

**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION  
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**ATTACHMENT WS-10 TO STATEMENT OF WENDY MAREE STEENDAM**

Date of document: 9 July 2015  
Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria  
Prepared by:  
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This is the attachment marked **'WS- 10'** produced and shown to **WENDY MAREE STEENDAM** at the time of signing her Statement on 9 July 2015.

Before me:



**An Australian Legal Practitioner within  
the meaning of the Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)**

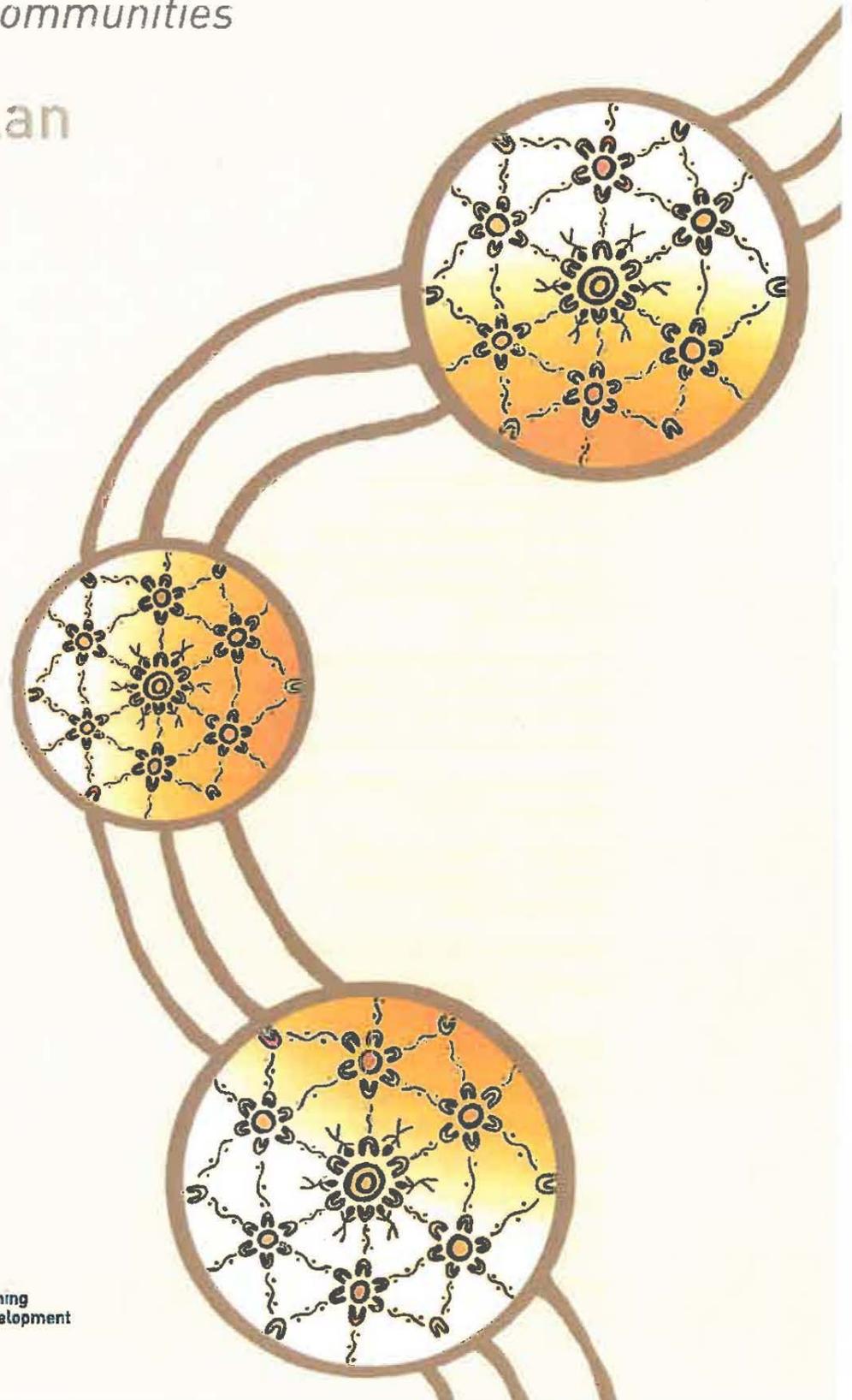
Attachment WS-10

# Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families

*Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities*

## 10 year plan

Second Edition



Published by  
Aboriginal Affairs Victoria  
Department of Planning  
and Community Development  
1 Spring Street Melbourne Victoria 3000  
Telephone (03) 9208 3244  
October 2008

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Authorised by the Victorian Government,  
Melbourne, Victoria

Printed by Stream Solutions  
Level 3, 157 Spring Street  
Melbourne 3000

Designed by The White Studio

ISBN 978-1-921331-90-9

## **Accessibility**

If you would like to receive this  
publication in an accessible format,  
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This publication is also at  
[www.dpcd.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au)

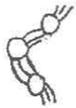
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## Cover Artwork

The front cover is styled on a design by Catherine King from Geelong. It represents families and communities staying strong together by helping each other, and the elements depicted are:



**A running waterhole to show how the culture is moving forward.**



**Families sitting together, talking and keeping close.**



**Communities coming together as a group.**



**Travel between families and communities so they can work together and help each other.**

## Letter of Introduction

The Indigenous community and Victorian Government members who have signed this plan present *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan*.

This 10 year plan was written by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum of Indigenous community representatives from the 10 regions across the State, Indigenous organisations and senior representatives from government departments. Our work grew out of our respect for Indigenous culture and history and our joint concern over the levels of violence in Victoria's Indigenous communities.

In 2003, the *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report* stated that each day one in three Indigenous people in Victoria are the victim, have a relative that is the victim or witness an act of violence. This violence is not part of Indigenous culture. Through this plan, we seek to build on Indigenous cultural norms and history to make Victoria a safer place for all Indigenous families.

This plan outlines our vision for the next 10 years, the objectives for us to reach and the specific actions we need to take. It is a living document which will guide, inform and direct joint efforts of the Indigenous community and the Victorian Government to reduce Indigenous family violence.

Creating a safer Victoria and promoting healing will take many years, particularly given the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people and the effects of transgenerational abuse and trauma, but important achievements have already been made and we look forward to further positive changes in future years.

We commend to you this plan as our contribution to the journey of healing ahead of us.

**The Indigenous community  
and the Victorian Government**  
(refer next page)





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**Gwenda Black**  
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*Lily D'Ambrosio*

**The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP**  
Parliamentary Secretary, Community  
Development & Chairperson of the Indigenous  
Family Violence Partnership Forum

**10 year plan**      **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families:  
towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities**

**Vision overview**      The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government, in partnership, will lead the development of a safer Victoria for all Indigenous families and communities.

**Values**

- Safety and security for victims of violence
- Strong community leadership and positive role models
- Shared responsibility and support for one another
- Healthy lifestyles, harmonious relationships and respect for self and others
- Cultural integrity/respect and cultural safety within Indigenous and mainstream services
- Healing for victims and perpetrators, and
- No more violence – in the home, in the family, in the community or in the workplace

**Objectives**

**Cultural Safety**  
**Healthy Families**  
**Education Awareness Prevention**  
**Safety for Victims**  
**Accountability**  
**Healing**  
**Service Capability**  
**Research and Evaluation**

**Victorian Government policy environment**

*Growing Victoria Together*  
*A Fairer Victoria*  
*Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*  
*Government Response to Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Report*  
*Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy*  
*Aboriginal Justice Agreement*  
*Aboriginal Human Services Plan*  
*Children Youth and Families Act*  
*Wannik Education Strategy for Koorie students*  
*A Way Forward – Violence Against Women Strategy*  
*Victoria’s plan to improve outcomes in early childhood*  
*Elder Abuse Prevention Implementation Strategy*

## Vision: where we are heading

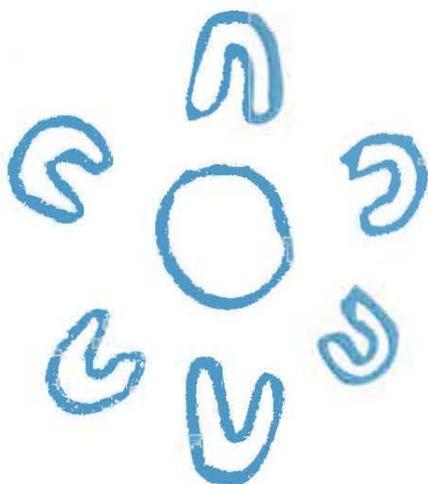
The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum has a vision and guiding principles which underlies the values, achievements, objectives and actions we undertake over the next 10 years.

### Our vision for 2018

Families are our heart and soul. They generate dreams and values, ideals and visions for our children.

Actions and programs strengthen, honour and respect Indigenous individuals, families, communities, cultural heritage and cultural practices. We are committed to breaking the cycle of indigenous family violence.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government, in partnership, will lead the development of a safer Victoria for all Indigenous families and communities.



## Guiding principles

To guide all elements of the plan towards the vision, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum established nine principles for developing and implementing policies and programs:

1. **Family violence is not part of Indigenous culture.** As stated in our Vision: 'Families are our heart and soul. They generate dreams and values, ideals and visions for our children.' Family violence is a crime and is unacceptable within the Indigenous community. Safety and security for victims of violence is our number one priority.

---

2. **Complex nature of family violence within Indigenous communities.** In an Indigenous community context, family violence includes a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural and economic abuses that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities.

---

3. **Indigenous culture.** Indigenous Victorians are the First Peoples of our state. We recognise the uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous culture, society and history in Victoria and promote reconciliation that gives proper recognition and respect to the Indigenous people of Victoria. We acknowledge Elders as the keepers of this rich history and we value, respect and protect them. The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government agencies work together in a respectful manner to effectively develop integrated and culturally competent responses to family violence in Indigenous communities that incorporate Indigenous history, values and parenting experience.

---

4. **Partnership, transparency and accountability.** Honesty, mutual respect, trust, accountability, transparency in decision making and shared recognition of each partner's role and responsibilities enables the partnership between the Victorian Government and Indigenous community. To maximise the effectiveness of all service provider and partnership arrangements, members of the Partnership Forum actively promote transparency and accountability in all work on Indigenous family violence.

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5. **Adequate resources.** The provision of adequate funding and resources is an essential element in the prevention and elimination of family violence in the Indigenous community. We ensure these resources achieve long term, sustainable improvements in the Indigenous community and Victorian Government practice.

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6. **Empowering Indigenous communities.** In recognition of the principle of Indigenous self management and self-determination, we recognise, advocate and promote the need for Indigenous people to lead the process at all levels.

---

7. **Local solutions to local problems.** We recognise the requirement to support, empower and enable communities to develop solutions to prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Indigenous communities through the core leadership of the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups and the Partnership Forum.

---

## 8. Holistic healing approach to family violence in Indigenous communities.

We appreciate the importance of a holistic healing approach to family violence in Indigenous communities based around family and Indigenous community strengthening, collaborative approaches, appropriate resources and flexible program and service delivery arrangements.

## 9. Early intervention, prevention and education.

Indigenous community and Victorian Government responses to family violence in the Indigenous community are based on our support for early intervention, prevention and education.

The Guiding Principles have equal status to and should be read in concert with the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy Principles (See *Appendix 1*).<sup>1</sup> Through these principles, the Victorian Government acknowledges that due recognition and respect will be given to the unique knowledge, skills and expertise which Indigenous people bring to the service system.

<sup>1</sup> The Principles of the Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy in Victoria reinforce that freedom from violence is a fundamental human right shared by all Indigenous people in Victoria. Protection of this right means that people who may experience particular vulnerability to violence, usually women and children, but also Elders and men, must be protected and those who use violence must be held accountable for their actions. These Principles are narrower in focus than those of this Plan, but are congruent with the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Key Values and are part of the broader policy environment addressing family violence in Victoria. See *Appendix 1*

## Values

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum has identified seven clear Values for preventing and eliminating family violence (six of these mirror those developed by the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce).

These values are:

- **Safety and security for victims of violence**
- **Strong community leadership and positive role models**
- **Shared responsibility and support for one another**
- **Healthy lifestyles, harmonious relationships and respect for self and others**
- **Cultural integrity/respect and cultural safety within Indigenous and mainstream services**
- **Healing for victims and perpetrators, and**
- **No more violence – in the home, in the family, in the community or in the workplace.**

These values guide the plan.

## Background: where this plan began

### Rationale

Victoria's 30,000 Indigenous people are the inheritors and custodians of many diverse Indigenous cultures of Australia. These cultures survive today in differing forms in Victoria's Indigenous communities in their various urban, regional and rural settings as expressions of both the resilience of Indigenous traditions and Indigenous peoples.<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous children in Victoria are born into a broad community of care that consists of immediate family, Elders, extended family and the local community.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the level of disadvantage, the Indigenous community is vibrant and actively seeking to address the issues that they face.

Notwithstanding the strong leadership demonstrated by the Indigenous community, significant investment by the Victorian Government and the fact that the majority of Indigenous families are loving and supportive, family violence in the Indigenous community remains a major challenge.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce estimated that: *'One in three Indigenous people are the victim, have a relative who is a victim or witness an act of violence on a daily basis in our communities across Victoria.'*<sup>4</sup>

In response to the unique historical context in which family violence occurs, the Indigenous community has called for a holistic approach to family violence that addresses the legacy of the past and seeks to heal individuals, families and communities. There is a shared recognition between the Victorian Government and the Indigenous community that solutions to family violence lie within Indigenous communities themselves and that Indigenous people must lead the strategy which will prevent and eliminate family violence in the Indigenous community.

### Context

Victoria's Indigenous people are amongst the oldest continuing, living cultures on earth. Indigenous cultures are deep, complex and holistic systems which unite a sense of spiritual identity with economics, ecology, law, politics, education and family relationships.

In Indigenous communities, nurture and care is the responsibility not just of parents but of the extended family. Community Elders also play a critical role, particularly in education and the maintenance of culture. The importance of strong cultural connections is seen as fundamental to increasing resilience in the Indigenous community. Indigenous music, art, film, dance and theatre productions are key expressions of contemporary Victorian Indigenous culture.

Throughout the year, Indigenous communities hold a range of activities that celebrate Indigenous culture and demonstrate the creative resilience of today's Indigenous cultures.

Family violence is an issue of serious concern to Indigenous families and communities in Victoria and throughout Australia. It is recognised that family violence is adversely affecting the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people, families and communities.

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and encompasses a diversity of regional, kinship and tribal identities. In using the term Indigenous to refer to peoples, communities and families, this plan acknowledges the rights of Indigenous peoples upheld in international law – including identification by Indigenous people of a historical continuity between pre-colonial Indigenous societies and Indigenous societies today. In Victoria, Koori or Koorie is used to refer collectively to Indigenous inhabitants of southeast Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Many Indigenous children have an Indigenous and non-Indigenous parent. See also footnote 9 regarding relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Victoria.

<sup>4</sup> *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Report, 2003, p. 4.*

### Definition of family violence

Indigenous definitions of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in the mainstream.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force defined family violence as: *'An issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.'*<sup>5</sup>

Indigenous family violence encompasses a range of acts that are criminal, such as physical and sexual assault, and non-criminal, such as emotional and spiritual abuse. Community violence, or violence within the Indigenous community (often between Indigenous families), is also an emerging concern for local areas in Victoria. This violence contributes to overall levels of violence reported by Indigenous people and the trauma experienced within families and kinship networks.<sup>6</sup>

Family violence includes intergenerational violence and abuse, affects extended families and kinship networks. An individual can be both a perpetrator and a victim of family violence.<sup>7</sup>

### Scope of the problem

Indigenous community consultations in the Victorian Indigenous community have revealed continuing high levels of:

- Partner abuse
- Elder abuse (physical, psychological and financial)
- Youth abuse (assaults involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people)
- Assaults between extended families as a consequence of drug and alcohol misuse
- Large numbers of Indigenous people presenting at court on assault charges
- Sexual abuse, and
- Child abuse and neglect.

Current information on the incidence of family violence against Indigenous women is limited but estimated to be significantly higher than the general population.<sup>8</sup>

Family violence affects many Victorians (one in five women are affected at some time in their adult lives) including many Indigenous women, who are in relationships with non-Indigenous partners.<sup>9</sup> Violence is certainly a significant contributor to preventable death, disability and illness of all Victorian women aged 15-45 years.<sup>10</sup>

5 Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report, 2003, p. 123.

6 See Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report, 2003, p. 109.

7 See Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), *Their Future, Our Responsibility*, 2002 & Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report, 2003.

8 The Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* indicates that the family violence victimisation rate may be 40 times the rate for non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women accounted for 15% of homicide victims in 2002-03. See Dr Kerry Carrington & Janet Phillips/ Parliamentary Library, *Domestic Violence in Australia*, September 2006.

9 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Women's Safety Survey*, 1996. 2001 Census figures indicate around 60% of Indigenous women are with non Indigenous partners – see Bob Birrell & John Hirst, *Aboriginal couples at the 2001 Census*, *People and Place*, 10:3, 2002. Indigenous identification in censuses, surveys and administrative data collections is inconsistent across government and non-government organisations and service providers. Most data collection uses self-identification to determine Indigenous status and previous practice regarding the differential treatment of Indigenous people and other Australians or other personal concerns may impact whether or not a person identifies as Indigenous to government and non-government organisations. See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Recent Developments in the Collection of Indigenous Statistics', *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 2004.

10 VicHealth and Department of Human Services, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, June 2004.

Family violence also has a devastating impact on Indigenous men who experience higher levels of victimisation than is the case in the general community. National data suggest that between 1999-2001 Indigenous men were eight times more likely to be hospitalised for assault than non-Indigenous men (nationally, Indigenous women were 28 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of assault than other women in the same period).<sup>11</sup>

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force identified communities' need to create safe ways to disclose child and sexual abuse in particular and that more research was needed to determine the scope of the problem. Family violence is the single biggest risk factor for child abuse notifications to be substantiated in Victoria and is present in 64% of cases affecting Indigenous children. Indigenous children are around 10 times more likely to be victims of abuse with the highest proportion relating to emotional abuse.<sup>12</sup> Family violence and its implication in the abuse of Indigenous children as observers of violence, poses a serious developmental threat to the health and welfare of Indigenous children in Victoria. The 2006 census indicates that children under 13 years old make up approximately 32% of the Indigenous population in Victoria (compared to 16% of the non-Indigenous population).<sup>13</sup>

As detailed in the *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report*, the majority of perpetrators of violence against Indigenous people are men (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous).<sup>14</sup> Indigenous male perpetrators often have experienced inequity, violence and transgenerational trauma that contribute to the current levels of Indigenous family violence.<sup>15</sup>

From an Indigenous perspective, the causes of family violence are located in the history and impacts of white settlement described above and structural violence of race relations since then such as:

- dispossession of land and traditional culture
- breakdown of community kinship systems and Indigenous law
- racism and vilification
- economic exclusion and entrenched poverty
- alcohol and other drug abuse
- the effects of institutionalisation and child removal policies
- inherited grief and trauma, and
- loss of traditional roles and status

All of these factors are seen as contributing to high levels of distress within the Indigenous community, which is often demonstrated through destructive behaviours such as substance abuse, self-harm and violence.

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Cat No 4704.40, 2003.

12 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child Protection Australia 2006/07*, Table 2.8 and Table 2.10, 2008.

13 2006 Census table 20680, *Indigenous Status by Age by Sex - Victoria*, accessed on <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/>

14 Fadwa Al-Yaman, Mieke Van Doeland and Michelle Wallis/Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, November 2006.

15 See *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report*, 2003 p. 81 & 145.

## Process

The process towards the development of *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* began as a response to national, Victorian and local communities' concern about the need to improve efforts to prevent and stop Indigenous family violence. The process also recognised that because family violence is such a broad issue, detail on related government initiatives such as child abuse, women's safety and the accountability of perpetrators are not detailed in this plan, but are an integral part of strategies to reduce family violence.

## Indigenous community

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups have a leadership role in implementing community-led responses that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in the Indigenous community. These groups are an inclusive mechanism for the Victorian Indigenous community to develop local responses to family violence matters, ensuring they are responsive and culturally relevant to Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

As recommended in the taskforce report and by the Partnership Forum, the community-led approach is the agreed implementation model under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and specifically for this plan. This includes a core role for the Partnership Forum and the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups in the implementation planning process, review and further development of this plan.<sup>16</sup>

The Partnership Forum remains the key mechanism for an ongoing partnership between Indigenous communities and the Victorian Government in implementing and reviewing the actions and strategies contained in this plan.



<sup>16</sup> *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report*, 2003 p. 198-199.

The Regional Action Groups have also developed Regional Action Plans, setting out priorities in each region of Victoria.

Other key functions of the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups are to:

- Develop expertise and build community capacity in developing solutions to family violence in Indigenous communities
- Work towards encouraging best practice for family violence service delivery at local and regional levels
- Advise on preventing, reducing and responding to Indigenous family violence as well as related community issues.
- Provide a focus for the development of Indigenous community awareness and understanding of family violence issues
- Engage in active problem solving and the development of local and Indigenous community based responses, initiatives and strategies for addressing family violence issues
- Develop cross agency linkages and partnerships and provide advice in relation to the provision of services to people affected by family violence
- Promote the sharing of information at local and regional levels
- Assist in ensuring that mainstream family violence services and other mainstream support services provide culturally competent services for Indigenous people and communities
- Assess local Indigenous community needs and contribute to the mapping of service provision and service utilisation, and
- Support the development of holistic approaches to family violence in regional and local Indigenous communities, encompassing the social, emotional, spiritual, physical and cultural wellbeing of families and communities. Approaches reflect the important roles of Elders, women, men, children, youth and same-sex couples

The Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups are comprised of Elders, women, men, young people and community leaders from local Indigenous communities as well as local Indigenous organisations and service providers.

The Victorian Government funds the operational budget of the Regional Action Groups and employment of Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers who provide support to the Regional Action Groups.

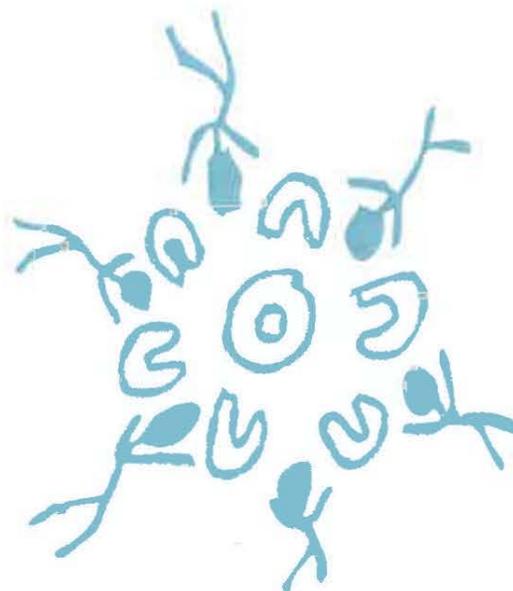
A State-wide Coordinator position has also been established to provide ongoing support to the 10 regional family violence support workers employed by the Department of Human Services to support local Regional Action Groups.

Located in the Victorian Government regions and geographical locations of Indigenous communities throughout the State, Regional Action Groups arose out of the work of the Taskforce to form a substantial part of the membership composition of the Partnership Forum and provide the key mechanism for local communities to inform the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. These groups also undertake important leadership roles in their respective communities.

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups are independent entities.

Key tasks of each group are:

- to develop an Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Plan
- monitor its effectiveness
- provide annual reports on its progress to the Victorian Government and Indigenous community
- provide advice to the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum
- participate in regional leadership networks
- contribute to the annual grants process for the Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund, and
- participate, as requested, in forums, meetings and training relevant to Indigenous family violence projects and programs at the local, regional, state and national levels.<sup>17</sup>



There are a number of other Indigenous organisations and representative frameworks which include the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, the Regional Aboriginal Services Reference Groups and, in some instances, the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. As Local Indigenous Networks and Regional Indigenous Councils are established, these groups will also play an important role in coordinating effort across sectors, particularly at a regional level.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to Department of Human Services, *Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group Operating Guidelines 2007*.

## National

In 1999, family violence in Indigenous communities was a key issue for the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) which adopted a strategic focus to support local Indigenous communities to develop holistic and integrated responses to family violence in their communities.

The following year, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed upon a framework to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Australians through promoting economic independence of Indigenous peoples and addressing their disadvantage. COAG identified community leadership, community wellbeing, family functioning and economic development as priority areas for action. Governments agreed to look at measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction. In 2001, MCATSIA ministers, in recognition of COAG emphasis on family violence, agreed to increase the level of commitment to addressing these issues in each jurisdiction.

Since 2007, COAG announced the following high level targets to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage:

- close the life expectancy gap within a generation
- halve the mortality gap for children under five within a decade
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- halve the gap in employment outcomes within a decade
- create access for all 4 year old children in remote Indigenous communities to a quality early childhood education program, and
- at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

These targets demonstrate a national commitment to working collaboratively across all levels of government. The Commonwealth Government's national apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008 marks a new way forward in Indigenous affairs and shows a renewed commitment from the Commonwealth to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

## State

In accord with COAG and MCATSI's strategic focus, in 2002, the Victorian Government released the *Framework for the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy: a partnership approach between the Indigenous community and Government* which outlined a three stage process to develop and implement an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy for Victoria.

→ **Stage One:** An Indigenous-led Task Force provided the Victorian Government with advice about how to effectively address family violence within the Indigenous community. The final report was released in 2003.<sup>18</sup>

To achieve this, the Taskforce undertook consultations, forums and focus groups with Indigenous Victorians to apply their experience and knowledge to develop the most appropriate means to address family violence in Indigenous communities in Victoria.

A major role of the Taskforce was to support, enable and empower Indigenous communities to develop local solutions tailored to local conditions and local needs.

Commencing in 2002-03, funding of \$7.6 million over four years was allocated to support the development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. As part of the Strategy, 10 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups were established across the state each with an Indigenous Family Violence Support Worker employed to support these groups. The Community Initiative Fund, an annual grant round of \$650,000, supports the implementation of locally led Indigenous community based projects that aim to raise community awareness of family violence. The Regional Action Groups have provided critical advice to the Taskforce and the Victorian Government in directing strategy.

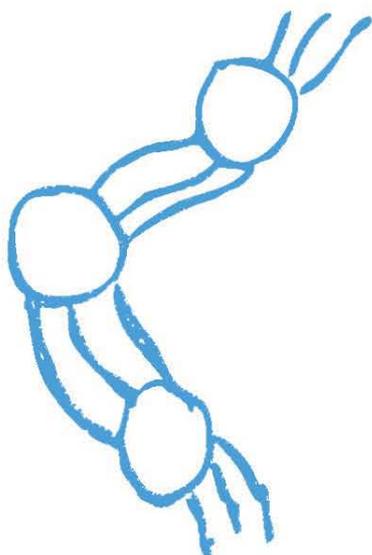
The Indigenous Family Violence Task Force delivered its final report to the Victorian Government in December 2003. This remains the foundation document for family violence policy for the Indigenous community in Victoria. It highlights 28 recommendations for immediate action. One of the key recommendations was the establishment of an Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to lead the development of a '10 year plan to prevent and eliminate family violence in Indigenous communities'.

<sup>18</sup> The Indigenous membership of the Taskforce at the time of the publication of their Final Report was Daphne Yarram (Chair), Troy Austin, Alf Bamblett, Karen Bryant, Fay Carter, Tim Chatfield, Marion Hansen, Lance James, Ella Pitt, Joleen Ryan and Alan Thorpe.

→ **Stage Two:** The Victorian Government issued a response to the recommendations of the Task Force in 2004.

The Victorian Government's response also included provision for a number of service investments in areas including Healing Services, Time Out Services, an Indigenous scholarships scheme, a new Men's Resource Advisory Service, Indigenous Family Support Innovation Projects and an extension of the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program. However, significant further action is required to fully respond to the taskforce report. The 10 year plan must provide the necessary strategic framework for the Victorian Government to respond effectively, in partnership with the Indigenous community, to outstanding Taskforce recommendations.

Since the release of the taskforce report, the Indigenous community has addressed family violence by devising and implementing new approaches; leading the policy debate and reforming mainstream service approaches to improve their responsiveness to Indigenous clients. Of all Australian States and Territories, Victoria is unique in its community-led approach to family violence.



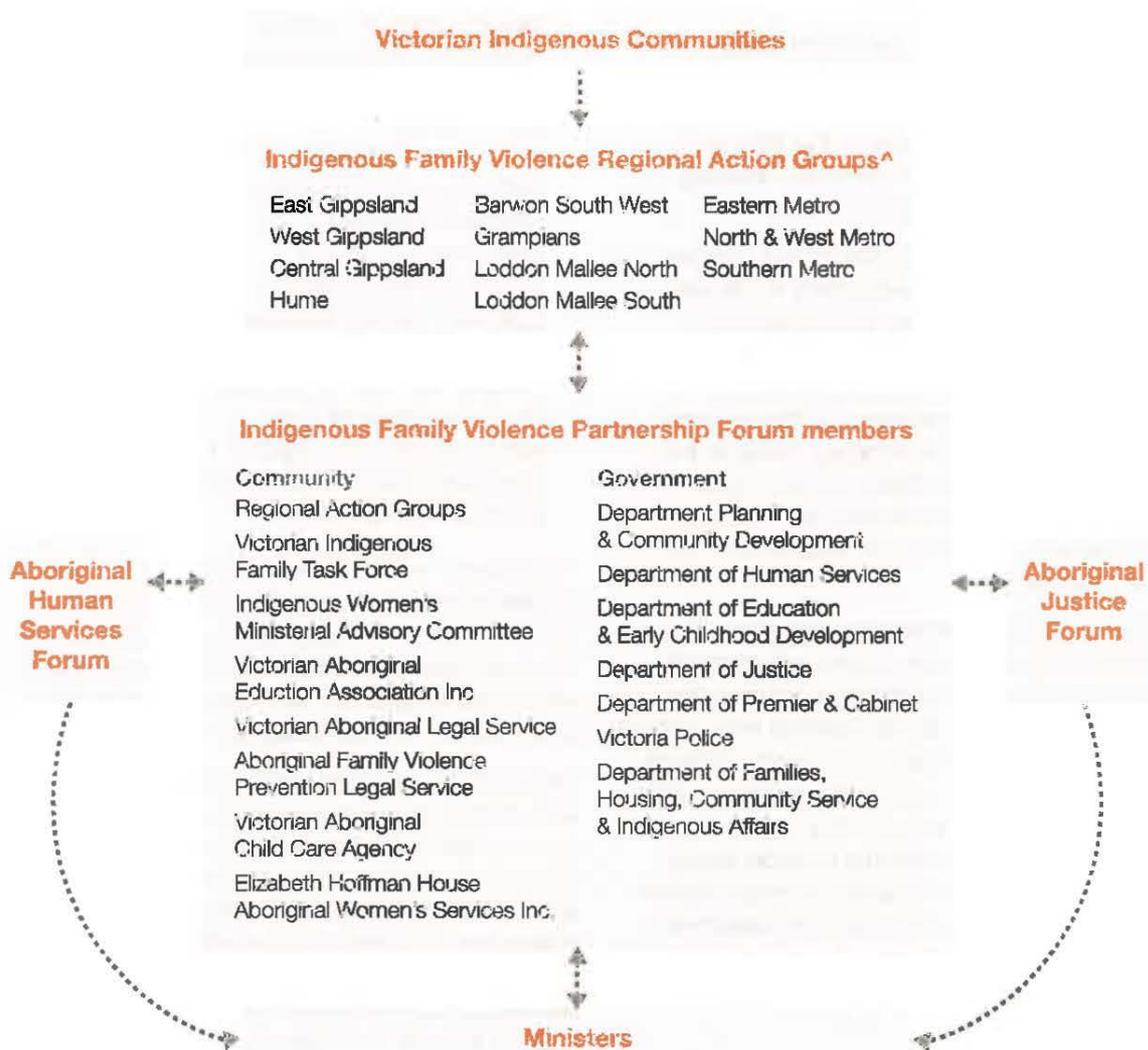
→ **Stage Three:** The Victorian Government and Indigenous community developed this 10 year plan to address Indigenous family violence, through the work of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum from 2005-2008.

The Forum was established in April 2005 and included representatives from the 10 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups, Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, Indigenous Women's Ministerial Advisory Committee, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Elizabeth Hoffman House Aboriginal Women's Services Inc. The Victorian Government representatives on the Forum are from the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Justice, Victoria Police, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Commonwealth Government. The Forum is chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development.

The Forum established terms of reference, principles and a process for the development of this plan, including work on a strategy to underpin its content. The action plans of Regional Action Groups are critical for shaping the development and implementation of the 10 year plan.

## Partnership Forum

This diagram depicts the Partnership Forum and the pivotal role of the Regional Action Groups.



<sup>^</sup> These groups are also supported by family violence support workers. See pages 14-15 for details of Regional Action Group roles.

## Victorian Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy

This plan aligns with the new approach to family violence in Victoria, which has been a key focus of *A Fairer Victoria*.

In 2005, the Victorian Government made an initial investment of \$35.1 million over four years to reform family violence services. This reform agenda was outlined in the *Women's Safety Strategy*, which is a five-year strategy to address violence against women.

The Minister for Women's Affairs and Children and Early Childhood Development is the lead Minister for family violence and convenes a Ministers group comprising the five relevant portfolio Ministers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the reforms. These Ministers are the Attorney-General, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Housing and Local Government, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Community Services.

The family violence reform key objectives are to better integrate police, courts and support services, to improve the safety of women and children experiencing family violence and improve accountability and access to behaviour change services for men who use violence. The reforms collectively aim to reduce the high levels of recurring victimisation and the broader social and economic impact of family violence. Reform outcomes are monitored to demonstrate how the system is responding to all communities, particularly those at greater risk.

The 2005 funding was allocated to services and program areas which included:

- new intensive case management for women with complex needs and increased funding for women's and children's support and recovery programs
- development of a common risk assessment framework for the integrated service system
- expanded housing options for women and children
- crisis accommodation and voluntary behaviour change programs for men
- increased resourcing for the state-wide men's referral service
- workforce development
- Specialist Family Violence Services at four Magistrates' Courts
- Indigenous Healing Services and Time Out Services, and
- early intervention programs for adolescent males who exhibit aggressive or violent behaviours.

The reforms build on the *Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* that was introduced in August 2004, and the Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates Court which was established with two demonstration courts set up in Heidelberg and Ballarat.

Regional partnerships, established as part of the implementation of these reforms, are required to develop strategic plans demonstrating how linkages and partnerships are formed with Indigenous services and how Indigenous Victorians will benefit from these reforms. A key emphasis is how Indigenous services and professionals are assisted to support access and improve responses of mainstream systems to Indigenous people.

A further \$14.5 million was allocated in the 2007-08 Budget for initiatives such as the statewide rollout of the new Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework, continuation of the Family Violence Court Division and the court directed family violence counselling program for a further two years, and new specialist family violence lawyers.

In 2008, *A Fairer Victoria 2008: Strong People, Strong Communities* committed a further \$24.7 million to tackle family violence in Victoria.

This funding will strengthen Victoria's prevention response through the development of a State Family Violence Prevention Plan. The government will also increase intensive case management, improve crisis response, and increase access to men's behaviour change programs.

In addition, specialised support will be provided to communities and people at greatest risk of experiencing family violence, including Indigenous Victorians.

\$8 million of the \$24.7 million reform package is for Indigenous specific initiatives and forms part of the initial investment of government to this plan.

This package builds on the substantial work undertaken in partnership with the Indigenous community and includes funding for intensive case management for Indigenous victims of family violence, an Indigenous specific primary prevention framework and support for local prevention projects, Indigenous men's behaviour change programs, and Indigenous workforce development.

The government will also introduce the new *Family Violence Bill* in 2008 to provide better protection for victims of family violence. A state-wide campaign will underpin the release of the new legislation and will increase community awareness of family violence, its unacceptability and the increased protections and responses available to victims.



## Victorian Government policy environment

This 10 year plan operates within the wider Victorian Government and community partnership policy framework based on achieving a fairer Victoria for Indigenous Victorians. The objectives of this 10 year plan are also those of other broad government strategies and together these policies aim to create an environment of cultural safety for Indigenous people. Relevant strategies and initiatives include:

- ***Growing Victoria Together***, the Victorian Government's overarching policy framework for making Victoria a stronger, more caring and innovative state. Core goals of *Growing Victoria Together* are 'building friendly confident and safe communities' and creating 'a fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity'.

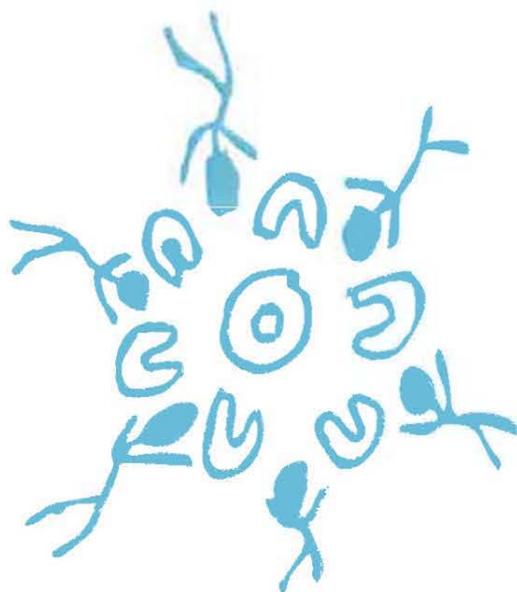
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- ***A Fairer Victoria – the Victorian Government Social Policy Action Plan***, a \$4 billion investment aimed at reducing disadvantage and creating opportunities. The initiatives and reforms in *A Fairer Victoria* include working with Indigenous Victorians across a number of social policy areas, such as family violence.

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- ***Women's Safety Strategy and Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy***, a whole of government family violence reform initiative, comprising investment of \$35.1 million over four years, is located within the policy context of the Victorian Government's *Women's Safety Strategy*, the five year strategy to address violence against women. An Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy key objective is to better integrate police, courts and support services to reduce the incidence of revictimisation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria*, Victorian Government, 2005.

- **Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework**, commits the government to achieve improvements against the strategic change indicators for the Victorian strategic areas for action. Relevant are strategic areas for action 1 (Improve maternal health and early childhood development) 2 – (Improve literacy and numeracy), 3 (Improve year 12 completion or equivalent qualification and develop pathways to employment) and 4 (Prevent family violence and improve justice outcomes). Government departments will work collectively and in partnership with Indigenous communities to achieve significant improvements against the strategic change indicators contained in the VIAF Performance Framework. The fourth strategic area for action of the VIAF (Prevent family violence and improve justice outcomes) and has strategic change indicator 4.1 (Increase in police responding to and taking action on any Indigenous family violence incident reported to them) and 4.2 (Reduce repeat police call outs for Indigenous family violence incidents). The strategic change indicators match the Victorian strategic areas for actions against which improvements can be made over 5, 10; and 15 year period in keeping with the COAG generational plan timetable.
- **Aboriginal Justice Agreement**, a unique partnership agreement between Victoria's Indigenous leaders and the Victorian Government and lead by the Department of Justice to reduce over-representation of Indigenous people in the youth justice and criminal justice system. The partnership has been in place since June 2000 and includes a diverse range of initiatives to reduce initial contact with the system and improve outcomes for Indigenous people at all stages of the youth justice and criminal justice system.
- **Aboriginal Human Services Plan**, a three year plan with an annual reporting cycle. The Department of Human Services has a key role in supporting the family violence service system and in particular the Regional Action Groups. The Plan aims to achieve a demonstrable improvement in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in Victoria in line with that of the general population by understanding causal factors contributing to the disparity in health and wellbeing, maximising the use of primary and preventative services and minimising the need for secondary and tertiary services by Indigenous people.

- ***Children, Youth and Families Act 2005***  
a law to promote children’s best interests (including a new focus on child development), support a more integrated system of effective and accessible child and family services with a focus on prevention and early intervention; and improve outcomes for children and young people in child protection and out of home care. The intent of the Act with regard to Indigenous children, families and communities is to maintain Indigenous children within their families and communities and, where this is not possible, to ensure an ongoing connection with their families, communities and culture.

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- ***Wannik – Education Strategy for Koorie Students***, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s new Education Strategy for Koorie Students in Victoria. Wannik from the Gunnai/Kurnai language meaning, ‘learning together - journey to our future’. It outlines a comprehensive package of actions, based on the findings that emerged from the review process such as reform of the government school system, engagement of Koorie students and parents plus development of the Koorie support workforce.

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- ***A Way Forward – Violence Against Women Strategy 2002***, a Victoria Police Strategy which included 25 recommendations to improve police responses to family violence and sexual assault. Since the implementation of all these recommendations, a number of other initiatives have been developed and implemented including an Indigenous public awareness campaign developed through a partnership between the Indigenous community in Mildura and Victoria police. Protocols will be developed and trialled in three locations throughout Victoria to outline how police will work with other agencies when receiving reports of family violence from the Indigenous community.

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- ***Victoria’s Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood***, which sets out a framework for reform of early childhood services in Victoria within the four policy directions set out by COAG: improving antenatal care, strengthening the health, development and learning of 0-5 year olds, enhancing the provision of early childhood education and care services and strengthening the early years workforce. The plan also recognises the Victorian Government’s commitment to ensuring that services are culturally sensitive to the needs of diverse children and families, including Aboriginal children.

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- Elder Abuse Prevention Implementation Strategy**, which resulted from budget commitments announced in June 2006 as part of the government's social policy action plan, *A Fairer Victoria*. In support of eleven recommendations made in the Elder Abuse Prevention Projects Report, *Strengthening Victoria's Response to Elder Abuse*, the Victorian Government committed \$5.9 million to protecting older Victorians from abuse. The response to elder abuse is being achieved through community education, strengthening service response to instances of abuse and the establishment of specialist legal and advocacy services tailored to older people's complex needs.<sup>20</sup> The special needs of people from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are also being considered by this strategy.



<sup>20</sup> The Strategy recognises Elder abuse can be physical, social, financial, psychological and/or the result of intentional or unintentional neglect.

## Case study

### Circle of tradition and change – art and shared yarns West Gippsland region

In Warragul/Drouin, a Local Action Group was formed from a core group of four community members who shared a similar vision for a community where violence was unacceptable. In 2005 this group became known as the Yarning Circle, holding regular meetings and community consultations.

Yarning reflects the way Indigenous people communicate sitting around either a kitchen table or outside in the fresh air to talk in a circle. In Warragul/Drouin, women yarning about themselves, their families, and issues they faced provided a two-way conversation for problem solving, addressing issues and concerns in a collective manner at the table.

Yarning Circles deal with a range of issues such as education and learning, youth, health and wellbeing, and caring for country, but it is critically important for the women and family (including men) to start their own conversations about topics important to them.

The use of yarning is illustrated in a community artwork, designed by Dale Hayes, a young Kurnai man, which tells the story of our past and present Kurnai people, sitting and yarning. Symbolism illustrated throughout the artwork represents 'shared yarns'.

The 'spirit beings' represent the soul and the spirituality of all people, both black and white, working together to bring about Peace - within themselves, their families and within their Earth community.

The feet signify the spiritual journey, including a Dreamtime travelled by all. Hands represent the work of the people, the Circles characterise how people yarn together and work together to achieve a life filled with Harmony. To enable people to accomplish harmonious relationships, they must first look within themselves and, secondly with their partners, their family and their friends.



'Peace and Harmony', by local Indigenous artist Dale Hayes, illustrates the use of yarning in West Gippsland.

## Case study

### Food for thought – family violence awareness raising annual dinners

#### Barwon South West region

'it was really valuable to have Indigenous people from high places talk about their own problems and at the same time inspire people. The dinners were about regrouping our strength and were really empowering and motivational,' said local Gunditjmarra Elder Auntie Libby Clarke about the CIF 'Tracks to Stronger Communities' event in Barwon South West region.

A television interview sparked the Elders' idea of an annual dinner to get families and communities together to raise awareness of family violence and healing. 'After seeing Larissa Behrendt speak, Auntie Libby and I thought it would be great if we could have such a prominent speaker come and talk to us about family violence,' says Southwest IFV SAAP worker Libby Lesock.

The dinner was attended by over 100 people from local and surrounding Indigenous communities of Portland, Heywood, Hamilton Framlingham and Geelong who enjoyed the first dinner, held in 2006 and over 100 people attended in 2007. Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group members were active in inviting local community members and identifying other interested people from across the region.

The inaugural speaker Larissa Behrendt, Professor of Law and Indigenous author used her speech to talk about Indigenous family violence through her story and others from around the country. Gregory Philips, Professor of Anthropology was the 2007 speaker from the Onemda Vic Health Koori Health Unit, he spoke about addictions, lateral violence in family and community and anger. He inspired people, particularly men, with stories of healing.

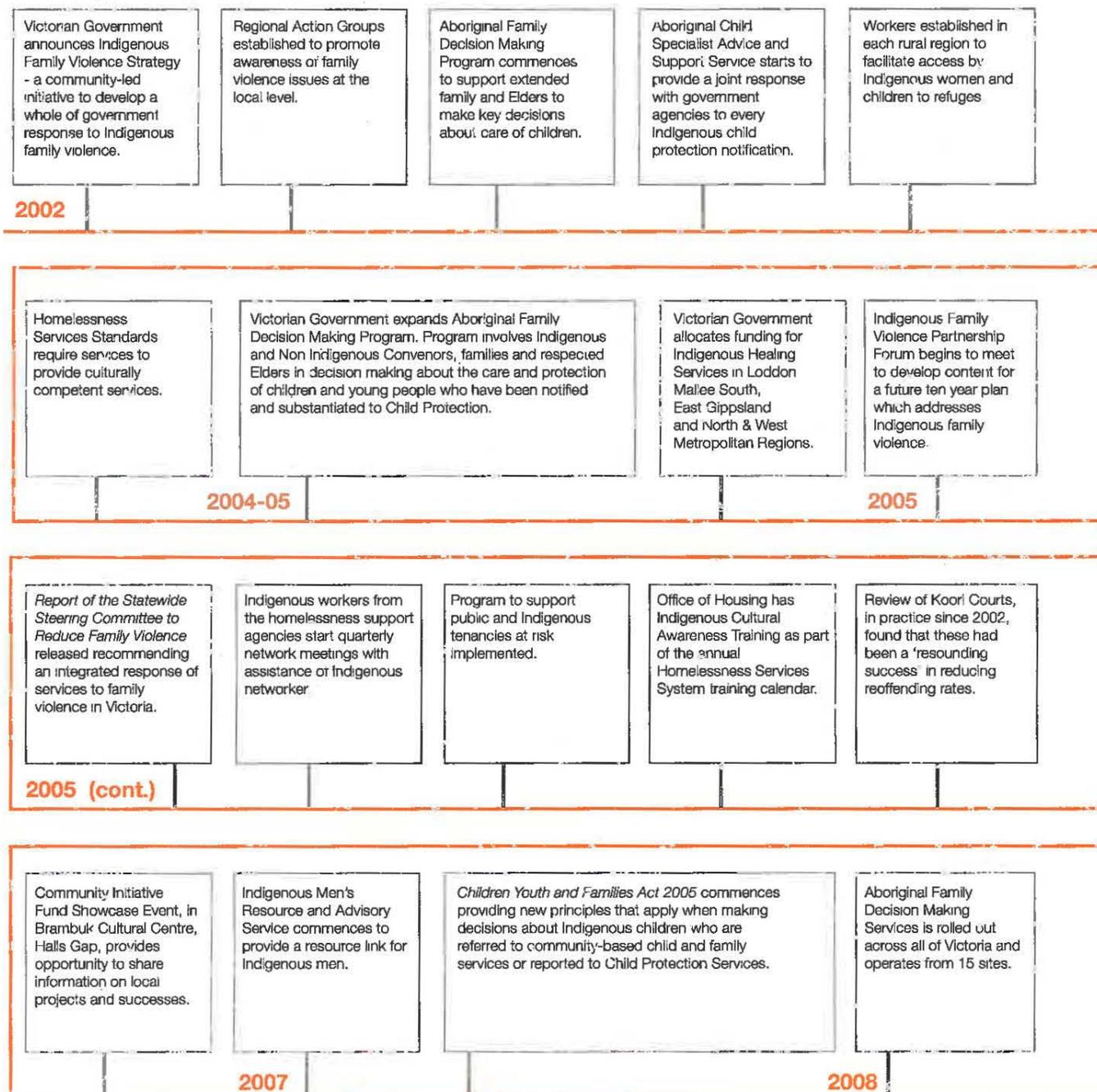
The 'Tracks to Stronger Communities' CIF Project, the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group and the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, sponsored, organised and facilitated the IFV dinners. It inspires new innovative programs to be developed through the sharing of knowledge and is a forum for community engagement that provides support and empowerment to the local Indigenous communities. Attendees also included local Koori court members, court and corrections staff, police, DHS regional staff and representatives from integrated family violence service agencies.

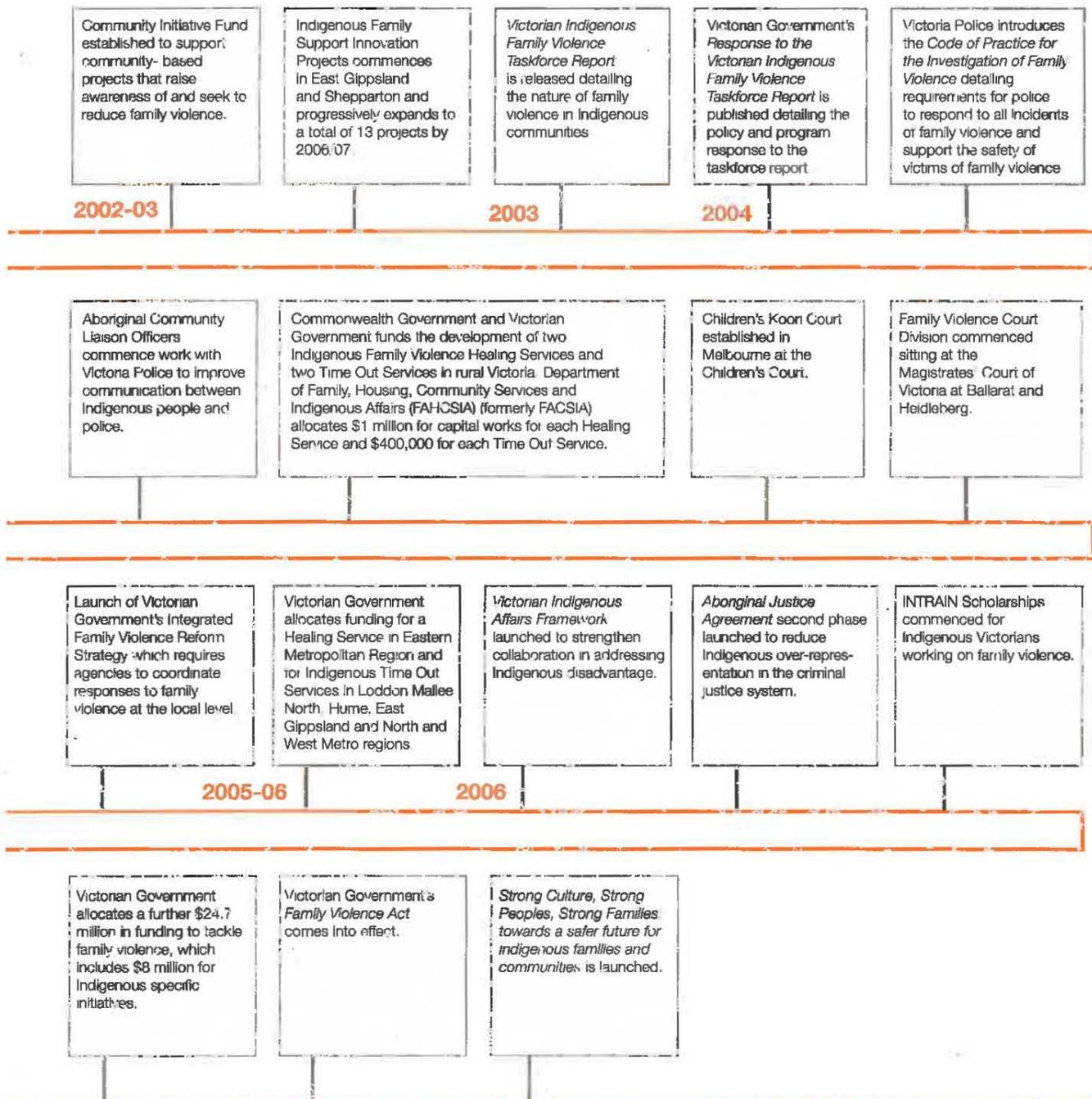
The annual IFV dinner that occurs in November is also complemented by another community strengthening event that 'Tracks to Stronger Communities' CIF project has sponsored and organised since 2006. Community members identified that participating in the Long walk and Dreamtime at the G would be another positive cultural, community strengthening and awareness raising event that would benefit community members of all ages.

In 2006, 100 people from the five Indigenous communities participated in the event. In 2007, 220 people from communities of the Barwon southwest region took part. These events are drug and alcohol free outings that allow communities to get together, provide inspiration and achievement, encourage strengthening of community spirit and reinforce positive role models for youth. These events promote community engagement and this fosters a strengthening of community that was felt by all, says Libby Lesock.

## Achievements to date

The following timeline outlines the achievements to date since the introduction of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy:





## Case study

### Creative Communities Initiative Fund (CIF) projects Southern Loddon Mallee region

A strong focus in the Southern Loddon Mallee Region is on supporting and developing group activities for men, women and children to provide mutual support and a safe place to discuss family violence issues for individuals, families and the community.

Through the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) a women's group has been set up in Echuca and in Bendigo the Men's Healing Men project, and a Creative Healing, Recreation, Music Education and Development Project for women. Through these groups people are able to come together through activities and conversations and share positive messages about families and communities.

The Echuca women's group which is auspiced by Njernda Aboriginal Corporation aims to establish a group to include Elders and young women, which will strengthen their relationships, provide mutual support and discuss family violence issues in their families and the community. Planning and participating in cultural activities will be used as the focus for discussions and building relationships.

Through the Bendigo Community Action Group auspiced by St Luke's, male community members from Bendigo and the surrounding district are supported in addressing various issues of concern and assisted in strengthening family and community relationships through a variety of weekly activities –cultural, physical intergenerational and social.

Pallert Tooree Larr (under the auspice of Annie North Women's refuge in Bendigo) have developed the Creative Healing, Recreation, Music Education and Development Project. The focus is on women and children experiencing family violence and participants are provided with materials for group work, art therapy, music, games and recreation. The project aims to strengthen the response to Indigenous women and children in the Bendigo area and explore innovative ways to connect with them, including supporting outreach approaches and increasing access to services.

"Family Violence is in our communities everyday and effects everybody in one way or another, either personally or when it touches a member of our families, a loved one, a friend or even a fellow worker. The opportunities that have been given to all people to address family violence at a community level through the CIF projects and the Regional Action Groups have, not only, been positive but have also allowed for projects and solutions, to be more relevant especially for their own communities. This has brought the ownership, not just for the problems, but for the solutions back to the everyday person to help them through these tough times." (Ann Spittles, Chairperson Loddon Mallee South Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group)

The region recognises the need to engage various groups within Aboriginal communities when addressing family violence and related issues. Through the group model culturally competent supports, messages and activities have been identified that aim to build the capacity of Indigenous people in the community as well as providing essential support.

## Case studies

### Loddon Mallee North region

#### Munatunga Elders Group

In Robinvale, the Munatunga Elders have taken a lead role in raising awareness in their community spreading the message against family violence to over 600 people.

Through Indigenous Family Violence information sessions, discussion groups and acting as mentors for other Indigenous people, the Elders used personal experience and real life examples to illustrate the problems and solutions to family violence. They also helped link young people up with their cultural traditions and heritage through mentorship and education activities.

More recently, the Elders have also helped skill up themselves and others to engage in healing activities - organising counselling training and use of narrative therapy sessions.

#### Mildura Indigenous Awareness Campaign

In 2006 Victoria Police in partnership with the Loddon Mallee North Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group, the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, Local Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria developed the Indigenous Awareness Campaign.

The campaign consisted of locally developed television advertisements, posters and pamphlets featuring local Indigenous community members highlighting that violence is not part of their culture and that victims should tell someone.

The campaign was highly successful in not only raising awareness of family violence and sexual assault but contributed to the development of better relations between the Indigenous community groups and Victoria Police.

Using a campaign which was developed by local members of the Indigenous community ensured that the messages contained within the campaign were relevant and likely to bring about change in community attitudes toward violence.

## 10 year strategic plan

### Objectives, strategies and actions for the next decade

*Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* enables a strategic approach to address Indigenous family violence. It sets out a journey for the next decade – destinations to reach (objectives), paths to take (strategies) and steps to take towards these destinations (actions).

This 10 year plan is a living document – its purpose is to make Victoria a safer place for Indigenous families. The plan itself is expected to change from a need for tertiary services to a stronger primary prevention focus and to respond to developments in the Indigenous community, the wider community and all levels of government over time.

Achievement of these objectives requires partnership approaches between Indigenous communities, the Regional Action Groups and the Victorian Government supported by investment in both improved, integrated responses and in prevention activities. The objectives of this broader strategic plan will be advanced by implementation plans reviewed by the Partnership Forum using measures of success that monitor the extent to which these objectives are being met over time. This will include periodic independent evaluation.

### Objectives

The objectives of the Indigenous family violence 10 year plan have been shaped by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to frame the actions which can prevent and eliminate family violence.<sup>21</sup>

- 1 **Cultural Safety:** Make Victoria a safer place for all Indigenous Victorians.

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- 2 **Healthy Families:** Support strong, robust and healthy families that provide a safe nurturing environment.

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- 3 **Education, Awareness, Prevention:** Intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence.

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- 4 **Safety for Victims:** Increase the safety of Indigenous families and individuals, especially women and children.

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- 5 **Accountability:** Increase the accountability and personal responsibility of perpetrators of family violence within Indigenous communities.

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- 6 **Healing:** Increase opportunities for healing for victims and perpetrators.

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- 7 **Service Capability:** Increase the cultural competency and capacity of the service system to improve responses to Indigenous family violence.

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- 8 **Research and Evaluation:** Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Indigenous family violence through ongoing research and evaluation.

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<sup>21</sup> In developing the Objectives, the Partnership Forum drew from the recommendations and values of the *Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Report*, the priorities of Regional Action Groups and recurring challenges identified at Partnership Forum meetings since 2005. See *Process* section of this plan for more details.

## Key elements of good practice for effective Indigenous family violence programs<sup>22</sup>

Previous research by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse regarding Australian and international literature on good practice in responding to family violence identified elements and strategies that have been shown to contribute to the success of Indigenous family violence programs. These elements, listed below, will help to guide the design, development and delivery of programs and services within the 10 year plan.

- 1 *Cultural grounding of programs*

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- 2 *Community grounding/development of programs and inclusive community approaches*

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- 3 *Composite programs, integration and holistic approaches*

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- 4 *Engagement of men, women and children in programs*

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- 5 *Ensuring the involvement of appropriate Elders*

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- 6 *Self-empowerment and self-esteem as capacity building by-products*

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- 7 *Examining inter-generational family history and cultural experience as a healing element*

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- 8 *Culturally competent responses, including group approaches*

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- 9 *Capacity building through networking partnerships and interagency collaboration*

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- 10 *Information collection and dissemination*

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- 11 *Training and skills acquisition*

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- 12 *Flexibility and adaptability of programs*

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<sup>22</sup> Adapted from P Memmott, C Chambers, C Go-Sam and L Thomson, *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention – Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs*, 2006.

## Case study

### Goulburn River Clan MENZ Group Hume region

What started as a weekly conversation among friends about the needs of Aboriginal men in the Goulburn Valley area has today developed into the Goulburn River Clan Menz Group.

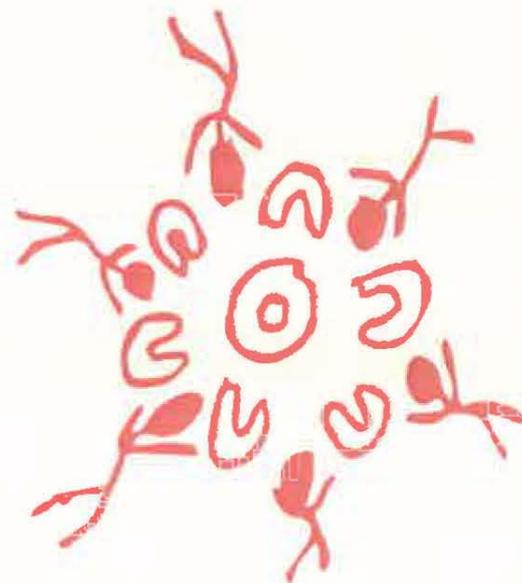
Noel Briggs, along with 5 other men helped set up the Menz Group and with assistance from the Hume Regional Action Group was able to get funding through the CIF to formally establish the group.

The group identified key Indigenous men in the Goulburn Valley region who could get involved to support other men in the community and provide a space for men to reconnect with culture and community and at the same time talk about issues such as the role of men in family and community, and address issues of family violence, etc.

Participants who have taken part in the Menz Group have been linked into cultural activities such as making Aboriginal artefacts and sharing knowledge about traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices.

Men from the group were able to share these skills and traditional knowledge with the broader community and raise awareness by taking them into schools in the area. Through these activities the men were able to reconnect with their culture and community and assist and lead a revival of Aboriginal culture in local schools and communities.

“One of the greatest benefits for the community was the re-attachment to Aboriginal Culture that was achieved. Now men know that there is support out there for them and that there is an alternative to drink and drugs when dealing with personal issues” said Noel Briggs Menz Group mentor.



## Objective 1: Cultural safety

Make Victoria a safer place for all Indigenous Victorians.

In recognition of Indigenous people as Victoria's First Peoples and of Elders as the keepers of a rich history of local cultures and traditions, cultural safety will be advanced through greater understanding of Indigenous culture by the wider community.

Cultural safety respects and empowers Indigenous communities to be involved in services which affect their health and wellbeing. It acknowledges the need of mainstream service providers and governments to analyse their culture and stop negative impacts this may have on the cultural rights of Indigenous communities. This right is supported by Victorian, national and international legal instruments which uphold the rights of Indigenous people.<sup>23</sup>

This objective is driven by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably *Wannik – Education Strategy for Koorie Students* and *A Fairer Victoria*, as outlined in *Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan*.

### Strategy 1.1

Promote respect for Indigenous culture and history.

**Action 1.1.1** Develop a culturally inclusive curriculum within the Victorian Essential Learning Standards to enhance understanding of Indigenous history and culture for all school students.

**Action 1.1.2** Develop a professional learning package with universities that supports pre-service and in-service training for teachers in the history and contemporary culture of Victoria's Koorie community.

**Action 1.1.3** Engage with educational institutions to promote understanding and respect of Indigenous culture through course material for professions.

<sup>23</sup> For example see the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which calls on States to recognise and respect Indigenous culture, history and language and way of life as an enrichment of the State's cultural identity, ensure Indigenous people's rights and freedom from discrimination, provide Indigenous people with development compatible with their cultural characteristics, ensure no decisions directly relating to their rights and interests are taken without their informed consent and that Indigenous communities can practice and revitalise their cultural traditions, customs and language. See also, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's *Social Justice Report, 2006 & 2005* editions for an outline of relevant national legislation such as the Racial Discrimination Act and the relation of such laws to international obligations. On the State level, Victoria has a *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* which articulates and enshrines in law freedoms, rights and responsibilities of all Victorians.

## Case study

### Yarning up – family and community strengthening Central Gippsland region

The NAMBUR Action Group (meaning 'to yarn up') uses community activities to get people talking about family violence. Community awareness activities are strengthened by a focus on skilling up people from youth to Elders to know more about how to respond to family violence.

Under the Community Initiative Fund grants, NAMBUR Action Group has supported a Young Aboriginal Men's Shed, providing anger management support for young men to address inappropriate behaviour, training of community members in community capacity building and working with trauma, grief and loss and a community events program to promote strong families under a project called Koori Families United.

Last year alone NAMBUR organised family outings other events for Elders, young people, women and men. Through these events they promoted positive messages such as the group's slogan 'Family violence is not part of our past. Don't make it our future.'

An Action Group worker goes to the park to talk to Indigenous people who may be in need of family violence support, or to accompany people to court. Barbeques at Morwell park provide another connection point for Indigenous people who may be experiencing homelessness, drug or alcohol misuse and other problems.

Partnerships have enabled communities in the local area to increase their skills in dealing with family violence and family strengthening. This year, the group partnered with Lifeline to increase skills of community members through trauma and grief counselling. Another focus is using the Koorie FACES program, a family strengthening program developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), to build on community activities that use storytelling and programs which engage both elders and youth to promote healthy relationships and confidence of Indigenous parents and children to address challenges in life.

## Objective 2: Healthy families

Support strong, robust and healthy families that provide a safe, nurturing environment.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will support Indigenous children to have a safe and nurturing childhood by providing primary prevention children's services and support services for their parents.

This objective is driven by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework, as outlined in *Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan*.

### Strategy 2.1

**Promote a safe and healthy start to life for Indigenous children.**

**Action 2.1.1** Increase awareness and support services to Indigenous parents to promote child safety and wellbeing.

**Action 2.1.2** Strengthen programs that increase parenting capacity, particularly for young parents, and promote the safety, health, care, learning and development needs of children.

**Action 2.1.3** Develop strategies to ensure that family services are integrated with the specialist family violence system therefore promoting holistic approaches to families.



## Case study

### Culture and change – stop the family violence campaign North and West Metropolitan region

What do women's tile-painting, basketball, trivia nights and men's gatherings have in common? They all were opportunities to spread the message – Stop the Family Violence – as part of an innovative Indigenous-led campaign in 2005.

Organisations in the North West Metropolitan region including Radio Station 3KND, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc and the Aboriginal Advancement League all contributed to social and cultural events coordinated by the Aboriginal Advancement League and supported by the Victorian Government. These events featured Indigenous people speaking about their support for respectful relationships and an end to family violence.

At the Bill Muir Basketball Carnival in Swan Hill, over 3000 people gathered to watch and play sport. The event brought together different families and all parts of the community – Elders, youth, men and women – and supported a zero tolerance approach to violence by conduct of people at the event and through promotional materials with the campaign slogan 'Hands are for holding and hugging, not hitting and hurting'. This approach was also supported through the poster artwork of Bangerang and Wiradjuri artist Leigh Saunders which depicted a man going to hit his partner but a hand reached out to stop the man from hitting.

Back in Melbourne, women gathered to paint their own messages of support for respectful relationships and an end to family violence on brightly coloured tiles. This range of men's, women's, youth and whole community activities is estimated to have involved thousands of Indigenous people over the course of the campaign.



## Objective 3: Education, awareness, prevention

Intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence.

Building on past successes of Indigenous community led approaches, the Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence.

Key features will include school-based awareness and skills development for young people, promotion of positive role models, mentoring programs, transitional cultural programs for adolescents plus parenting and family strengthening programs.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy as outlined in *Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan.*

### Strategy 3.1

**Develop and implement an evidence based prevention strategy.**

**Action 3.1.1** Develop an Indigenous-specific prevention framework for family violence which links to the wider prevention framework developed by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

**Action 3.1.2** Continue to support Indigenous community leaders, the Indigenous community and Regional Action Groups to develop locally based prevention strategies that challenge normalisation of family violence and reinforce its inconsistency with Indigenous culture, target children and young people and promote healthy relationships.

### Strategy 3.2

**Improve the capacity of Regional Action Groups, organisations and Indigenous community groups to implement local prevention programs.**

**Action 3.2.1** Develop strategies to engage respected Indigenous men, women, Elders and young people as ambassadors and spokespeople to promote communities free from violence.

**Action 3.2.2** Empower Indigenous women, build their self-esteem, cultural identity, solidarity with other Indigenous women and belief in their right to live free from violence.

## Case study

### Backing each other – empowering women Eastern Metropolitan region

Indigenous women have been given new opportunities to deal with trauma and anger and to support each other through better decision making and local leadership in Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne.

In partnership with Anglicare, women – ranging from young women to elders – had the opportunity to participate in an anger management and violence recovery program over a period of 10 weeks. They used music, dance and art to express themselves, learnt mediation skills and had individual counselling and joint discussions to talk through issues and identify actions they could take to tackle family violence. The provision of child care and a safe, culturally appropriate environment assisted in creating a space to talk about their needs and to link into services when required.

The region's work on education and skilling up of women was enhanced by the formation of the Mullum Mullum Australian Indigenous Network. About 30 women meet monthly to provide leadership, mentoring and support to women and develop suitable family violence responses and prevention activities. The group helped establish support networks between women and better information sharing about solutions to family violence. By backing each other and increasing confidence of women, the local network encouraged more women to take part in programs and services to improve their wellbeing.



## Objective 4: Safety for victims

Increase the safety of Indigenous families and individuals, especially women and children.

By providing early intervention services for Indigenous women and children who are at high risk of family violence, improving their access to crisis services when they experience violence and supporting therapeutic responses to address trauma and violence, the Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will increase the safety of victims of family violence.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the Victorian Government Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy, *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* and *A Way Forward – Violence Against Women Strategy 2002*, as outlined in *Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan*.

### Strategy 4.1

Improve access to and response of the service system for Indigenous victims of family violence.

**Action 4.1.1** Improve access of Indigenous victims of family violence to a range of services including emergency accommodation and outreach services, 24 hour support and appropriate case management provided by Indigenous and mainstream services as part of crisis response.

**Action 4.1.2** Strengthen the service system to ensure that Indigenous women and children are linked to a range of longer term supports and services including counselling.

**Action 4.1.3** Improve access to culturally competent and flexible sexual assault counselling.

**Action 4.1.4** Develop strategies to ensure that the family violence service system for men and women is linked with Healing and Time Out Services, as well as services for alcohol and other drugs, gambling, mental health and other issues.

### Strategy 4.2

Strengthen the justice system to respond to Indigenous victims of family violence.

**Action 4.2.1** Improve cultural awareness and competency of police and court responses to Indigenous victims of family violence.

## Case study

### Keeping the campfire burning – men's camps Grampians region

Originally focusing their energy around the idea of a safe house, men in the Grampians region got together to address family violence by linking local men into drug and alcohol, mental health and legal services. One of their key successes on family violence was the men's camp conducted in the bush in 2006 by Gundgi-Weiri (an Indigenous organisation meaning Men's Camp Fire Burning) and Authentic Community Training (a company providing healing programs to Indigenous men).

The camp's four days of activities included cultural talks, counselling, anger management and group therapy. Support was provided by two counsellors and a psychologist throughout the camp for the 11 participants, many of them young men but spanning ages from teenagers to Elders.

'The mix of ages is important as not all men have uncles and grandfathers to guide them,' said Chairperson of Gundgi-weiri Terry Atkinson. 'And some of the younger men had lessons for us too – at times the younger men stood up to their problems, stronger than all of us.'

Men who participated in the camp kept their bond of silence between each other about what was discussed on the camp but it had a profound impact on their lives, says Terry Atkinson: 'At the camp, each man identified what they wanted to change about their life – find employment or reconcile with their family for example – and back in their communities, the men continued to meet socially on a regular basis. The confidentiality between them was a powerful thing. It meant the men from the camp could support each other in hard times. And when one man achieved something, all of the men could really celebrate because they knew just how far he'd come.'



## Objective 5: Accountability

### Increase the accountability of perpetrators of family violence within Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will ensure that perpetrators of family violence are held accountable particularly through the justice system. Making perpetrators more accountable is also the responsibility of the whole community, which reinforces Indigenous norms against family violence.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement (Phase Two)*, *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* and *Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy as outlined in Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan*.

#### Strategy 5.1

**Develop, through the justice system, a range of support services and strategies for Indigenous people affected by family violence.**

**Action 5.1.1** Use experience, expertise and evaluations from the Family Violence Court and the Koori Court Network to develop a Koori Family Violence List to improve access to and outcomes of specialised services for Indigenous people.

**Action 5.1.2** Enhance court capacity to provide culturally competent responses to Indigenous people affected by family violence.

#### Strategy 5.2

**Promote coordinated responses to Indigenous men, women and youth who use violence.**

**Action 5.2.1** Provide assistance to Indigenous perpetrators of family violence to access appropriate services including housing, behaviour change programs, alcohol and other drugs services, gambling services, Healing and Time Out Services and support to attend court.

**Action 5.2.2** Provide support for men's groups to provide a range of culturally competent responses for perpetrators of family violence that include practical support and counselling, group programs and behaviour change programs.

**Action 5.2.3** Develop and deliver behavioural change programs for perpetrators in community, custodial and community corrections settings.

## Case study

### Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service East Gippsland region

In Gunai Kurnai language *Yoowinna Wurnalung* means Our Safe Place and the Healing Service in Lakes Entrance is aptly named to provide healing services to Indigenous victims of family violence and sexual assault.

In 2005 the East Gippsland Family violence Regional Action Group in partnership with Gippsland Lakes Community Health Service were successful in getting funding to establish an Indigenous healing service for the East Gippsland region. The Commonwealth has funded capital works for the Healing Service on a block next to the Gippsland Lakes Community Health Service and construction of the new healing service will be completed by July 2008.

The *Yoowinna Wurnalung* Healing Service based in Lakes Entrance not only delivers services locally, but links into a range of external services and outreaches to communities as far as Cann River, Orbost, Lakes Tyers, Bairnsdale, Sale and all the way to Yarram and Rosedale.

The Healing Service is focussed on providing education and prevention based programs, advocacy and referral pathways for clients as well as post intervention support for Indigenous community members and their families. The Healing Service provides programs and services targeted to support Indigenous women, children, youth, male victims, same sex couples and Elders and non Indigenous partners and family members. Since July 2006 services have been provided to over 170 clients.

"Our service has been developed with a cultural overlay that supports Indigenous victims, their children and families in a safe and caring environment. We established our service next to the Gippsland Lakes Community Health Service because we recognised the importance of building better linkages and forming partnerships with mainstream services so that we can ensure that our people have more options and better access to a range of services available to support them to heal from the traumatic effects of family violence." (Daphne Yarram, Manager, Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service).

Among a number of staff employed at the Healing Service, the Women's Co-ordinator has a major role in developing programs and activities to support women. There have been cultural camps with a focus on family violence, healing days for women of all ages, school holiday camps for young Indigenous girls, young mum's support activities, community barbecues to bring together community members and provide information on services and supports for victims. This worker has also formed good networks and relationships with mainstream agencies, and provides advice and support to mainstream agencies to ensure the programs and services are delivered in a culturally appropriate and respectful way.

The Family Coordinator, works closely with other Healing Service staff to develop and run activities for Indigenous children, youth and Elders. The Coordinator has also facilitated a school holiday program for children and youth, Elders Gathering and information day cruise, support to youth on the street on New Years Eve, service mapping and running a series of focus groups looking at the needs and support services available for young Indigenous parents, especially supports for young Indigenous fathers.

The Regional Action Group and Gippsland Lakes Community Health were also successful in 2006 in receiving funding to establish a Indigenous Men's Time Out Service and this service is being set up to run under the umbrella of the Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service and will provide independent support services for Indigenous male perpetrators of family violence.

## Objective 6: Healing

Increase opportunities for healing for victims and perpetrators.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will strengthen community-led initiatives, such as Healing and Time Out Services, that provide opportunities for healing for victims and perpetrators of family violence and facilitate a therapeutic response to trauma and violence.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the *Aboriginal Human Services Plan* and *Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy as outlined in Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan*.

### Strategy 6.1

Improve access to therapeutic programs for people who experience family violence.

**Action 6.1.1** Develop strategies to ensure that Healing and Time Out Services are part of a continuum of support that includes crisis responses, access to counselling and longer term healing opportunities.

**Action 6.1.2** Develop options for culturally competent services for Indigenous victims of sexual assault.

**Action 6.1.3** Improve referral pathways to therapeutic counselling for Indigenous victims of family violence through promotion of schemes to support access to clinical practitioners.

### Strategy 6.2

Build capacity of services to coordinate service responses to Indigenous family violence.

**Action 6.2.1** Establish mechanisms to ensure that mainstream organisations funded to provide services to Indigenous clients deliver culturally competent responses to Indigenous people.

**Action 6.2.2** Develop partnerships between family violence services and alcohol and other drugs services, gambling services, mental health services and child and family services.

**Action 6.2.3** Ensure that behaviour change programs link into a range of services which target mental health, alcohol and other drugs, gambling, literacy & numeracy and Koori cognitive development.

**Action 6.2.4** Ensure the development of Indigenous alcohol and other drug initiatives that raise awareness and reduce the impact of alcohol and other drug misuse on the Indigenous community.

## Case study

### Moving out of the shadows – healing opportunities North West Metropolitan region

'Until they have a process, such as at the camps or in the group work we do, people don't even realise the problems they have, they just live with them. They can't see into the realms of their own shadows,' says Indigenous men's worker Reg Blow from the MAYA Living Free Healing Association.

Combining cultural activities and counselling opportunities, MAYA provides an Indigenous approach to group therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and local capacity building. It focuses on culture to rebuild the strength of individuals and support networks to help Indigenous people deal with trauma and loss.

Housed in a former church, the MAYA centre in Thornbury provides a tranquil space for Indigenous men and women to gather and is bedecked with local Indigenous art. People who come to the centre for activities such as sports, meditation, art and social events such as Koori-oke can also access alcoholics and narcotics anonymous meetings, counselling, Centrelink advice, legal services and referrals for other support.

A women's day of programs and men's day of programs is conducted each week. For women, circle discussion provides a way of sharing problems and learning from guest speakers each week. For men, sporting and cultural activities, including camps, reinforce cultural identity and provide opportunities for group and individual counselling and support.

Reg Blow says addressing their underlying issues of low self esteem helps Indigenous men to move through their shadows to a state of healing: 'Once men see the power of words, the power of their own self-talk, they can tell themselves they are good people. Their talk can tell them they might not control everything but they can change their own lives. This is the start of a healing process for our men.'

## Objective 7: Service capability

Increase the cultural competency and capacity of the service system to improve responses to Indigenous family violence.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will promote Indigenous workforce development and increase the cultural competence of all service provision through cultural competency initiatives.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy and *Aboriginal Human Services Plan as outlined in Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan.*

### Strategy 7.1

Support employment, retention and development of Indigenous people in services through coordinated planning and support.

**Action 7.1.1** Review existing Indigenous workforce strategies with a view to developing training, recruitment, retention and career pathways for staff and scholarships at all levels (undergraduate, postgraduate, professional training).

**Action 7.1.2** Increase access to education for Indigenous students in courses for professions related to reducing, responding to and eliminating family violence, including health, mental health, criminal justice, housing, relevant services (such as children's services and aged care) and legal professions.

### Strategy 7.2

Ensure cultural competency of services consistently across the service system.

**Action 7.2.1** Develop cultural competency guidelines and standards for mainstream services.

**Action 7.2.2** Improve access to Indigenous cultural competency training for mainstream family violence workers and organisations.

**Action 7.2.3** Provide a targeted training program on Indigenous family violence for judicial officers and court workers to assist in the provision of culturally competent court responses and options to victims of family violence.

### Strategy 7.3

Provide tools to police to ensure provision of culturally competent responses to Indigenous victims and perpetrators of family violence.

**Action 7.3.1** Develop protocols between Victoria Police and Indigenous communities to increase cultural competency of Police staff and assist Indigenous communities in addressing family violence.

### Strategy 7.4

Strengthen service provision through formalising cross-sector and cross-agency service linkages.

**Action 7.4.1** Establish mechanisms that promote links between Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups and Integrated Family Violence Committees including cross membership and joint planning.

## Case study

### Indigenous Perspectives for mainstream services Southern Metropolitan region

Family violence service providers are now better equipped to work with and help Indigenous communities in the Southern Metropolitan region.

The *"Family Violence: From an Indigenous Perspective"* forum held in June at the Caulfield Hospital was attended by 22 mainstream service providers and three government agency representatives. Originally targeting staff in the inner south and middle regions, interest in attending was received from all over Victoria.

The forum featured a range of Aboriginal speakers talking from different perspectives of family violence. There were speakers from the Aboriginal community sharing experiences as service providers and community members talking about their perspectives of family violence as clients.

The forum showcased the work Aboriginal workers are doing in their community and helped raise awareness of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

There was also a powerful performance of *'I Don't Wanna Play House'* by Tammy Anderson.

As a result of the forum, mainstream service providers are now better skilled to work more effectively with Indigenous clients affected by family violence issues.

It has helped create a better understanding of the particular issues facing Indigenous communities and increased cultural understanding and competence in mainstream services.

The forum has also highlighted the benefits and need to establish partnerships between Aboriginal community organisations and services with mainstream services, and identified the need for more forums to educate and share information on issues related to family violence.

The forum was organised by Aboriginal staff from three mainstream community services, the Chair of the Southern Metropolitan Regional Action Group and staff from the Salvation Army Family Violence Outreach team and was funded through the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF).



Please note that this case study has been revised from the first publication of the plan in June 2008 in consultation with the Southern Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group.

## Objective 8: Research and evaluation

Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Indigenous family violence through ongoing research and evaluation.

The Indigenous community and the Victorian Government will strengthen data collection and promote ethical research into family violence to build an evidence base to better inform, evaluate and identify good practice responses of services to Indigenous family violence.

This objective is also supported by a range of Victorian Government initiatives and policy frameworks, notably the *Aboriginal Human Services Plan* and *Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy as outlined in Victorian Government policy environment in the Context section of this plan.*

### Strategy 8.1

Review ongoing initiatives to ensure effectiveness of responses to Indigenous family violence.

**Action 8.1.1** Develop a framework for the evaluation of *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* and components for review including action research drawing on experiences and expertise of Indigenous people and service providers.

**Action 8.1.2** Develop and implement a review and evaluation of the Regional Action Group model and undertake an evaluation of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum.

### Strategy 8.2

Develop mechanisms to share information on good practice actions and outcomes.

**Action 8.2.1** Strengthen information and communication about initiatives and outcomes to reduce, prevent and eliminate family violence with the Indigenous community.

**Action 8.2.2** Establish a code of ethics and a mechanism developed by the Partnership Forum to ensure independent review of Indigenous components of family violence research generated through the 10 Year Plan.

**Action 8.2.3** Document effective therapeutic and holistic healing approaches, including those being implemented in Healing Services and Time Out Services, and ensure that learnings are shared across the state.

**Action 8.2.4** Conduct men's, women's and youth forums in Victoria.

### Strategy 8.3

Improve data collection systems from mainstream service agencies to better inform service responses.

**Action 8.3.1** Victoria Police staff record Indigenous status of perpetrators and victims of family violence.

**Action 8.3.2** Undertake research to determine prevalence of family violence (including sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect sexual abuse, Elder abuse, community violence) in Indigenous communities to inform design and planning of future services.

**Action 8.3.3** Expand capacity of *Community Attitudes Survey* to capture Indigenous community views on acceptability of violence and wider community attitudes about Indigenous culture.

**Action 8.3.4** Increase local research capacity through development of Regional Action Groups.

**Action 8.3.5** Consider learnings from existing Healing and Time Out Services for future planning of Statewide service provision.

## Appendix 1

### Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Strategy Principles extract

*Strong Culture, Strong People, Strong Families* is applicable to Indigenous community and government responses to family violence specifically in Indigenous families and communities. Provided here for information is an extract from the Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Strategy Principles applicable to all government responses to family violence in Victoria:

- 1 Family Violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and unacceptable in any form.

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- 2 Physical or sexual violence within the family is a crime which warrants a strong and effective justice response.

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- 3 Responses to family violence must recognise and address the power imbalance and gender inequality between those using violence (predominantly men) and those experiencing violence (predominantly women and children).

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- 4 The safety of women and children who have experienced, or are experiencing family violence, is of paramount consideration in any response.

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- 5 The voices of women and children who have experienced violence must be heard and represented at all levels of decision making to help assist in reform.

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- 6 Men who use violence should be held accountable and challenged to take responsibility for their actions.

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- 7 Family violence affects the entire community and occurs in all areas of society, regardless of location, socio-economic and health status, age, culture, gender, sexual identity, ability, ethnicity, or religion. Response to family violence must take into account the needs and experiences of people from these diverse backgrounds and communities. Family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture.

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- 8 Responses to family violence can be improved through the development of a multi-faceted approach in which responses are integrated and specifically designed to enhance the safety of women and children.

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- 9 Preventing family violence is the responsibility of the whole community and requires a shared understanding that family violence is unacceptable.

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- 10 The prevention of family violence requires changing community attitudes and behaviour, responding to people at risk at the earliest possible stage and improving responses to women and children who experience violence and to men who perpetrate it.

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- 11 Responses to family violence can be improved through increased recognition and greater coordination of services in responding to the independent rights and needs of the child.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Victorian Government, Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria 2006.







