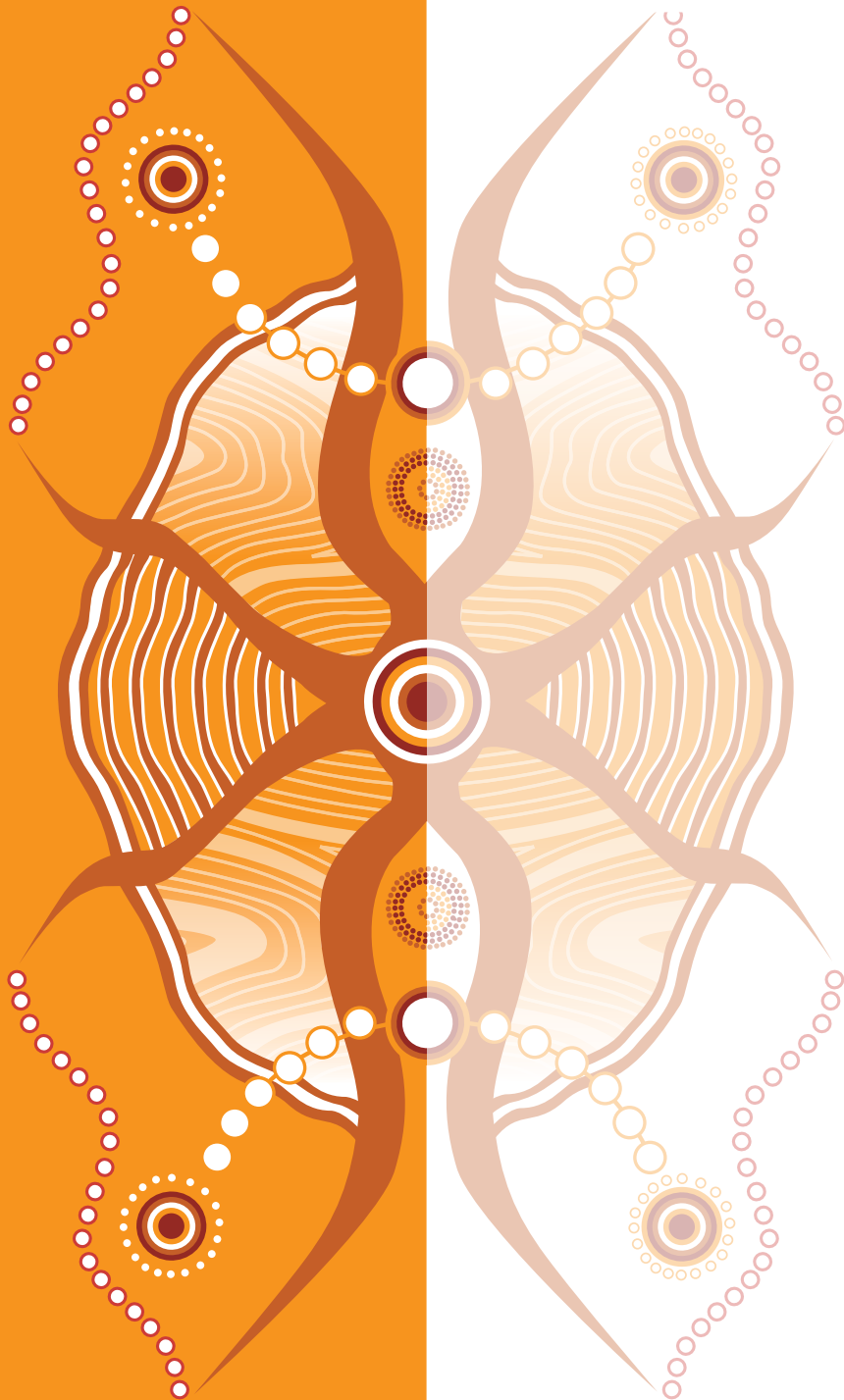


Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2009-10



Department of Planning
and Community Development

Prepared by Aboriginal Affairs Taskforce
Department of Planning and Community Development



DESCRIPTION OF ARTWORK

By Reanna Bono, *Wiradjuri and Wemba Wemba*

The circles in the centre of the design represent the meeting place where the Victorian Government and the Indigenous community come together, working to improve the quality of life for all Indigenous Victorians.

The pathways leading from the centre, symbolise the Victorian Government reaching out to the Victorian Indigenous community, both the more populated areas as well as our more remote communities within Victoria. As all pathways lead back to the centre and interconnect, this shows that the Victorian Government constantly working together as one with the community.

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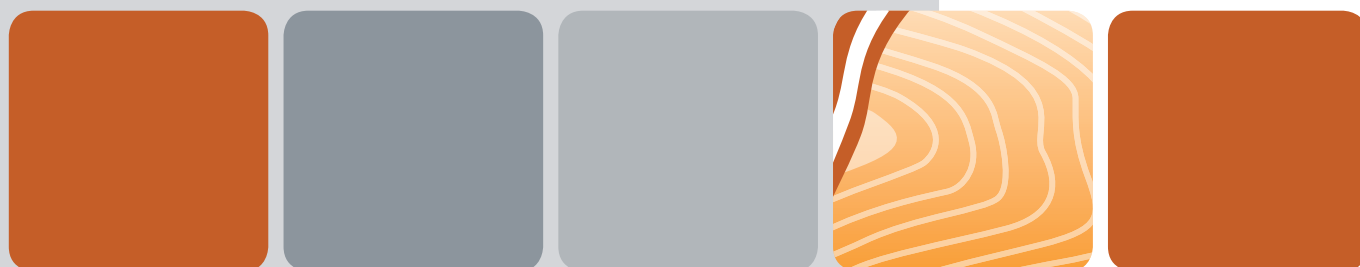
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Throughout this document, the term "Indigenous" is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Use of the terms "Aboriginal", "Koori" and "Koorie" are retained in the names of programs and initiatives, and, unless noted otherwise, are inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AJA2	Aboriginal Justice Agreement – second phase
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DHS	Department of Human Services
DPCD	Department of Planning and Community Development
LEAP	Law Enforcement Assistance Program
LGA	Local Government Area
LIN	Local Indigenous Network
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MIPs	Managed Individual Pathways
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
RoGS	Report on Government Services
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIAF	Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework
WNLP	Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place



Foreword by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



I am pleased to present the 2009-10 report on outcomes for Indigenous Victorians. While this report relates to progress under the previous Government, we will, in the interests of accountability and transparency, continue the practice of releasing an annual report.

The Premier has committed to reviewing the previous Government's Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework. This will require reconsideration of targets agreed by the previous Government to ensure they are appropriate.

While there is progress in some areas there are other areas where there has been little or no change. It is not good enough that the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous people has not changed over the last 10 years. On average Indigenous Australians live a decade less than non Indigenous Victorians.

We are committed to closing the gap and this report forms part of that commitment.

Future reports will continue to be tabled in Parliament and will take account of the outcomes of the review of the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework announced by the Premier on 24 March this year. Future reports will also be timed to coincide with the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report and will provide a Victorian perspective, reminding all Australians that some of the greatest challenges in closing the gap are in our urban and regional areas, and not just in remote locations in Australia.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the special place Indigenous Victorians occupy as the original inhabitants and custodians of this state.

I was particularly proud that a new Parliamentary tradition commenced in December last year at the Opening of the 57th Parliament with a formal Welcome to Country by Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin, Elder of the Wurrundjeri and Aunty Carolyn Briggs, Elder of the Boonwurrung people.

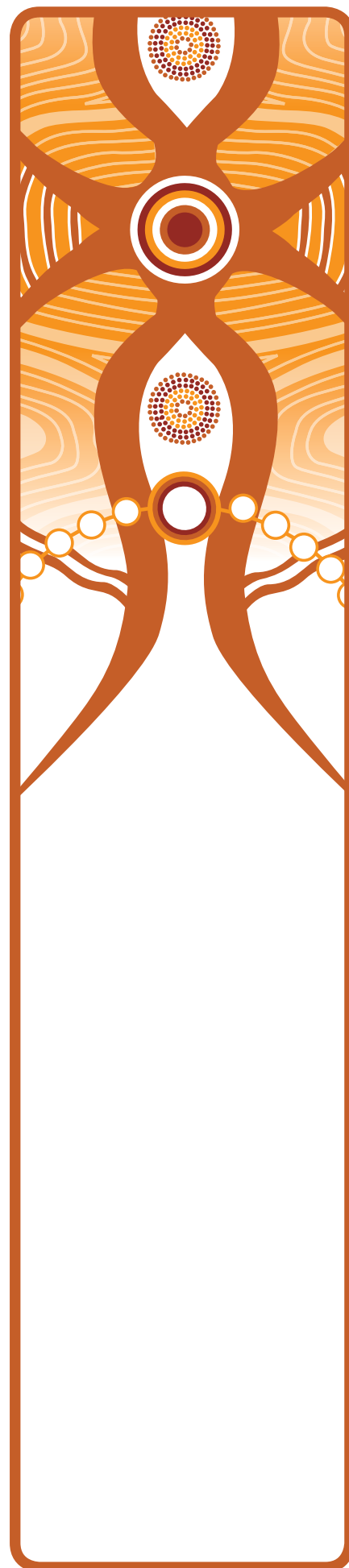
Good policy and program delivery must be guided by evidence. Where we are making progress, we must learn from our successes, consolidate our achievements and build on that platform to make further gains. Where we are failing, we must seek, together, to understand why, and then re-prioritise for new and revitalised approaches.

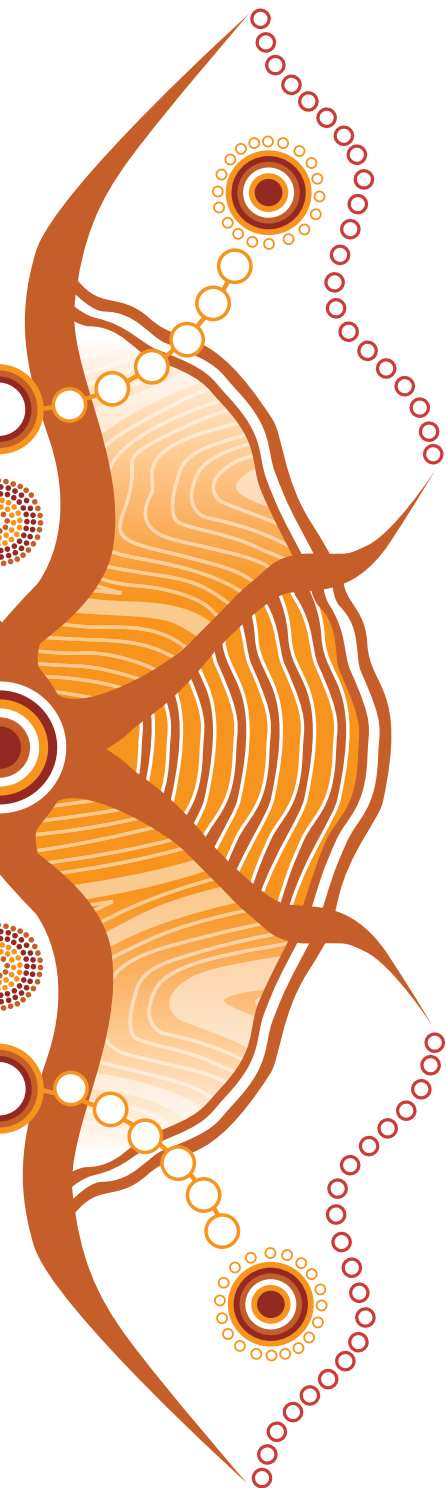
This report therefore provides invaluable information in understanding those areas where lessons can be learned and improvements can be made.

The Victorian Government accepts the need for an approach that is multifaceted and covers all aspects of people's lives, including health, housing, education, employment and social justice.

Overall, Victoria is improving in closing the gap in a number of important areas, particularly when compared to other jurisdictions. However, there are three areas where Victoria is lagging behind national averages and improvement is needed:

- Smoking rates;
- School retention rates; and
- Over representation in the child protection system.





Victoria will be calling on COAG to place a much higher priority on the needs of Aboriginal people in urban and regional areas. Without this commitment we will not reach our goals to Close the Gap in outcomes for Indigenous Victorians.

On 24 March this year in the Queens Hall of the Victorian Parliament, I was privileged to witness the Premier, on behalf of the Victorian Government signing a recommitment to Closing the Gap in outcomes for Indigenous people. The Deputy Premier and I were also signatories to the Statement, along with the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Spokesperson for Aboriginal Affairs and others. In an important speech, the Premier outlined four principles that will inform the Government's Aboriginal Affairs policy intentions and delivery:

- **Aspirations**
Every Victorian should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. A commitment to closing the gap in health, education and housing outcomes underpins the ability and capacity of Indigenous Victorians to build a better future. A more prosperous and economically engaged Indigenous community will have benefits for all Victorians.
- **Accountability**
Government has a responsibility to be accountable to all Victorians. Good policy and program delivery must be based on evidence. In turn funded organisations must be accountable for delivering services that meet the needs of their communities.
- **Engagement and Inclusiveness**
Closing the gap can only be achieved through a partnership built on genuine engagement with Indigenous people across this state. This includes recognition and inclusion of local community voices and the views of Indigenous organisations and their peak representative bodies.
- **Partnership - a whole of community approach**
Harnessing the resources and commitments of all sections in the community – government, community, business and philanthropic is essential. Indigenous individuals, families, communities and organisations have a key role to inspire and drive the process.

The Premier also expanded on a number of important actions taking place that will shape Indigenous Affairs policy in the coming years:

- **The release of this 2009-10 Indigenous Affairs annual report.**
The report provides valuable information on how Victoria is tracking against goals and targets identified in the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework. As indicated, future releases of this report will be timed to coincide with the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report and will be tabled in Parliament.
- **Strengthening the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework.**
A review of the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework will be undertaken to strengthen the Framework, address shortfalls and improve outcomes.
- **Departmental Action Plans.** All Victorian Government Departments will prepare Action Plans demonstrating how they will improve access to services for Indigenous people, and these will be reported through the annual report to be tabled in Parliament.

Government will also be progressing the implementation of a number of important election commitments, including the Indigenous Honour Roll, the enquiry into the Registered Aboriginal Parties process and restoring funding to Reconciliation Victoria.

Our commitment to a judicial inquiry into Victoria's vulnerable children is already underway. While not specific to Indigenous children, this inquiry will provide us with the important directions and actions we can take to provide safe and stronger families.

We acknowledge that there are a variety of interests and groupings within the wider Indigenous community and we will seek to engage and listen to both local community voices and the views of Indigenous organisations and their peak representative bodies.

Our approach will be based on our strong belief that partnerships with Indigenous Victorians are the only way forward.

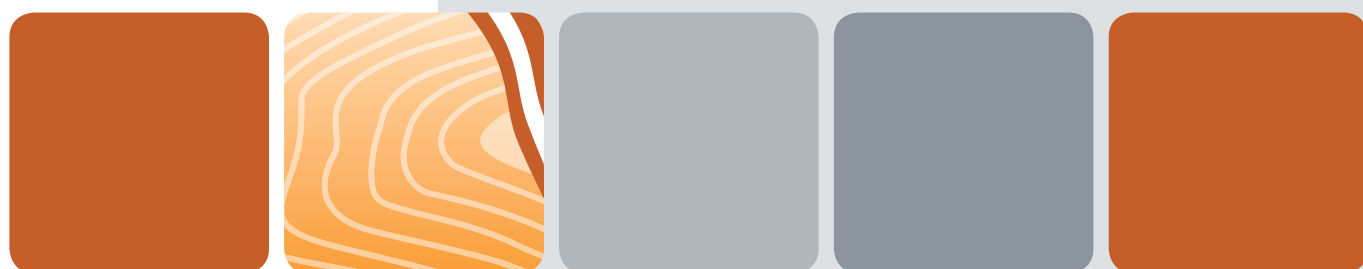
We will continue to look for ways to strengthen Victoria's Indigenous organisations – both in their capacity to meet the need of clients but also to meet 21st century expectations of accountability and governance.

A more prosperous and economically engaged Indigenous community will have a range of social, cultural and economic benefits for all Victorians. We understand the critical importance of employment in building pride and self esteem and are keenly aware that the growing Indigenous population is an important element for unlocking the potential of our regional economies.

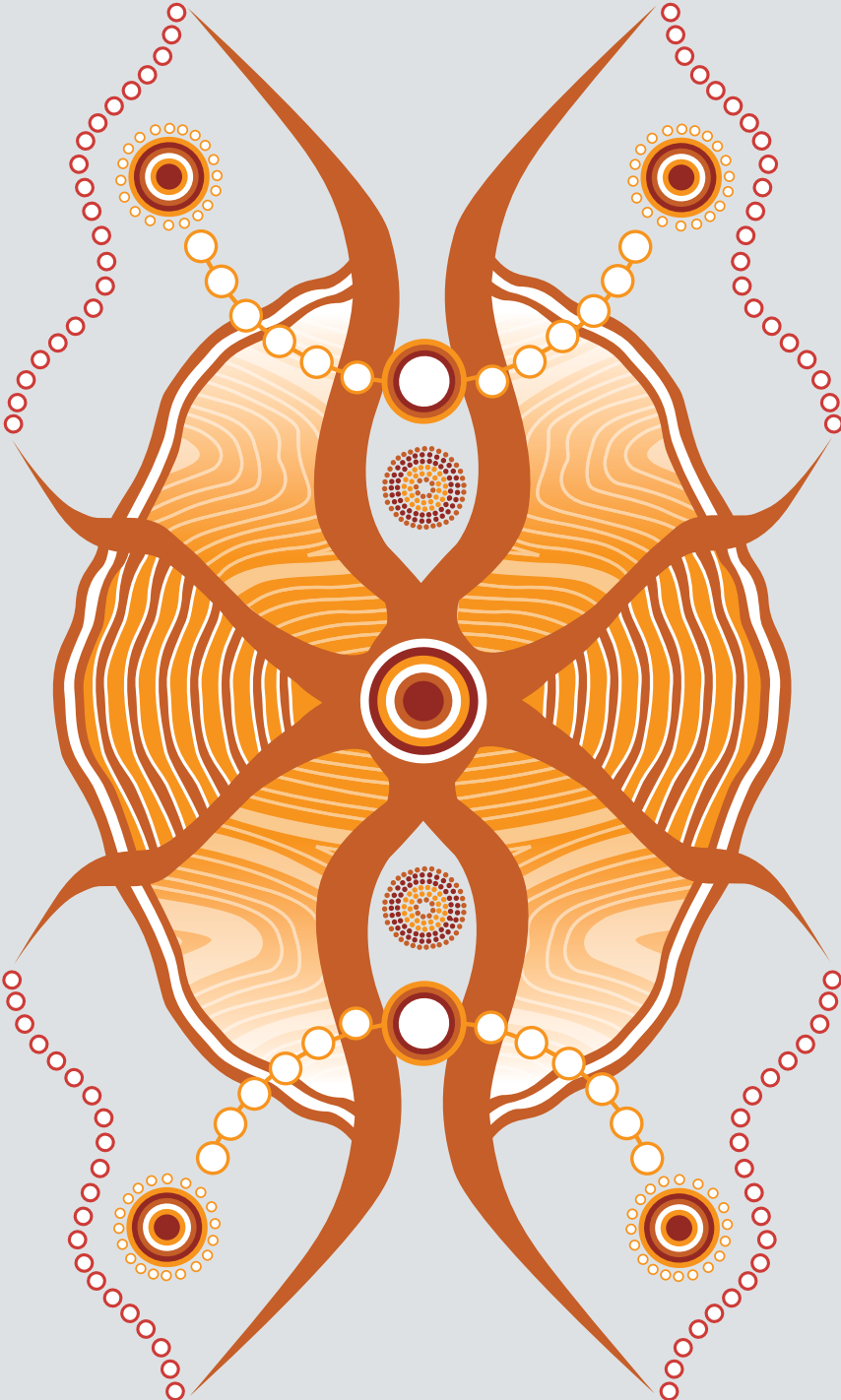
The Victorian Government recognises that Victorian Indigenous culture plays a central role in how all Victorians identify our sense of place. This includes recognition of and protection of cultural heritage and supporting Victorian Indigenous people to further enrich and strengthen their cultural identity.

I look forward to working with the Victorian Indigenous community to ensure that every Indigenous Victorian has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Jeanette Powell MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



PART 1



PURPOSE OF REPORT

The Indigenous Affairs Report has been produced annually by the Victorian Government to outline progress made against the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF).

The report does not cover all action being taken across the Victorian Government in relation to Indigenous affairs.

Rather it concentrates on the areas of strategic priority set out in the VIAF.

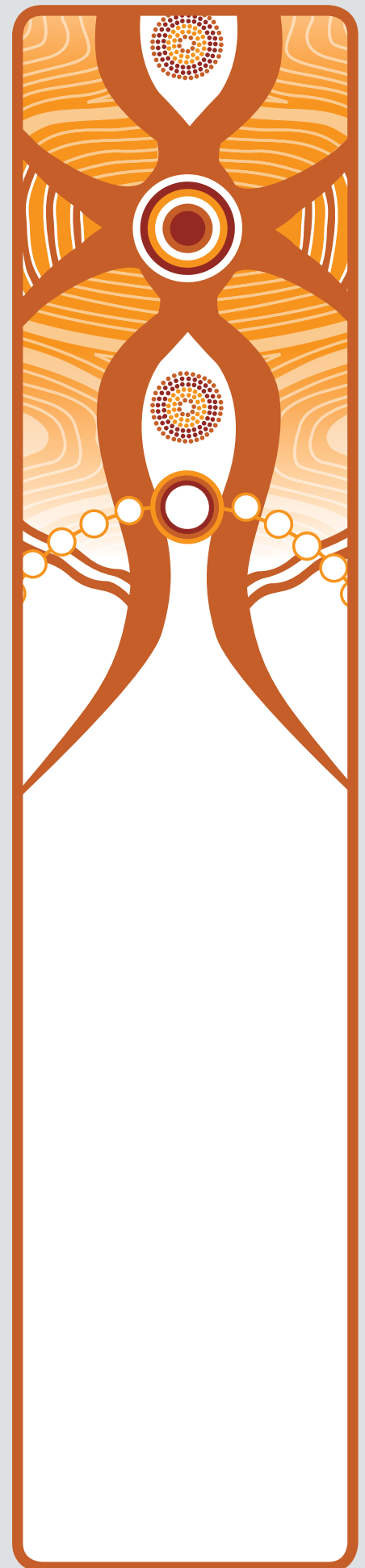
This report relates to key actions undertaken by the previous Government in the 2009-10 financial year and measures performance against each of the VIAF Strategic Change Indicators.

PROFILE OF VICTORIA'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

Indigenous Australian cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world. Indigenous culture and heritage is a fundamental part of Victoria's history and identity.

The land that is now called Victoria has an Indigenous history that goes back tens of thousands of years. It is estimated that there were between 20,000 and 60,000 people speaking more than 30 languages when European settlers first arrived.

In 2006 the Australian Census showed that there were around 33,500 Indigenous people living in Melbourne and regional Victoria, an increase from 27,800 in 2001. It is estimated that the Indigenous population in 2010 has further risen, to approximately 36,700 people¹. (See Figure 1.)

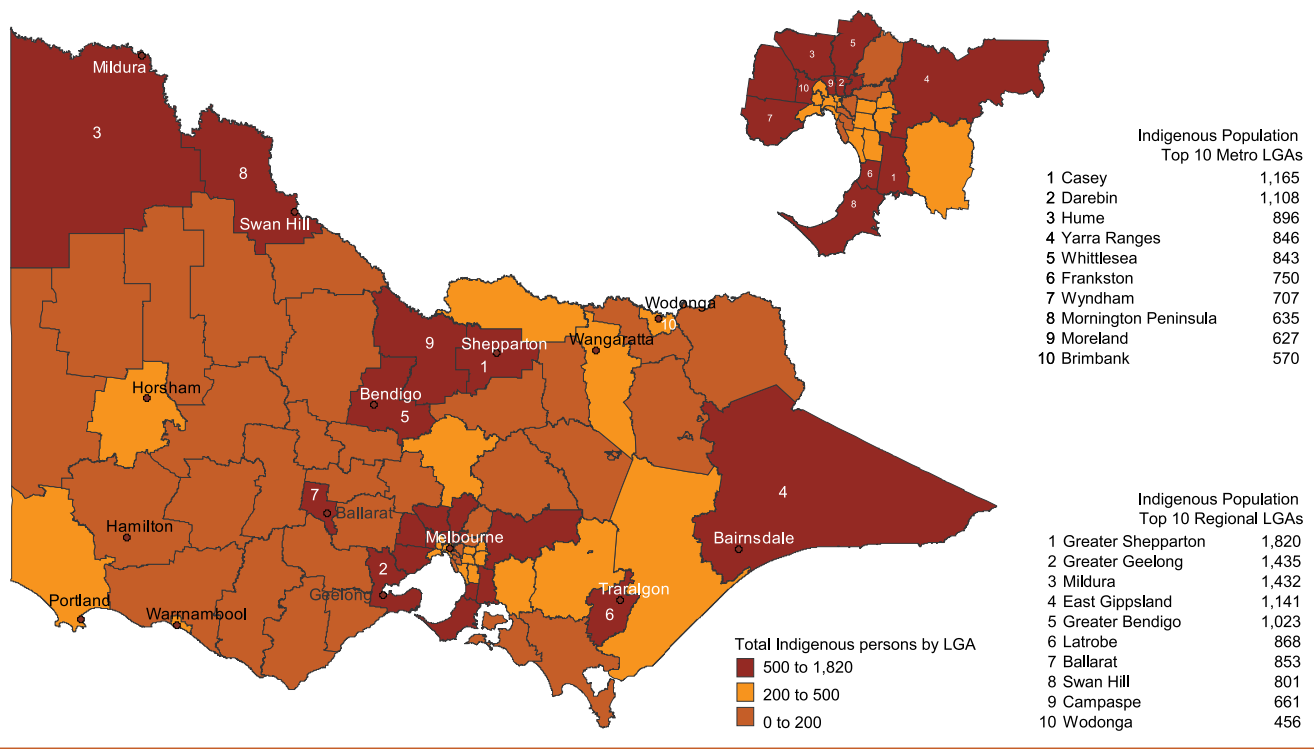


¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, category 3238.0: *Experimental estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 1991 to 2021*.

Figure 1: Total Indigenous population by local government area, Victoria and Melbourne, 2006

Where Indigenous Victorians live:

with Local Government Area boundaries highlighted



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing 2006, Persons, Place of Usual Residence, Local Government Area (LGA), by Indigenous status

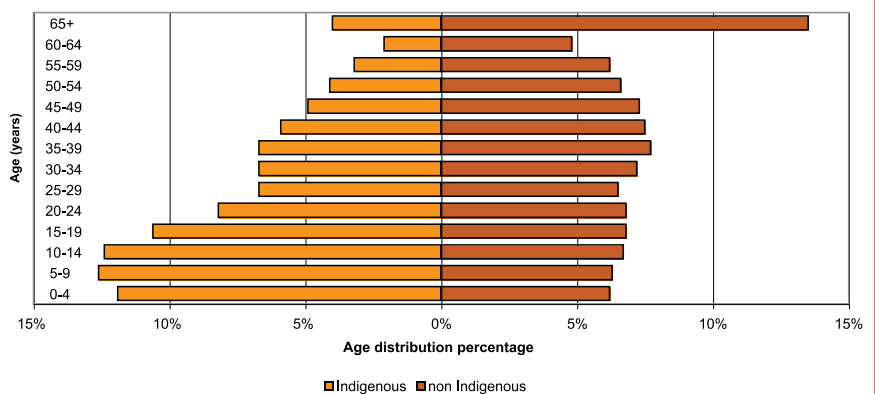
The current Indigenous population is about 0.65% of the State total. Victoria's Indigenous population includes those connected to land in Victoria and those whose lands are elsewhere in Australia.

The demographic make-up of the Indigenous population in Victoria differs from the general Victorian population. It is a young population; the median age of Indigenous Victorians is estimated to be 21.8 years², while the median age of the general population is estimated to be 36.0 years. Children aged 0-17 make up 43.5% of the Indigenous population, compared with 23% of the general population. (See Figure 2 for a comparison between

the age group proportions of the Indigenous population and the total population of Victoria, and Figure 3 for the proportions of Indigenous young people in Victorian local government areas.) The Indigenous

population in Victoria has a higher growth rate than the population as a whole. All Indigenous Victorians live in regional or urban areas, whereas nationally 25% of Indigenous Australians live in remote areas. No areas in Victoria are classified as remote.

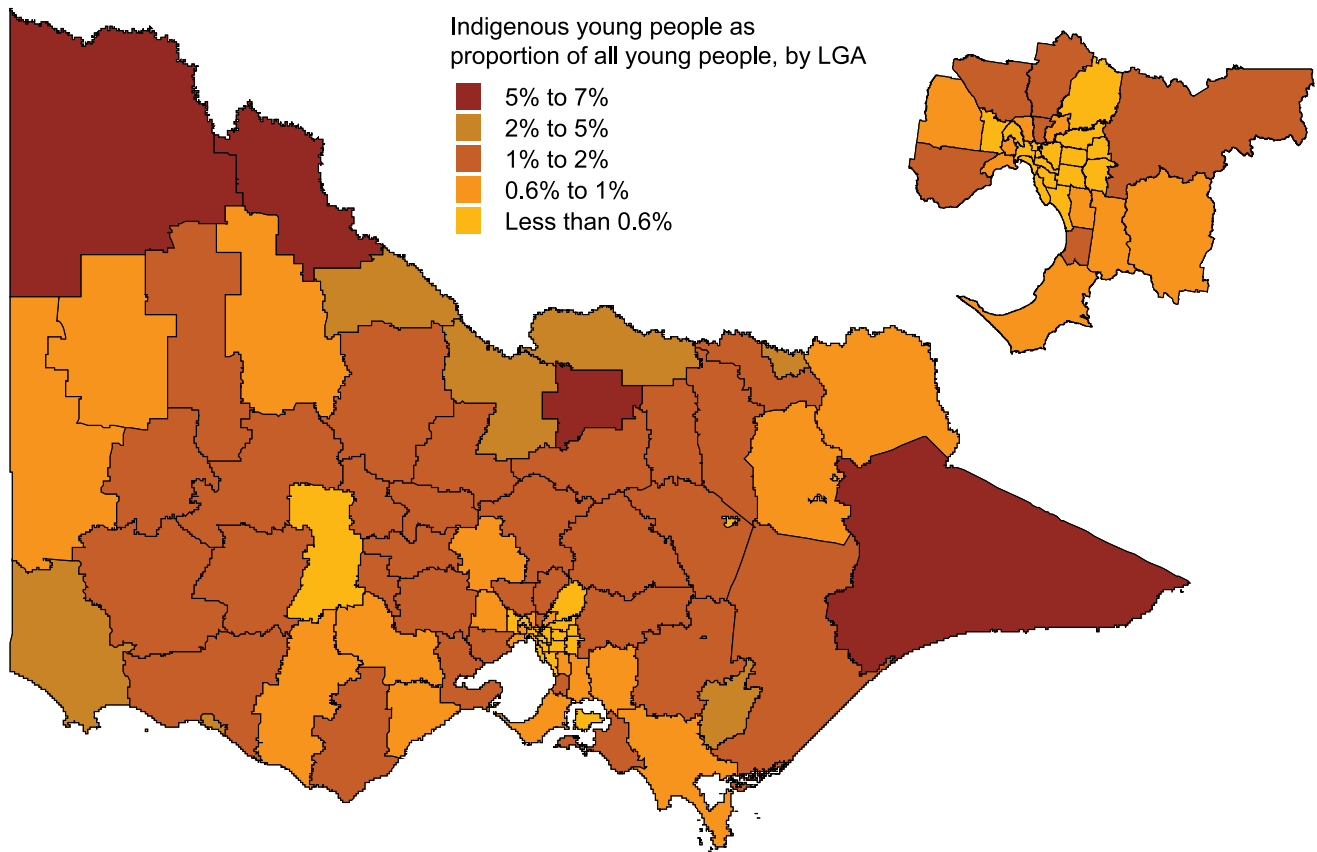
Figure 2: Proportions of Indigenous population and non Indigenous population by age group, Victoria, 2006



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, Census of Population and Housing, Community Profiles. Note that the figures used do not include persons for whom Indigenous status was not stated.

² Ibid.

Figure 3: Proportions of Indigenous young people (aged 15-24) in local government areas, 2006



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Census of Population and Housing, Indigenous profile, Table I03*

Many Indigenous Victorians are resilient, have a strong sense of identity and cultural connection and actively contribute to their communities in a variety of ways. However, Indigenous Victorians are more likely than other Victorians to experience disadvantage in areas including early childhood development, life expectancy, education, employment and justice.

Indigenous Victorians have suffered disproportionately from historical policies that removed Indigenous children from their homes and families, compared with Indigenous people in other jurisdictions; 11.5% of Indigenous Victorians report having been removed from their natural family, compared with 7.0 per cent across the national Indigenous population³. 47.1% of Victorian Indigenous respondents reported they had relatives removed from their family compared to 37.6% nationally.

The ongoing impact of dispossession continues to be felt today and is reflected in the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous Victorians across all social and economic indicators.

³ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008