Aboriginal employment strategy
2016–2021
Acknowledgments

Cover artwork and about the artist

The artwork Yanyabak Dana means ‘to walk towards or on a pathway’ in the Yorta Yorta language.

The artist Dixon Patten is a traditional descendant from the Gunnai (Gippsland), Yorta Yorta (Goulburn Valley), Gunditjmara (Western District) and Dhuduroa (Snowy Mountains) peoples.

Acknowledgment of traditional owners

The Department of Health and Human Services would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners throughout Victoria and acknowledge their ancestors and Elders past and present.

Throughout this document the term Aboriginal is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Contributors to the strategy

Thank you to the following participants who contributed to the development of the new Aboriginal employment strategy:

- the department’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees who participated in consultations
- Aboriginal partner organisations
- Victoria’s Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- the People and Culture Committee
- the previous Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention Steering Committee members
- the Diversity and Inclusion Unit
- divisions who hosted consultations, in particular the People and Culture Managers.
Secretary’s foreword

It is a pleasure to launch the new Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021 for the Department of Health and Human Services.

The strategy is a key commitment to workplace diversity under Moondani: Aboriginal inclusion action plan 2015–2018. As we all know, a diverse workplace has many benefits. It better reflects the society we live in and it better places us to innovate and adapt to meet the changing needs of the people we serve. But most importantly, a diverse workplace will deliver better outcomes for vulnerable Victorians.

In line with its vision and organisational values, the department is committed to maintaining a work environment that is safe and supports employee health and wellbeing. Our five-year Aboriginal employment strategy will engage, participate and collaborate with Aboriginal communities to develop a culturally safe workplace. This will involve working with Aboriginal partners to co-design responsive services for communities based on best practice and the latest data and evidence.

The strategy will progress our commitment to be a diverse, inclusive and culturally safe employer of choice. For example, it will guide the department in its aim to more than double the number of Aboriginal employees by 2021. And we will also invest in training and development so more Aboriginal employees occupy executive roles across the department.

While this strategy has a focus on our internal workforce, the initiatives closely complement the work being led by the department to increase the participation of Aboriginal people across the external health and human services sector. The health sector is the largest employer of Aboriginal people and, with future demand expected to grow; there is an opportunity to increase the Aboriginal workforce and attract more Aboriginal people into key leadership roles across the sector.

Economic participation and development is central to enhancing the wellbeing of every Aboriginal Victorian. Increasing Aboriginal employment not only improves health and wellbeing, it is also a key driver for improving access to quality and culturally appropriate health and human services for the Aboriginal community. And, as we know, economic participation contributes to Victoria’s overall competitive advantage.

A workplace and working sector that attracts and nurtures Aboriginal employees will benefit future generations and strengthen the resilience of First Peoples. It ensures cultural perspectives become embedded in all aspects of our organisations over time. And it challenges each one of us to grow from being culturally capable in 2016 to being culturally proficient by 2021.

Kym Peake
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
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Our commitment

We strive to provide a dynamic and diverse workforce that delivers inclusive policy development and service delivery to our communities.

Cultural safety for Aboriginal communities and employees is critical for our new strategy’s success.

Our leaders will empower our workforce to do things differently and embrace innovative practices that enable us to reach our two per cent Aboriginal employment target.
Introduction

The Department of Health and Human Services is committed to enhancing the health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal Victorians by delivering services in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities throughout the state.

The department acknowledges that increasing its Aboriginal workforce is a key factor in achieving this aim, and has set a target of two per cent Aboriginal employment by 2021. The Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021 sets out the six focus areas to achieve this goal:

- Profile and leadership
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Inclusive workplaces
- Induction
- Development.

The Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021 was developed following an extensive consultation process with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal partner organisations. It has also been informed by the department’s Koolin Balit: Victorian Government strategic directions for Aboriginal health 2012–2022 and operates in conjunction with the Moondani: Aboriginal inclusion action plan 2015–2018.

The department aims to attract increasing numbers of Aboriginal employees into career pathways that are diverse, inclusive and include caring for Aboriginal people, families and communities. This strategy will lead to an increase in the number of Aboriginal staff in executive roles and build a senior Aboriginal workforce profile that is representative of Aboriginal employees in all higher level position classifications by 2021.

‘It is very important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to be part of the frontline workforce in government in order to drive improvements in cultural awareness, cultural practice and to influence positive policy change for better outcomes for clients.’
Setting a new Aboriginal employment target

The Department of Health and Human Services currently employs 126 Aboriginal staff which equates to one per cent of all staff across Victoria (as at March 2016).

The Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021 proposes a new Aboriginal employment stretch target of two per cent.

This target was determined by a number factors including:

- Currently the department is meeting the one per cent target set by the Victorian Government in 2010. A target of two per cent is required to maintain this target and also to meet the projected population growth of the Victorian Aboriginal community. Also, in the consultation process, participants expressed a desire to do better than the government target.
- This strategy covers a period of five years during which time a number of the recommended actions will be fully implemented. Since 2010 the department has set an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment target of 1.5 per cent. Aboriginal employment numbers within the department have doubled from 2010 until 2013.
- The strategy will focus on developing a talent pool and achieving the target through natural staff turnover rather than creating new roles.
- Some sectors within the department have the ability to achieve greater outcomes in Aboriginal employment, for example, child protection and youth justice. The department will explore setting specific targets in these areas.
- The department acknowledges that the employment of Aboriginal staff will benefit the Victorian Aboriginal community as a whole and also enhance the awareness of Aboriginal affairs for non-Aboriginal staff. This will result in improved policies and programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians.
The framework for change

The department’s commitment to increase Aboriginal employment to two per cent of the total workforce over the next five years requires a sound framework that builds on current foundations and introduces a series of innovative actions.

The framework for change is structured around six focus areas, which are linked to a number of actions to continually drive change and facilitate improvement:

- Profile and leadership
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Inclusive workplaces
- Induction
- Development.

The framework highlights the commitment and the actions – underpinned by monitoring and reporting – critical to the success of the strategy.

Figure 1: Aboriginal employment strategy framework for change
Doing things differently

The strategy calls for the department to adopt new practices and ideas to meet the target of two per cent. Innovation in work practices that focus on driving change and increasing measurable outcomes are the foundations for the strategy.

Innovative practices that underpin the success of the strategy include:

- **Investing** in Aboriginal staff to ensure that they reach their full potential.
- A focus on value **development** and incorporating the unique cultural skills that Aboriginal employees offer in workplaces.
- **Development of a talent pipeline** of Aboriginal staff through the **co-design** of training and employment programs with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to increase employment in local areas and in key roles.
- **Co-designing** services and policies with Aboriginal people and communities in ways that make a difference and build the department’s capability to continuously improve.
- Developing **partnership and collaborative** approaches within the health and **human services sector** to enhance Aboriginal employment opportunities.
- Development of a **cultural safety framework** that outlines the department’s pathway to cultural safety for our employees and clients.
- Applying a **diversity and inclusion** lens to cultural learning for all staff within the department together with unconscious bias training.
- Adopting a **cultural learning spectrum** that is incorporated into all position descriptions and assists the department in creating a **culturally safe** workplace.
Senior Aboriginal leadership creates the authorising environment that enables innovation and delivers sustainable outcomes.

Focus area 1
Profile and leadership

The department has important relationships with the Victorian Aboriginal communities. These relationships stem from the significant over-representation of Aboriginal people in many social measures including health, child protection and homelessness. The department has responsibility in all these areas to deliver policies and services. Building the department’s relationship and profile with Aboriginal communities is vital to the success of this strategy.

Aboriginal communities are key stakeholders and share a common interest in positive outcomes for Aboriginal people including employment and career development. The department is committed to creating and driving workforce change that empowers Aboriginal people to take on leadership roles now and into the future.

Actions
To raise the profile and develop leadership for the strategy the department will:

- Develop a monitoring and accountability structure that provides clear oversight and accountability.
- Provide supportive leadership through all managerial levels and sectors of the organisation.
- Identify and appoint champions within the department to promote key messages internally and externally.
- Develop principles of co-design that focus on enhancing the profile and reputation of the department through engagement and relationship building with Aboriginal communities.
- Develop a job shadowing secondment program with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.
Focus area 2
Recruitment

In the last five years there has been significant focus on creating jobs for Aboriginal people across the private and public sectors. This has created a highly competitive environment for both qualified and experienced talent. The challenge for the department is to engage with other partners – including the Aboriginal community-controlled sector – in order to develop the talent pool.

The department will also adopt some new approaches to increasing the recruitment of Aboriginal staff. This will include looking for opportunities to work collaboratively with professional associations, peaks and unions to reach Aboriginal candidates with varying levels of skills.

Actions

To develop the pool of talented Aboriginal employees the department will:

• Partner with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to develop a locally focused traineeship program that will provide a pathway to full-time employment.
• Develop a scholarship fund targeting tertiary level students wishing to undertake studies in fields of work related to employment opportunities at the department.
• Invest in school-level scholarships to encourage year 12 (or its equivalent) completion rates in Aboriginal communities.
• Invest in Aboriginal identified participants for the Career Trackers internship program in child protection and generalist streams.
• Implement a department-specific graduate recruitment program targeting Aboriginal graduates.
• Explore the establishment of a professional network of Aboriginal people with qualifications in the health and community sector (similar to the Tarwirri – Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria).
• Develop Aboriginal employment resources and promote employment at community events and expos.
• Continue to advertise roles in the Aboriginal media and circulate opportunities through Aboriginal networks. Develop a social media campaign targeting Aboriginal people.
• Explore opportunities to work collaboratively with the sector, professional associations, peaks and unions to reach Aboriginal candidates with varying levels of skills.
• Identify roles across the department in which formal qualifications are not mandatory and rewrite position descriptions to focus on core competencies and experiences.
• Review position descriptions for identified Aboriginal roles to ensure that they are written in plain English.
• Explore new practices for interviewing Aboriginal candidates including opportunities for candidates to demonstrate skills and knowledge.
Focus area 3

Retention

The department currently employs 126 Aboriginal people across a range of roles in many portfolios including: disability, child protection, housing support, youth justice and children, youth and families. Over 50 per cent of the Aboriginal workforce have been with the organisation for less than three years and a number of these people have leadership roles.

The retention of staff is strongly linked to how safe and valued they feel in the workplace and increasing career development opportunities.

Actions

To retain Aboriginal employees the department will:

• Implement a professional development program for all Aboriginal staff that is focused on realising the potential of individuals.
• Develop a compulsory training program for managers that focuses on cultural safety and assisting individual career and professional development.
• Improve exit interviews to gain insight into the success of initiatives and the reasons why staff leave the department (for example, promotions).
• Ensure Aboriginal staff are represented on key departmental committees such as the Aboriginal Outcomes Committees.
• Establish divisional and statewide Aboriginal Staff Support Networks. Continue to develop the annual Aboriginal Staff Support Network conference, ensuring innovation and best practice approaches.
Creating an environment which embeds cultural perspectives in all dimensions of the organisation is fundamental to the cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal people working within the department.

The department has been building its cultural inclusiveness over a number of years through reconciliation action plans, the Wirrigirri reconciliation program and the delivery of Aboriginal cultural awareness training. The department also has the Moondani: Aboriginal inclusion action plan 2015–2018. However, more specific measures are required, to make the department an inclusive and culturally safe place to work.

**Actions**

To develop an inclusive workplace the department will:

- Strengthen the fair and ethical workforce strategy to be inclusive of providing a culturally safe workplace.
- Develop a cultural safety framework that defines cultural safety, incorporates a cultural learning spectrum and includes unconscious bias components to the cultural awareness program.
- Strengthen the positive and fair workplace policy to include the reporting of racism.
- Develop a cultural safety in the workplace campaign, focused on valuing diversity including specific messages relating to Aboriginal employees.
- Incorporate unconscious bias training into its cultural training package.
- Incorporate cultural competency expectations into all position descriptions across the department.
- Create a cultural resources hub that holds general information about Aboriginal employment and supporting Aboriginal employees.
- Continue the Wirrigirri reconciliation program.
Focus area 5

Induction

Induction plays an important role in the recruitment and retention of employees. At the department, some training is provided online and other components are delivered in person.

The department’s induction process can vary quite considerably, depending on the area, the role and the manager concerned.

New starters can sometimes feel overwhelmed by a new workplace. Providing new staff with a workplace buddy can assist them to settle into a workplace more comfortably. In the case of Aboriginal staff, another Aboriginal person is desirable in the role of a buddy, where possible.

Actions

To improve the induction process for Aboriginal employees, the department will:

- Review the current induction process to ensure that it incorporates the department’s commitment to Aboriginal outcomes, inclusive workplace policy and expectations of behaviour.
- Create a video resource as a part of the departmental induction process that can be viewed on the hub.
- Implement a workplace buddy system for all Aboriginal new starters.
- Develop a staff reporting tool to identify new Aboriginal staff to enable the Aboriginal Employment Unit to:
  - Make contact via email in the first instance and follow up with either a phone call or face-to-face contact to welcome staff to the department and inform them about the supports available.
  - Offer intensive support and outreach to Aboriginal recruits and their managers for up to four months.
Focus area 6
Development

The current data confirms that there are minimal numbers of Aboriginal people who hold senior roles within the department. Aboriginal staff surveyed for input into the strategy highlighted that they were very interested in professional development and career advancement within the department. Many also expressed an interest in having careers that flourish and recognition for contributions they make to influence change within Aboriginal communities.

Actions

To extend professional development and careers for Aboriginal employees, the department will:

- Implement a professional development program for all Aboriginal staff that is focused on realising the potential of individuals.
- Provide scholarships to VPS 5 and VPS 6 staff to undertake the Graduate Certificate of Management (Public Sector) through the Institute of Public Administration Australia, Victoria Division (IPAA Victoria) and La Trobe University linked to career advancement opportunities into more senior roles.
- Actively identify Aboriginal staff for leadership programs such as the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZOG), the Williamson Community Leadership Program and the Cranlana Leadership Programme.
- Establish a Secretary discretionary scholarship fund for all levels of staff. This scholarship will focus on the value development of staff.

Growing Aboriginal leaders is an essential component of development alongside growing individual careers. This in turn will ensure greater diversity in policy.
The governance, monitoring and reporting of the strategy is critical for achieving the intended outcomes. The overall accountability for the strategy sits with the Department of Health and Human Services Executive Board.

Progress will be monitored by the Aboriginal Outcomes Committee. The Secretariat and central coordination functions will be undertaken by the Diversity and Inclusion Unit, People and Culture Branch.

Figure 2: Operational governance, monitoring and reporting for the strategy
Governance

- The **Executive Board** will set the authorising environment, has overall responsibility and will provide leadership to drive the changes required.

- The central **Aboriginal Outcomes Committee** will oversee the strategy and make strategic recommendations to the Executive Board.

- At the divisional level the **Aboriginal Outcomes Committees** will provide divisional leadership, and together with **People and Culture**, oversee the implementation of the strategy at operational levels.

  The committees will report to the divisional executives who have a role to report directly to the central Aboriginal Outcomes Committee.

  These committees will be required to set divisional targets with a strong emphasis on child protection and youth justice targets.

- The **Diversity and Inclusion Unit, People and Culture Branch** will play a critical role in providing guidance, advice and day-to-day decision making around the strategy.

  The unit will develop an annual implementation plan for endorsement and reporting through Aboriginal Outcomes Committee governance arrangements.

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**Aboriginal employment**

Careers that value people, families and communities

For information about jobs and careers that aim to enhance the wellbeing of all Victorians email: **diversityinclusion@dhhs.vic.gov.au**

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