

Moonda Wurrin Gree Pathways to a Better Economic Future

The report of the Victorian Aboriginal
Economic Development Group



Department of Planning and Community Development

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Terms of reference

The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group would like to thank and acknowledge the Gunnai / Kurnai people for allowing us to use the words 'Moonda Wurrin Gree' to name our report. Moonda Wurrin Gree means Beyond Tomorrow's Money - Pathways to a Better Economic Future.

The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group will:

- 1. Develop** a Victorian Indigenous Economic Development and Participation Strategy that:
 - Identifies initiatives to improve the transition of young Indigenous people from schooling to further education and training and employment including models that contribute to improving retention;
 - Identifies initiatives to improve workforce participation and economic development opportunities for Indigenous Victorians, including employment in both the public and private sector and business development opportunities;
 - Identifies ways to foster the growth of Indigenous business;
 - Identifies ways to build links between the business community and Indigenous communities;
 - Identifies successful models nationally and internationally that contribute to improving economic outcomes for Indigenous people that could be applied to Victoria or adapted to Victoria's needs;
 - Identifies the benefits that can be gained by employers by engaging the skills and talents of Indigenous Victorians in their workforce;
 - Identifies the important link between land, culture and opportunities for Indigenous Victorians; and
 - Strengthens Victorian Indigenous leadership and governance.
- 2. Ensure** that the strategy:
 - Considers existing programs and identifies whether these might be modified to be more effective and identifies new programs where appropriate;
 - Aligns with any national initiatives;
 - Is developed in partnership with Indigenous Victorians;
 - Includes private, philanthropic and public sector involvement; and
 - Builds private sector, public sector and community support for improved outcomes for Indigenous Victorians.

Foreword

“...the enormous opportunity that Indigenous Australia affords us as a people is a different way of looking at the world and we could be a nation unlike any other on earth.”

Richard Flanagan, ABC Q&A, 27 August, 2009.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Australia, Aboriginal people had healthy, thriving communities involved in enterprises, including mining and large-scale aquaculture. While the language and currencies were different, the concept of working in a successful economy was common across different communities.

When Europeans first arrived in Victoria, Aboriginal people continued to engage and work in the economy. The highly successful hops farming at Healesville by the Aboriginal community at Corranderk was a good example of this.

But at some point things went wrong and Aboriginal people were systematically excluded from participating in economic life. This has had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal community and must be addressed if Aboriginal people are to have a successful economic future.

In December 2008, the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs established the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group to provide the Victorian Government with key recommendations to improve the economic outcomes for Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Bringing together the skills and knowledge of the private sector, philanthropy, government and the Aboriginal community we have taken up this challenge to bring real and lasting change.

We didn't see ourselves as the experts. Instead, we listened to what people told us, took inspiration from successes and took lessons from what has not worked in the past. This report and its recommendations have been built from this core position.

This is a vitally important project for Victorian Aboriginal people with far wider implications, for all Victorians, and potentially all Australians.

All the members of the Group agreed very early on that this project:

- Must not be just another Government report which gets launched with fanfare and left to gather dust on the shelf
- Must not be another duplication of what has happened in the past or what is currently happening
- Must not be just another splash of Government spending that achieves little for Aboriginal people at great cost to taxpayers
- Must not be another set of unco-ordinated short-term projects managed by bureaucracy.

Importantly, the Group agreed that all Victorians have a role to play in ensuring Aboriginal people have a sustainable and prosperous economic future.

This can happen with strong leadership, vision, action and support from the State Government, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and all Ministers - and both sides of the Parliament.

We also need the cooperation and support from local government, and greater involvement by the private sector in creating employment, developing real partnerships, and providing mentoring and support.

We need even greater commitment by the education institutions in training, mentoring and skills development.



Foreword

We are all responsible and we are all accountable

We believe this can happen with the Victorian community understanding that by developing relationships with Aboriginal people and communities, and being more socially inclusive, their own lives can be enriched.

Finally and most importantly, it can happen with ownership and commitment by the Aboriginal people of Victoria, who have similar aspirations to all people, in desiring a good lifestyle, recognition and celebration of the value of their culture, prosperity and a future for their children and their children's children.

It is time to stop saying 'what's wrong and how do we fix it', and start saying 'what is possible and how can we achieve it'. We are all responsible and we are all accountable.

A major part of this project was about listening to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Many of the ideas in this report are not difficult but they are different. Some are more challenging. Other ideas will emerge with time.

This report is only an opportunity. Whether or not it can make a difference to people's lives will depend on the commitment and positive action from the whole Victorian community.

There are three key things to take from the report:

- 1.** Economic participation and development is critical to addressing disadvantage. When an Aboriginal person leaves the education and training system, the justice system, or the human services system, their opportunity to participate in the economy should have increased, not diminished.
- 2.** Government, employers, the education system, the broader community and the Aboriginal community are all responsible and accountable.
- 3.** We cannot fail young Aboriginal people. We cannot fail the people who represent the oldest living culture on the planet, who have lived in Australia for over 60,000 years.

There have been many opportunities and attempts to make a difference to the economic circumstances of Aboriginal people. The strength and resilience of Aboriginal people is what makes it still possible. We must never forget that Aboriginal culture is vibrant, evolving and contemporary and draws strength from a strong traditional heritage.

All Victorians and all Australians should be proud to live in a country with a culture which is in the truest sense of the word, unique.

We hope that the ideas and recommendations in this report will help pave a new way forward for the Aboriginal people of Victoria.

Jason Eades

John Morse

Co Chairs

The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group

Bringing together all sectors

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The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group

All sectors of the economy have an important role to play

In December 2008, the Victorian Government established the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group and asked it to look at ways to improve the economic circumstances of Aboriginal Victorians.

Improving the lives of Aboriginal Victorians had been a priority of the Government for several years previously. In 2006 the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF) was released to drive a more strategic approach. The three initial priority areas were maternal health and early childhood health and development, literacy and numeracy, and completion of year 12 or equivalent and development of pathways to employment.

In 2008, the Victorian Government decided to expand this focus to include Aboriginal economic participation and development. The establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group (the Group) demonstrates the Victorian Government's commitment to take a different and innovative approach to improving Aboriginal economic outcomes.

The members of the Group come from different parts of the economy and bring different perspectives and expertise, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. In the spirit of partnership, two Chairs were appointed: one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal.

The work was broken up into six areas:

- Young people's transitions through school, further education and employment
- Employment
- Business
- Land and natural resources
- Tourism
- Leadership and Mentoring.

These areas were identified because:

- The circumstances for Aboriginal young people are not improving and Aboriginal people are becoming increasingly concerned about their young people's future
- It is critical that young people make successful transitions from education to employment as young people are the future of the community
- Employment and business are the key sources of income available to all Aboriginal people and the broader community
- Land and natural resources and tourism are sectors of the economy of interest to many Aboriginal people
- Leadership and mentoring have been identified time and time again as integral to success across all areas of economic participation.

Government employment and procurement are critical

The Group recognises the importance of the work that the State Services Authority (SSA) recently completed on public sector employment and the COAG National Partnership on Indigenous Economic Participation, which includes a plan to use Government procurement to drive employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people. Both pieces of work will be critical elements of an overall strategy for Aboriginal economic development in Victoria. While the Group engaged with both the SSA Strategy and the National Partnership, these pieces of work do not form part of this report.

The Group believes the three reports should be brought together immediately to form a comprehensive Aboriginal economic development strategy. We encourage the Victorian Government to demonstrate its commitment to Aboriginal employment and economic development, by releasing this comprehensive strategy as soon as possible.

The report outlines the recommendations that the Group believes will make a difference across the six areas. The key roles for Government, the private, education and philanthropic sectors, and community are identified. The Group began their work on the premise that all sectors have a key role to play, and this view remained consistent.

The views of the Group were formed through extensive consultations undertaken across the State, nationally and internationally with Aboriginal people, businesses, philanthropy and all levels of Government.

This consultation took a variety of different approaches including face to face meetings, phone discussions, site visits, group workshops, larger forums and written surveys.

A general invitation for submissions to the Group was placed in the *Koori Mail* and *National Indigenous Times* to encourage everyone to have a say.

These consultations also informed detailed reports commissioned by the Group which underpin the recommendations in the report. This work included extensive reviews of programs operating in Victoria, Australia and internationally.

The Victorian Government's Indigenous Economic Development Conference in 2009 was used as a forum to hear from Aboriginal people.



Report highlights

Aboriginal people have the right to the same opportunities as every Victorian and every Australian

Aboriginal people in Victoria have a history of enterprise and trade long before European settlement. But today, there are few Aboriginal people who own and operate businesses, too many Aboriginal people who are unable to find a job, and too many young Aboriginal people leaving school early, and not finding jobs or going on to university.

After consulting widely and listening to Aboriginal communities the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group has identified key areas where more action and sustained effort will make a difference to Aboriginal people's economic circumstances:

- **Real pathways for young Aboriginal people:** Ensuring young people have the confidence and aspirations to complete education and get a job
- **The bridge to work:** Assisting more Aboriginal people achieve fulfilling work
- **Business is business:** Supporting profitable and successful Aboriginal businesses and enterprises
- **Wealth from the land:** Creating greater economic opportunities through land and natural resources
- **Sharing Aboriginal culture through tourism:** Supporting a vibrant Aboriginal tourism industry in Victoria
- **Leadership and mentoring:** Making the most of Aboriginal people's leadership
- **Underpinning success:** Generating momentum for success

Above all else a fundamentally different approach is required; one where the private sector has a leadership role, funding is sustained, and where determination and long term commitment replaces short term and ad hoc responses.

We believe that our report paves the way for action that can deliver much more than the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) commitment to halve the gap in employment outcomes in a decade. With the commitment of the whole Victorian community, we should be striving to close the economic gap in the same period of time – not merely halving it.

Detailed research underpins the recommendations provided in the report. A summary of the 13 key recommendations is provided here.

Summary of recommendations for action

Real pathways for young Aboriginal people – *Ensuring young people have the confidence and aspirations to complete education and get a job*

- 1. A Pathways Leadership Group** of leading employers, TAFEs, universities, industry associations, philanthropic groups and Aboriginal leaders be established to:
 - Establish relationships between employers, students and their families to create pathways into employment and further education and training
 - Provide employment opportunities through school-based apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships
 - Provide career development activities such as open days, part-time employment and work experience from the start of secondary school
 - Make school more interesting through bringing sport, art and culture together with education
 - Establish targeted re-engagement projects in places with significant numbers of disengaged young Aboriginal people
 - Improve mentoring through career mentors for Aboriginal students and implementing the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience in Victoria.
- 2.** Every Aboriginal student under the age of 24, in secondary school, TAFE or Adult and Community Education (ACE) has an individualised education and career plan that includes work experience opportunities and career advice.
- 3.** A state-wide Aboriginal Youth Transitions Framework be developed to draw together all of the recommendations in the full report and ensure a consistent and concerted effort across all sectors.

The bridge to work – *Assisting more Aboriginal people achieve fulfilling work*

- 4.** A 10 Year Action Plan for Aboriginal employment in Victoria be developed with the following key elements:
 - Local Aboriginal Employment Brokers for three years in places with a significant Aboriginal population
 - The development of regional Aboriginal employment strategies
 - Industry-based Aboriginal employment Brokers for three years in industries with strong job prospects
 - A Victorian Aboriginal Employment Resource Centre to support employers and Aboriginal communities.



Report highlights

Business is business – Supporting profitable and successful Aboriginal businesses and enterprises

5. Tailored Enterprise Packages be provided to Aboriginal businesses and enterprises. The central plank of this initiative is a partnership with the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide Account Managers that bring together support including:
 - Aboriginal Finance Brokers to increase access to appropriate finance
 - Victorian Government underwritten loans of up to 40 per cent of the first year of a loan for eligible small businesses
 - Financial literacy and accredited business training tailored to the needs of Aboriginal people
 - Specific support for franchises and joint ventures.
6. A partnership between the State Government and commercial and community lenders be established to provide:
 - Microfinance and a range of low interest loans for eligible small businesses
 - Finance for Aboriginal community enterprises.
7. An Aboriginal Supplier Program that works with Aboriginal businesses to build their ability to tender for Government and other large contracts.

Wealth from the land – Creating greater economic opportunities through land and natural resources

8. Traditional Owners are supported by Governments to identify and maximise economic benefits early in the negotiation of native title settlements.
9. Commercial governance arrangements including risk management mechanisms are established to manage commercial activities.
10. Aboriginal Employment Strategies be developed with private and public sector employers across all natural resource management and primary industries sectors. These will include jobs, training and joint venture and sub-contracting opportunities through procurement.

Sharing Aboriginal culture through tourism – Supporting a vibrant Aboriginal tourism industry in Victoria

11. A 10 year Aboriginal Tourism plan for Victoria be developed by Tourism Victoria with Aboriginal tourism operators that provides for:
 - The establishment of Melbourne as an icon of contemporary Aboriginal culture offering interpretation and experience and providing a gateway to regional experiences and products
 - The full development of a regional experience with particular consideration of the South West based around Lake Condah
 - A full marketing plan that links Aboriginal cultural experiences in Victoria with mainstream tourism
 - The identification of and investment in strategic markets such as products aimed at groups and families that leverage emerging social trends
 - The supports required to fully develop businesses and products
 - A strong Aboriginal Tourism peak body based on the Western Australian model (WAITOC).

Leadership and mentoring – *Making the most of Aboriginal people's leadership*

12. The Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria should be appropriately resourced to partner with an organisation such as Leadership Victoria to provide a comprehensive leadership and mentoring program that builds the pool of Aboriginal leaders and mentors. Key features of this initiative are:

- A mentor bank linked to Leadership Victoria
- International leadership, young leaders and role model and champion programs
- Local leadership and problem solving forums
- A register to achieve equitable representation on boards and committees.

Underpinning success – *Generating momentum for success*

13. The Victorian Government needs to formally respond to this report. This response should be announced at a public function in partnership with leaders from the Aboriginal community, private and philanthropic sectors to demonstrate the commitment of all sectors to improving economic outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.



Aboriginal people in the economy

A prosperous economic history before European settlement

Economic activity predates European settlement

Popular media would have us believe that the concept of work and participation in the economy are new to the Aboriginal community. This is not correct. Both pre and post-contact Aboriginal people have been involved in the economy.

Before European settlement, Aboriginal people in Victoria participated in a thriving economy, including farming and mining.

For example, thousands of years ago at Lake Condah in the far southwest of Victoria, Gunditjmara people engineered an elaborate system of excavated stone channels, raceways and ponds for the aquaculture of eels and other fish.

As the aquaculture system expanded to cover some 100 square kilometres along the volcanic landscape's wetlands and stony country, the vast infrastructure and sustainable use of resources enabled the Gunditjmara to construct stone villages with settled clan areas.

Recent archeological evidence indicates that the aquaculture system can be dated at 6,800 years ago. Some 4,800 years ago the Kerrup Jmara clan at Lake Condah bolstered their infrastructure against drought conditions by expanding the aquaculture system to include new stone dams.

The Gunditjmara's activity at Lake Condah and along the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape clearly demonstrates that Aboriginal societies in Victoria had established and continued to progress their economic circumstances and prosperity thousands of years ago.

Just outside Melbourne at a place called Mount William or *Wil-im-ee Moor-ring* Aboriginal people mined greenstone. Mount William was famous throughout south-eastern Australia as the source of highly valued greenstone axe heads. Axe heads were traded over much of south-eastern Australia creating social links and obligations between neighbouring groups.

With the arrival of Europeans in Victoria in the 1800's Aboriginal people continued to participate in the economy. Many communities actively participated in the activities Europeans brought.

From the 1830s to the early 1900s, Aboriginal people worked in the 'white' economy in agriculture on missions and directly for European settlers. At Coranderrk Station near Healesville there was a focus on hop farming and at Ebenezer Mission in the Wimmera, sheep grazing.

The hop farm was extremely successful and neighbouring settlers lobbied the Government to close it down, an example of how Aboriginal people were shut out of the 'white' economy over the following years.

There will be greater job opportunities for Aboriginal people with skills

A young and growing population

In 2006, according to the ABS Census, Victoria's Aboriginal population was over 33,000 people. Almost half of these people live in a regional area and half in metropolitan Melbourne.

Compared with the ageing non-Aboriginal population, Victoria's Aboriginal population is young and growing.

More than half of Aboriginal Victorians are younger than 25 years compared with around a third of non-Aboriginal Victorians. According to the ABS Census, 2006, 58 per cent of the Aboriginal population of Victoria (over 17,500 persons) are under 25 years old and 31 per cent of non Aboriginal Victorians (1.5 million persons) are under 25 years old.

Aboriginal people could become major contributors to Victoria's economy

In developing countries across the world, people are having fewer children. This means that these populations are not growing as fast as before and the population is getting older.

Victoria is no different. Our population is currently growing at around 1.5 per cent but is predicted to decline to 0.7 per cent over the next 40 years. 13.7 per cent of Victoria's population is now aged over 65 years and this will increase to 25 per cent over the next 25 years.

Over time, there will be proportionately fewer and fewer people in the workforce.

In Australia there are currently 5.25 people of working age for every person aged 65 years and over. By 2050-52, this is projected to fall to 2.2 people and the situation in Victoria will be similar. (G Banks, An Ageing Australia: Small Beer or Big Bucks, Presentation to the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, Economic Briefing, 2004).

Victoria's economic growth depends upon a productive and sustainable working age population.

There will be more and more job opportunities available for those who are educated and have skills.

Regional Victoria is ageing faster and geographically, the population is changing. More and more people are moving into regional centres and metropolitan Melbourne. Small towns will be reliant on more Aboriginal people participating in local labour markets.

Aboriginal people already contribute to and benefit from Victoria's economy.

"As Aboriginal people we're not all at the lower end of literacy and numeracy. We have Aboriginal doctors and nurses, business people, Social Justice Commissioners, education, arts politics, health administration, Olympians, writers, film directors, the list goes on."

Koorie Liaison Officer, Victorian TAFE Institute

Because Victoria's Aboriginal population is young and growing, the opportunity is there for Aboriginal people to become major players in the economy over the coming generations.



Aboriginal people in the economy

Economic benefits flow from one generation to another

To achieve this, more young Aboriginal people will need to finish year 12 at school, do further study and move into work.

Young people who stay on at school and complete Year 12 are much more likely to undertake more education and training over their lifetime. Importantly, people who have completed Year 12 and have done further study are more likely to encourage and be able to support their children to do the same and the benefits flow from one generation to another.

Yet, many Aboriginal young people find it difficult to complete school and take up further study and/or get a job.

In Victoria, the proportion of Aboriginal 19 year olds who had attained a Year 12 certificate or equivalent in 2006 was 37.1 per cent. This is above the national average (35.7%) but significantly below Queensland (48.0%) and less than half the rate for non-Aboriginal people in Victoria (76.2 per cent). (Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report 2009, Table 4A.5.6)

Victoria needs more young Aboriginal people completing school and going to University in Victoria.

According to the ABS Census, in 2006, 6.6 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians had a degree compared with 19.6 per cent of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Many Aboriginal students prefer to finish their year 12 studies at TAFE. In 2006, there were 1,061 school aged (ie. 15-19 year old) Aboriginal students in Victoria enrolled in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector of which around 10 per cent were undertaking a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program.

Victoria recently changed its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and introduced a Training Guarantee. The Skills for Life: Victorian Training Guarantee provides:

- Subsidised training for people aged up to 20, for all students at all qualification levels
- Subsidised training for people aged 20 and over, at a qualification level higher than that already held, and
- The opportunity for Victorians to acquire foundation qualifications as a key to workforce participation and economic opportunity.

Under the Indigenous Completions Initiative the Victorian Government provides Aboriginal people with an entitlement to vocational training at the minimum tuition fee at all training levels. This entitlement only applies where an Aboriginal person is progressing to a higher qualification than currently held.

It is critically important that the Training Guarantee makes it easier for Aboriginal people to access VET. The Training Guarantee must improve the pathway from TAFE to work for Aboriginal students. In 2006, 66.1 per cent of Aboriginal students were employed after VET training compared with 80 per cent of non-Aboriginal students (NCVER, 2006).

The National Council for Vocational Education Research Student Outcomes Survey 2008 indicates that Aboriginal people who complete study at TAFE and enrol in further study, are unlikely to enrol in University.

The unemployment gap for young Aboriginal people is increasing

Young Aboriginal people are also finding it difficult to get a job. Unemployment for young people is generally higher than for the rest of the population. For young Aboriginal people, the gap is much greater.

According to the ABS Census, in 2006, the unemployment rate of young Aboriginal people in Victoria (15-24 year olds) was 24.7 per cent and was more than 1.5 times higher than the unemployment rate of the total Aboriginal population (15.8 per cent) and 2.3 times higher than the unemployment rate of the young non-Aboriginal population (10.8 per cent).

This unemployment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people has actually increased over the last five years.

The aspirations of children and young people are heavily influenced by the adults in their families and communities.

Children who have a parent who is employed are more likely to complete secondary school, more likely to enter into post-secondary education and gain employment themselves.

Modelling by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) for their report, *The Economics of Disadvantage in the Victorian Indigenous Community*, 2008, indicates that:

- Aboriginal males aged 15 to 24 years are twice as likely to have completed Year 12 or be in full time study if at least one of their parents has completed Year 12 and
- For Aboriginal females aged 15 to 24 years, the likelihood increases by nearly four times.

And more Aboriginal people will need to be involved in the future across the breadth of the economy.

According to the Census, in 2006, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in Victoria was 15.8 per cent; and the employment to population ratio for Aboriginal people in Victoria was 50.1 per cent.

This compares to an unemployment rate and employment to population ratio for non Aboriginal Victorians of 5.5 per cent and 70.8 per cent.

Halving the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Victoria by 2016 will require 6,800 more Aboriginal people in work.

It is clear that there are many Aboriginal children who are not growing up in working families.

Of those family members who are working, they are more likely to be working in a job that is specific to Aboriginal people. Across industries, the most common industries in which Aboriginal people were employed in 2006 were Public Administration and Safety (18%) and Health Care and Social Assistance (15%). This industry covers Government, Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal health workers and other Aboriginal specific positions.

They are less likely to be in Education and Training (9%), Retail Trade (8%) and Manufacturing (8%), and less likely to be working in higher earning jobs.



Aboriginal people in the economy

“We must raise our expectations for Indigenous people because if we raise our expectations we will change the outcomes.”

Deborah Cheetham, Indigenous Soprano, Radio National, September 18, 2009.

According to the ABS Census, in 2006, 22.8 per cent of Aboriginal employees in Victoria were in professional or managerial occupations. This compares to 34.6 per cent of non Aboriginal people in Victoria in professional or managerial occupations.

Not many Aboriginal children are growing up in families that own and operate their own business.

In 2006, 6 per cent of employed Aboriginal people in Australia indicated they worked in their own business. This compares to 17 per cent of non Aboriginal people in Australia who work in their own business. (ABS Census 2006).

Existing Aboriginal businesses in Victoria are focused on Aboriginal arts and tourism but have a lower representation in others such as agriculture, construction and retail trade.

Opportunities for employment and business can be expanded through increased Aboriginal tourism, land ownership and Native Title.

There will need to be a stronger culture of learning and working.

The strong working culture of the past has been lost to many Aboriginal adults. Policies of current governments are still encouraging a dependence upon welfare.

Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the Australian income support system, with 47.7 per cent reporting government cash pensions and allowances as their main source of personal income in 2004-05, compared to 17.3 per cent of non-Aboriginal people. A range of adverse socioeconomic conditions contribute to a high dependence on income support by Aboriginal people, including poorer standards of health, lack of employment opportunities in the local labour market and lower levels of educational attainment.

Ultimately, it is Aboriginal people who will build the aspirations and confidence of their children and young people to gain from the economy. Government, the private, philanthropic and education sectors need to support Aboriginal people to do this through understanding, rebuilding lost pathways, and creating new ones.

“There are different sets of circumstances. One parent [at a school] had no good memories of school. His palms were sweating, he was struggling to stay in the building, but he was there for his child. [It’s understandable that] they will trust an Indigenous person more.”

Principal, Victorian secondary school

The true nature of the task in Victoria will need to be identified, acknowledged and tackled.

The statistics demonstrate a large gap in the number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are active in the Victorian economy.

The gap is likely to be even greater as the data collected about Aboriginal people by the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not match local data sources such as that collected by hospitals.

Without better data it will be difficult to provide the right amount of resources to communities to realise the opportunities. Under- funding leaves Aboriginal organisations and their community continually stretched and unable to get ahead.



Key principles for success

Through speaking with many people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, about the ways in which Aboriginal people can contribute to and gain from the economy, we have identified principles we believe are critical to success.

Aboriginal culture is a critical asset for Victoria

"We will take responsibility and stand up but first we need to know who we are."

Koorie Liaison Officer, Victorian TAFE Institute

- Aboriginal culture is not a subset of mainstream culture to be integrated over time or ignored. It underpins resilience and empowerment and sustains Aboriginal activity in the economy. Aboriginal culture is vibrant, diverse, evolving, and contemporary and draws strength from a strong traditional heritage.

Success lies within Aboriginal people and local communities

"There need to be conversations with the community, we need to get our community out there and having conversations."

Staff member, Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative.

- All Victorians have a responsibility to listen and learn. Then to work together to provide co-ordinated, long-term and sustained support that develops the skills, capacity, leadership and empowerment for Aboriginal people to realise their aspirations.

Everyone is responsible

- All sectors of the economy must make a long term commitment to change. The private, community, education and philanthropic sectors must share leadership with all levels of government.

Networked and connected

- Connections into and within the economy, nationally and internationally need to be built for Aboriginal people.
- All Victorians need to help extend these connections. This includes including Aboriginal interests in economic development and planning activities (including education) by local communities, State and Commonwealth Governments, the private and philanthropic sectors.

Business is business

- Commercially focused governance arrangements are needed for commercial activities. The objectives of the community and a business are different and confusing them compromises commercial success.

Increased economic self sufficiency is a key outcome

- Increased self-esteem, economic networks, skills and job readiness should be the outcome of Government service 'systems'. The opportunity to participate in the economy should be increased and not diminished.



Key principles for success

“As my friend Fred Chaney says, we have to get rid of the “start again” syndrome that has a lot to do with politics and nothing to do with evidence. We have to see the points of light all round us and join them up.”

Professor Mick Dodson, Australian of the Year 2009, speech to the National Press Club, February 2009.

Profile success at every opportunity and through all mechanisms

- Reinforcing success can underpin social change. The Government should always embed Aboriginal success into its promotional activities.

Young Aboriginal people and their families are the primary focus

“If the young mothers are educated, they will pass on [those] aspirations to their children... This could be the key [to breaking the cycle.]”

Staff member, Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative.

- Young Aboriginal people and children learn about the economy and their place in it through their parents, families and communities.

Education, training, skills development, employment and economic development must be the highest priority for all Aboriginal people.

- To break the cycle of welfare, build the career dreams of the next generation and to achieve economic and broader goals.

A long-term and bipartisan approach

- Short-term commitments that stop and start and change with changing Governments, have not brought, and will not bring sustainable success. Persistence is required to achieve generational change.



Real pathways for young Aboriginal people

We cannot fail young Aboriginal people

Many Aboriginal people and communities are concerned about their young people. Too many young people are leaving school early. According to the Victorian Government's Wannik – Koorie Education Strategy:

- 16 per cent of Aboriginal students in Victoria leave school between years 9 and 10, compared to 3 per cent of non-Aboriginal students
- 22 per cent leave between years 10 and 11 compared to 5 per cent of non-Aboriginal students
- 41 per cent leave between years 11 and 12 compared to 18 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.

They are not leaving school to go to work.

In 2006, the proportion of young Aboriginal people in Victoria aged 15 to 24 years who were not employed and not studying was 24.6 per cent (1,392 people) compared to 8.3 per cent of non-Aboriginal people. (Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2009, Table 6A.6.4).

Too many are involved with the justice system.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in Victoria in 2006-07, Aboriginal young people were under juvenile justice supervision at a rate of 26 young people per 1,000, compared with 2 per 1,000 non Aboriginal young people. Aboriginal young people were about 13 times more likely to be under supervision than non Aboriginal young people.

Contact with the justice system establishes another barrier to achieving at school and getting a job.

Action now is critical and today's young people will set the economic futures of the next generation. This is about delivering generational change.

Real interest, real reasons, and real rewards

Young people, like anyone, are motivated when they believe that there is genuine interest in them and expectation of them.

"No-one had ever said anything like that to me before." Victorian Aboriginal young person now aspiring to be a teacher having been told that it was possible by her secondary school teacher.

In some cases, it can be that simple.

"... here I'm proud of myself...there is amazing support here I want to finish this off first (before other study)."

Victorian Aboriginal TAFE student



Real pathways for young Aboriginal people

Some parents, who have had a bad experience at school or work, prefer to support activities and interests where they believe young Aboriginal people can build self-esteem such as culture, art and sport.

Young people's aspirations are a strong predictor of eventual school completion. (Centre for Postcompulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, Making Career Development Core Business 2009, p.45, unpublished).

Raising the aspirations of Aboriginal students needs to start early by enabling them to experience the economy from years 7 and 8. The experience should intensify during years 9 and 10 to build the confidence of young people and support them to can make informed career choices.

"Conversations about university etc. should happen in Year 8 or 9...we need to plant the seed, highlight that it's an option...A lot of students drop off at Year 10."

Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator, Victorian secondary school

Work experience lasts a lifetime

Young people's experience of work has an important influence on their career decisions. (Centre for Postcompulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, Making Career Development Core Business 2009, p. 43, unpublished).

But many young Aboriginal people have little exposure to work either through their own work experience or through family members actively engaged in work and don't make a connection between learning and working.

"... not too many have had part-time jobs. It's preparation. It's a big deficit if Indigenous kids don't get this. Very few have worked pre [post school] employment."

Staff member, Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative

"Young people learn through part-time work but that is not happening with [a lot of] Indigenous kids."

Koorie Liaison Officer, Victorian TAFE Institute

As a result they know little about money - how it works, how you get it, and what you can do with it.

Young Aboriginal people should be given the chance and encouragement to experience work while they are at school, either through work experience or part-time work.

Flexible and real pathways

Finishing year 12 is a big achievement for any young person but for young Aboriginal people there needs to be an identifiable reward at the end of it.

For some young people, a job is the best reward as not every person is suited to study at university or TAFE. For others, it's the opportunity to go to university. Some young people come to university later after working for a while or studying at TAFE. This calls for flexibility. A range of real pathways that are flexible enough to allow young people to move across them as well as down them is what's required.

Young Aboriginal people and their families need a commitment that this is no longer about talk or promises or punishment or trying something until the money runs out.

“The future of Aboriginal people will be shaped by their choices and opportunities, and they in turn will be dictated by their access to education and training.”

Professor Marcia Langton, Presentation to the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group, 2009.

Programs like Barpirdhila show the way forward.

The Barpirdhila Program is a partnership between the Bill Hutchison Foundation, Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the Essendon Football Club that provides companies with an opportunity to make a meaningful and long-term contribution to the education and employment challenges facing many Indigenous Australians today.

The aim of the program is for companies, large and small, to support young Indigenous people to complete secondary school to the stage necessary to qualify for tertiary education, a traineeship or apprenticeship, and to then guarantee their placement in a company as a graduate trainee or apprentice as appropriate. The program recognises that:

- Economic development is the only way to overcome, in the long-term, the disadvantage experienced by the Shepparton Indigenous community
- Education of young Indigenous people today is an absolute and necessary prerequisite to the Indigenous community participating in economic development.

Bill Hutchison Foundation

There is a new focus on the transitions from school to work and further study for all young people by the Council of Australian Governments. In response, the Victorian Government is developing a new policy framework for youth transitions to increase the proportion of young people completing Year 12 or its vocational equivalent, continuing on to higher levels of education and training and moving successfully into strong career paths. The Council of Australian Governments has stressed that these reforms be used to drive improved outcomes for young Aboriginal people.

This is positive but the key difference for young Aboriginal people and their families is the lack of exposure to work and workplaces. At present education and working are separate and unconnected concepts.



Real pathways for young Aboriginal people

Bringing the world of work through the school gate

Many chances and flexible options

Driving change through partnership

The world of work has to be brought to young Aboriginal people and their families a lot earlier. This is not a job for governments alone – it requires real partnerships with the private, community, philanthropic and education sectors.

A strong partnership between the State Government and a high profile organisation such as the AFL could drive the momentum to form a Pathways Leadership Group that would bring the world of work through the school gate. This group could comprise of employers (through the Australian Employment Covenant, individual companies and the AFL's corporate partners), unions, professional and industry associations, education and training institutions, governments, philanthropists and Aboriginal communities.

The leadership group would work to ensure that long-term formal relationships are built between employers and students and their families starting early in years 7 and 8 with visits to schools and student and family 'open' days at workplaces. As students progress through school, they could be provided with a range of 'rewards' including:

- Flexible scholarships for all young Aboriginal people to support them to reach their learning goals (years 9 and 10, year 12, TAFE, university)
- Work experience
- Part-time work
- An ongoing job
- Flexible financial assistance for apprentices who struggle on extremely low incomes particularly those living away from home
- Life skill programs and engagement programs (sport, art and culture) for young Aboriginal people and their families.

The role of State and Commonwealth Governments would be to provide a range of individualised supports for young Aboriginal students while at school or TAFE and Adult and Community Education (ACE) and leverage opportunities created by the Pathways Leadership Group. Specific commitments should include making school more interesting, providing individual support to students and families, strengthening careers guidance, reaching out to young people who have opted out or are at risk of leaving, strengthening the connection between TAFE, ACE and work, measuring and monitoring performance, and driving these initiatives through a co-ordinating strategic framework.

Importantly, this new approach requires many chances and flexible options. Every young Aboriginal person under the age of 24 who has not completed year 12 should be able to 'opt back in', form a relationship and complete year 12 or equivalent using supports provided by the partners.

A Pathways Leadership Group

Making school interesting

Recommendations for action

To build the partnership for change, it is recommended that:

1. The Victorian Government establish a high-profile **Pathways Leadership Group** to generate immediate momentum and, as a first priority, secure the participation of:
 - The Aboriginal community
 - The AFL and its corporate partners, as football is of particular interest to young Aboriginal people and the AFL brand can help to attract corporate support and job opportunities
 - The Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) to set out how signatories can create real jobs and training opportunities
 - A key TAFE to generate momentum for rolling out the AEC's P-Platers Scheme across all TAFEs and the Victorian school system
 - Key Universities to find new paths into university
 - The philanthropic sector
 - A key professional association (such as Engineers Australia)
 - A key industry association (such as the Australian Retailers' Association), and
 - Support from Local Government.
2. The **Pathways Leadership Group** will:
 - Create opportunities for schools to develop long-term formal relationships between individual employers and further education and training providers, individual students and their families starting early in years 7 and 8 with visits to schools and student and family 'open' days at workplaces; and
 - Provide rewards to students who meet their goals (as agreed in their Managed Individual Pathways Plans) including (but not limited to):
 - Scholarships to continue to year 12
 - Scholarships to continue to University
 - Work experience
 - Part-time work, and/or
 - An ongoing job.

To make school interesting for Aboriginal people and their families, it is recommended that:

3. Football, netball, art and culture be integrated into Victorian school programs by involving organisations including the AFL, Netball Victoria, the Clontarf Foundation, the Koorie Heritage Trust and Arts Victoria.
4. The Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation (VAYSAR) sport carnivals be used as a vehicle to promote education and employment, including through careers fairs and job expos.



Real pathways for young Aboriginal people

Engaging employers in schools

To support the engagement of employers in schools and co-ordinate activities across regions, it is recommended that:

5. Brokers external to schools and possibly funded through COAG National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions be provided to work with schools and trainers, employers, local organisations and the Pathways Leadership Group to secure more opportunities for Aboriginal students aged 15 and over to work part-time while at secondary school or in tertiary education. The same Brokers support employers participating in the Australian Employment Covenant, and the Pathways Leadership Group, to provide young Aboriginal people with *school-based apprenticeships and traineeships*.
6. Koorie Transition Co-ordinators be provided across all DEECD regions to drive activities across regions aimed at strengthening pathways to employment and further education for young Aboriginal students. These Co-ordinators would be an interface between activities within and external to schools aimed at increasing the aspirations and the motivation of young Aboriginal people to complete secondary education and move into employment or further education and training. Co-ordinators would work closely with families, communities, schools and Koorie Engagement Support Officers to identify the supports young people need to remain engaged in school and succeed in employment or further education and training.

Providing individual support

To provide individual support for Aboriginal young people and strengthen career development at all schools, it is recommended that:

7. Every Aboriginal secondary school student from year 7 has an individualised education and career plan that includes work experience opportunities and career advice. The plan (a Managed Individual Pathway Plan) would be supported by a school based resource who co-ordinates the individual support provided within schools and who can leverage the opportunities generated by Brokers, the Pathways Leadership Group, School Business Community Partnership Brokers and Local Learning and Employment Networks.
8. An Aboriginal Career Development Program is established in all schools to introduce work concepts, job information and work experience well before the post-compulsory schooling years by which time many Aboriginal students have already disengaged. This would involve:
 - Aboriginal students from years 7 to 9 participating in career development activities including open days, part-time employment and work experience
 - Career development activities that involve families and communities in their children's career development
 - Providing a Career Mentor for every Aboriginal student early in secondary school
 - Co-ordinating the work of Koorie educators, career teachers and Brokers to achieve much better outcomes for Aboriginal students.
9. The Government encourage universities to implement the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and support its introduction in secondary schools across Victoria.

Reaching out

Stronger pathways from training to employment

Drawing it all together

To reach young Aboriginal people aged 15-19 who have opted out of school, it is recommended that:

10. One-on-one support be given to Aboriginal students at risk of disengaging or who have already left school or training to help them find the most appropriate schooling (secondary, TAFE or Adult and Community Education). Through the soon to be established and Commonwealth funded Youth Connections service, the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments should work together to ensure support is provided in a way that recognises the particular needs and local and family circumstances of young Aboriginal people.
11. Additional place based projects be funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments in areas with significant numbers of disengaged young Aboriginal people.

To strengthen the pathway from training to employment, it is recommended that:

12. The Australian Employment Covenant's P-Plater scheme is introduced to Victorian TAFEs from 2010. This scheme will support young people to complete their education and training and provide clear pathways into employment.
13. Every Aboriginal student in TAFE and ACE aged 24 years or younger be provided with a Pathway Plan that sets out the transition from training to employment, incorporating work experience and/or part time work.
14. TAFE Completion Officers are being introduced in some TAFE institutes. They should ensure Aboriginal students are provided with supports such as mentoring, careers advice and pathways planning.

To draw together all of the VAED Group's recommendations and ensure a consistent and concerted effort across all sectors, it is recommended that:

15. The Victorian Government develop a Statewide Aboriginal Youth Transitions Framework to complement the efforts of the Pathways Leadership Group. The framework should reach:
 - Students in secondary school - plans should be developed across networks of schools and set out how schools will work together to improve the transition of Aboriginal students. Individual schools should address transition planning for Aboriginal students in their strategic plan and set out how they will work with the local Aboriginal community, education and training providers, schools within their network, employers and support agencies such as Local Learning and Employment Networks and Brokers to help more students move from school to work or further education
 - Students in TAFE – plans should be developed by each TAFE and set out how 15 to 24-year-old students will be supported to transition into employment, further education or training
 - Students in ACE - plans should be developed by each ACE provider working with five or more Aboriginal students. It should set out how 15 to 24 year-old students will be supported to transition into employment, further education or training.

Real pathways for young Aboriginal people

Measuring performance

16. The Commonwealth Government should develop accountability arrangements which ensure that funding for Aboriginal students in non-government schools is used to deliver supports such as pathways planning and career advice needed to deliver improved student outcomes.

To measure performance, it is recommended that:

17. Indicators be developed and publicly reported to show the progress on young Aboriginal people's educational attainment and transition to work. Reporting of outcomes by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, classified by gender, need to be developed for school, tertiary education and training, and labour force and employment.

Proposed indicators

School	Tertiary education and training	Labour force and employment
Retention through school	Participation	Participation by school leavers
Achievement at school	Completion	School leavers at risk
Employment experience at school	Re-engagement	Participation by 15-19 year-olds
Attainment at school		Participation by 20-24 year-olds
		Duration of transition

The annual reporting should be state-wide and, where data exists, at regional level. It should also incorporate relevant indicators in the performance review and professional development of senior staff working with young Aboriginal people.



The bridge to work

It's time for a different approach

Working is the most common way that people contribute to and gain from the economy. Every Victorian should have the opportunity and the skills to work.

It is important that young Aboriginal people grow up in families and communities that work.

Until the recent Global Financial Crisis, an increasing number of people have found jobs over the last decade and unemployment rates have been decreasing. For Aboriginal people living in Victoria, more people have found work but unemployment has not decreased at the same rate as for non-Aboriginal people. Despite the economic good times, the actual employment gap between the two has grown.

History tells us that during the bad times, the gap gets even bigger.

Young people and particularly young Aboriginal people are most at risk.

All of the net 122,000 full-time jobs lost in Australia in the past year were held by young Australians aged 15-24 (*Youth bear jobless brunt*, *The Age*, 22 August 2009).

Everyone's talking about employment or jobs

It is positive that, despite the Global Financial Crisis, all the talk about employing Aboriginal people generated by the National Apology and by the Australian Employment Covenant has not gone away.

Over 40 employers across Australia have committed to providing over 13,334 jobs under the Australian Employment Covenant. Around nine of these have a major presence in Victoria including Commonwealth Bank, NAB, ANZ, Crown Ltd and Linfox.

A very, very small proportion of these jobs have been filled.

If history is not to be repeated, it's time for a different approach. The good intention of employers needs to be converted into action. Aboriginal workers need to be valued and well skilled employees, not a residual labour force that is retrenched as soon as there is an economic downturn.

According to many employers, the jobs are there but the Aboriginal workers are not.

Yet Aboriginal people want to work. In Victoria in 2006, 1602 Aboriginal people were seeking work. 715 were between the ages of 15 and 24.

While many Aboriginal people have successful careers, there are others who face significant barriers. Some do not have fundamental numeracy and literacy skills, have not completed year 12, have health issues or have had contact with the justice system. Some people have been churned through a variety of TAFE and ACE qualifications that are not relevant for the jobs on offer. Some people don't have work ready skills, some are not aware that there is a job opportunity and some have lost patience with Commonwealth employment services. Some are single parents. Some have simply opted out.



The bridge to work

There are significant employment opportunities

There are particular industry sectors (both professional and non-professional) where there are proportionately fewer Aboriginal people working.

Industry sector	Size of opportunity
Retail trade	755 potential jobs to parity. Currently only 0.28% of employees are Aboriginal
Professional, scientific and technical	663 jobs. Currently only 0.15% of employees are Aboriginal.
Manufacturing	656 jobs. Currently only 0.34% of employees are Aboriginal.
Education and Training	385 jobs. Currently only 0.34% of employees are Aboriginal.
Financial and Insurance Services	377 jobs. Currently only 0.16% of employees are Aboriginal.
Construction	325 jobs. Currently only 0.38% of employees are Aboriginal.

Note: Victoria's Aboriginal people are 0.65% of the general population. Compiled from 2006 ABS Census data.

These industries offer the most opportunity for increasing the number of Aboriginal workers provided that there is strong support provided to Aboriginal jobseekers and employers.

There are also skill shortages within Aboriginal communities. For example, there is a need for more nurses, allied health workers, people with managerial skills, and administrators. As many Aboriginal people want to work for their communities, this provides significant opportunity.

Preparation, placement and post-placement support

Some employers have taken committed action to employ and keep Aboriginal people. They have done this for two key reasons: it made good commercial sense; and there was a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Rio Tinto found numerous benefits in local Aboriginal employment, including improved retention of employees, stability of the local workforce with family ties to the region, increased flexibility when fly-in fly-out transport is unreliable and greater connections with the local community.

"Literacy and numeracy is not a barrier. We identify the skills required and the skills gaps. Then we establish the right training programmes. It's about supporting Indigenous people to be work ready."

Rio Tinto

It is not enough to advertise jobs and wait

Transfield Services was motivated through both social responsibility but also because their major clients provided a commercial reason by making Aboriginal employment a requirement of their commercial contracts.

"there were two main motivators with regards to the Aboriginal participation strategy. Firstly, it was a requirement of many of our clients, especially the blue chip clients, and having an Aboriginal participation strategy provided the business with a competitive advantage..... Secondly, the organisation wanted to "do what's right", as we felt that as a major Australian employer we have a responsibility in this area."

Transfield Services

Companies that successfully employ Aboriginal people know that it's not enough to pledge jobs, advertise them, and then sit and wait for Aboriginal people to apply and start working.

Fletcher International Exports and the NSW Department of Housing, go directly to the local Aboriginal community at the Dubbo housing estates and talk about working with Fletcher's and what it means to have a secure job. At these sessions potential Aboriginal employees are helped to complete job application forms.

"We go out to them, in the housing estates and the community centres; we talk to them (Aboriginal people) in their backyard - it helps."

Fletcher International Exports

There needs to be preparation by both parties

Employers need to prepare by building relationships with Aboriginal communities and then extend these relationships back into their own workplaces to create an environment where Aboriginal people can be successful workers.

"Our Aboriginal Employment Strategy was initially about employment. We soon found that our retention rates were poor because our sole focus was on employment not on also developing community relations. In many of our plants we now deal directly with Aboriginal communities. In some communities we are involved in community relations even though we might not have a site in that community. We know that building relationships is more crucial and this has to happen first."

Boral

Aboriginal people who want to work may also need to prepare. This might be specific training or a qualification (such as a drivers licence, truck or fork lift licence). They may have not worked for some time and need to refresh their skills.



The bridge to work

Two way learning

Rio Tinto's approach to employing Indigenous people involves building relationships with communities and supporting employees to be work ready before they start work.

Rio Tinto works with local Indigenous communities to gain an understanding of the education, health, demographics and skill levels of its potential workforce. At the same time it builds strong relationships that are used to educate the community about mining culture and working for Rio Tinto.

This relationship is used to facilitate two way learning and cultural competency programs delivered by local traditional owners who introduce people to the local Indigenous culture and traditions.

Rio Tinto works in collaboration with Indigenous communities and Australian Governments to increase positive employment outcomes for Indigenous people. This involves providing employees with the full range of recruitment, retention and progression supports:

- Job readiness training and recruitment
- Literacy and numeracy support
- Skills development – apprenticeships and traineeships
- Retention and career development

This approach has been very successful. Rio Tinto's retention rate for new Indigenous employees beyond 26 weeks exceeds 80 per cent.

Rio Tinto, Indigenous Employment in Australia

Many Aboriginal people have qualifications that have not led to a job. Training needs to provide a pathway to work and not be training for training sake. This may require Aboriginal people to undertake training at a lower level than they currently have. Under the Victorian Training Guarantee, this training may not be free. Aboriginal people should not be penalised for the past. If it can be demonstrated that the training is a pathway to a job then, regardless of an Aboriginal person's training history, it should be free.

It's critical that employment is a priority for all Aboriginal people who are in a State 'system' whether it be education and training, justice, health or housing. This means ensuring that employment preparation is provided as part of any State Government delivered service.

Placement and post-placement support

Relying on the Commonwealth Government's general employment services to place Aboriginal applicants has not been a successful strategy for many employers or Aboriginal jobseekers.

There is a better alternative.

Aboriginal communities across Victoria have built considerable organisational capacity and infrastructure, with and without the support of governments and the private sector, to provide employment opportunities for their communities. Aboriginal employment practitioners have the skills to bridge the gap between employers and industry and their communities.

The way in which employment support is currently funded is detrimental to long term and sustainable employment outcomes

In Shepparton, Transfield works with the Rumbalara Football Club, and noted that Rumbalara Football Club “knew we were serious and were able to put us in touch with good people.” The contract in Shepparton includes restoration work as part of the water pipe development, and they have a four-man maintenance crew who conduct the restoration work, all of whom are Aboriginal. Transfield also have a formal arrangement with Rumbalara for the mentoring of Aboriginal staff.

Transfield Services

Across the State, Aboriginal employment specialists and organisations are funded by a variety of sources to bring Aboriginal people and employers together. This includes helping Aboriginal people prepare for work, supporting employers in their preparation, placement and then providing both parties with placement supports. This can include 24-hour mentoring where it is needed.

Some Aboriginal employment specialists are funded by councils, some through the Commonwealth employment services, some by State Government and some by community organisations. Each different funding stream has a different time-frame and administrative hurdles. Virtually all funding is short-term for a set number of ‘employment outcomes’. When the funding runs out, capacity, momentum and assets are lost. When new funding comes through, things have to start up again.

Aboriginal people commonly speak of unco-ordinated, complicated and short-term funding from Governments. Unfortunately employment support is an example of this.

It’s unfortunate because a job is the most likely way that Aboriginal people will be involved in the economy.

It’s unfortunate because helping Aboriginal communities to build their own bridges to employers has been shown to be successful time and time again.



The bridge to work

Change is achievable

Making a long-term commitment

Summarising the situation:

- There are jobs
- There are industries that offer particular opportunities
- The actual number of Aboriginal people is not large so significant change is achievable
- Improving the transition of young people from education into work will make a difference over time
- Stopping and starting funding reduces the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to make a difference
- There needs to be a longer-term and sustainable approach to employment that builds on what works.

Long-term commitment is required by governments, business and Aboriginal communities that:

- Builds the capacity of local Aboriginal employment services to successfully engage young and mature Aboriginal people in employment, and to work with local, state and national employers
- Builds the capacity of industry sectors and individual employers to create and support pathways to both entry level and higher-level career opportunities for Aboriginal people, through building long-term relationships with local Aboriginal communities
- Creates a bridge between local Aboriginal employment organisations, and the companies and industries that have made a commitment to Aboriginal employment opportunities and working with Aboriginal employment
- Ensures pre-placement, placement and post-placement support for Aboriginal employees and their employers is built into all job services
- Ensures training provides a real pathway to employment through meeting the needs of individuals and employers including the skill needs of Aboriginal organisations.

A 10 Year Action Plan

A Victorian Aboriginal Employment Resource Centre

Recommendations for action

The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group recommends a 10 Year Action Plan for Aboriginal employment in Victoria to signal a State and Commonwealth Government commitment to long-term and sustainable outcomes for both Aboriginal communities and employers.

To build bridges between Aboriginal communities and employers, it is recommended that:

- 1.** A 10 Year Action Plan for Aboriginal employment be developed to align State and Commonwealth effort in partnership with local governments, businesses and Aboriginal communities. The Plan will have both a 'place based' and 'industry based' approach.
- 2.** Local Aboriginal Employment Brokers be employed for three years as the first step in the 10 Year Plan in places with a significant Aboriginal population. To be jointly supported by the State and Commonwealth, the brokers will engage with community, employers and governments at local, state and national level to develop employment strategies and five to 10-year employment plans.
- 3.** Industry-based Aboriginal Employment Brokers be appointed for three years initially, in the industries of greatest opportunity: retail, professional services, manufacturing, education and training, and construction. This should be done in partnership with industry associations and/or unions, and jointly supported. Again, both the State and Commonwealth Governments should jointly support these brokers.
- 4.** Pre-placement and post-placement support for Aboriginal employees and their employers be built into all job services that are supported by government.
- 5.** The Victorian and Commonwealth Government support the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Employment Resource Centre to recognise the critical role and contribution played by local Aboriginal employment practitioners and organisations. The Resource Centre should:
 - Provide a source of advice and access to expertise by companies wishing to develop their Aboriginal employment strategies, and on how to engage effectively with local Aboriginal communities, and thus to access potential employees
 - Support the creation of a best-practice network of Aboriginal employment practitioners which includes both Aboriginal employment practitioners and companies such as Rio Tinto and other corporate partners
 - Support the work of individual Aboriginal employment professionals and to provide them with professional development and education opportunities
 - Advise State, Commonwealth and Local Governments on the progress of employment initiatives and their practical impact, and the need and nature of further action required.
- 6.** Government procurement policies should support employers who employ Aboriginal people and/or create real pathways to employment.