

Accessibility of Mainstream Services for Aboriginal Victorians

Tabled 29 May 2014

Background

- In 2011 there were 47 000 Aboriginal people in Victoria—a 40 per cent increase since the 2006 census.
- About 55 per cent of the Aboriginal population—compared with 26.2 per cent of the total Victorian population—lives in regional centres, such as Mildura, Shepparton and Portland.
 - The remainder live in metropolitan Melbourne.
- 55 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under 25, compared to 32 per cent the non-Aboriginal population.



Photos taken at Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre by Tobias Titz. Thanks to the organisations for making their premises or events available for the photographs.

Background – *continued*

3

Aboriginal Victorians face considerable disadvantage:

- Higher perinatal mortality rates—10.7 per 1 000 births —compared to 6.8 per 1 000 for the rest of population.
- Higher rates of low birth weight babies—12.1 per cent of births—compared to 6.8 per cent for the rest of the population.
- Poorer overall health status and higher rates of psychological distress.

Perceptions of government service delivery are influenced by former policies of forced removal.

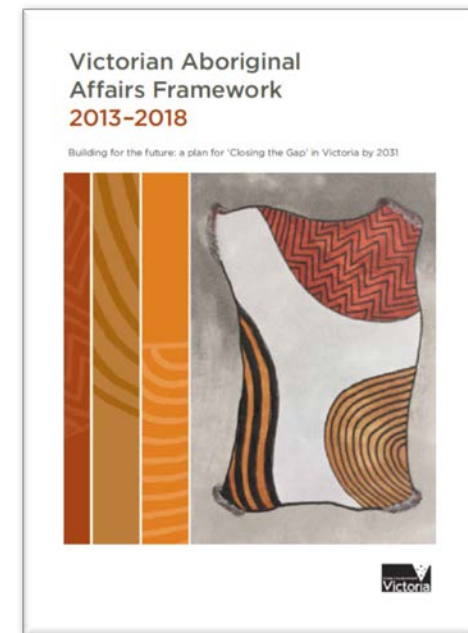
Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–2018

4

page
3

The *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–2018* (VAAF) was released in 2013.

- A whole-of-government strategic reform agenda.
- Aims to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians with engagement arrangements and stronger governance and reporting arrangements, using specific targets.
- Emphasises a holistic life course approach for Aboriginal Affairs.
- Replaced the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*.
- Provides the mechanism for integrated action across government.



Audit objective

5

page
9

The audit assessed the accessibility of mainstream services and whether departments:

- had a sound understanding of the service needs of Aboriginal people
- developed and implemented effective plans, programs and strategies to facilitate access to services for Aboriginal Victorians and address identified needs
- demonstrated how improved service access has contributed, and is expected to contribute to improved outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians
- had effective monitoring, reporting and evaluation frameworks in place—underpinned by reliable data—on service access that demonstrated the achievement of intended outcomes.

Definition of mainstream services

Mainstream services were defined as services that the general population is entitled to access, for example:

- kindergarten
- maternal and child health services
- hospital services
- public housing and homelessness services.



Audit scope

7

page
9

Audited agencies included:

- Office of Aboriginal Affairs within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (OAAV)
- Department of Health (DH)
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)
- Department of Human Services (DHS).

Audit focus

- The audit examined access to mainstream services for Aboriginal Victorians, including targeted programs and strategies designed to support access to these services.

Consultation

- The audit team consulted broadly both in metropolitan and regional areas.

Conclusions

Departments have developed programs to assist in 'closing the gap'.

- But little improvement in outcomes, and in some cases, the gap has worsened.
- There have been improvements in service access in some areas.

Lack of effective leadership and oversight has adversely affected the delivery of mainstream services for Aboriginal Victorians over many years.



Conclusions – *continued*

- Lack of accountability for delivery of actions.
- Individual departments develop and implement their own plans, with limited oversight.
 - Although some new oversight arrangements are being established.
- Little evidence that departments undertake robust evaluations to determine if their services and programs are delivering positive outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians—except for DH.



Photo taken at Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre by Tobias Titz.

Findings

10

page
xi

- Weaknesses in completeness and reliability of data that mean it is difficult for departments to measure outcomes or understand whether all eligible Aboriginal people are accessing relevant services or programs.
- Departments have not reviewed or updated their relevant plans to reflect VAAF focus on service access.
- Lack of effective collaboration and coordination in planning and service delivery between departments and service providers, and at service delivery level between local providers.

Findings – *continued*

- Improved access to maternal and child health, kindergarten, hospital services, and public housing, although improvements are mixed and may not be sufficient to meet VAAF targets.
- The Secretaries' Leadership Group is tasked with overseeing VAAF implementation and coordinating department activity—limited evidence that this is occurring.



Findings – *continued*

12

- Scope for greater community consultation, in line with VAAF and COAG principles relating to engaging Aboriginal community members at all stages of program development, implementation and evaluation.
- Successful implementation of VAAF requires improved cross-government coordination.
- Many problems with government services reflect a siloed approach to service delivery.

Recommendations

		Accept
That departments:		
1.	improve data collection and recording processes, including collaborating with other departments, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other relevant organisations to estimate Aboriginal populations for each service	✓
2.	as a priority, finalise Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plans and fully apply Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework service access criteria in service delivery plans and programs	✓
3.	engage a broad range of Aboriginal people in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating plans and programs.	✓

Recommendations – *continued*

14

		Accept
That departments:		
4.	identify and pursue opportunities to collaborate, cooperate and share data with government agencies responsible for mainstream service delivery and with service providers	✓
5.	routinely evaluate plans and programs to determine whether access is increasing and outcomes are improving and to identify where improvements are needed	✓
6.	develop internal and external reporting regimes that provide comprehensive and informative data on the progress and outcomes of departmental plans and programs.	✓

Recommendations – *continued*

15

		Accept
That the Department of Premier and Cabinet:		
7.	provides more active leadership and direction so that departmental programs and strategies comply with VAAF, and identifies and addresses increased access and improved outcomes	✓
8.	through the Secretaries' Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs, monitors the implementation of departmental plans, evaluate outcomes and monitors the development of investment logic maps that identify the funding requirements over the term of the government's commitment to VAAF.	✓

Relevant reports

- *Access to Services for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)*
- *Access to Education for Rural Students (2014)*
- *Indigenous Education Strategies for Government Schools (2011)*
- *Coordinating Services and Initiatives for Aboriginal People (2008)*



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