‘Elder teaching Aboriginal child.’

Artwork by a non-Aboriginal girl, aged 11 years, attending Orbost Primary School.
Section 2
In recent years we have seen a renewed effort to reduce inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people at all levels of government, with ambitious reform agendas aiming to close the gap. This report aims to describe current health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and their families in Victoria and, while it is not intended to produce a catalogue of all government policies and initiatives, there are a number of key initiatives that must be considered, in conjunction with the findings of this report, as they provide the overarching context for current and future reform activities for this priority population group.

2. Major Victorian and Commonwealth Government policy initiatives

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) Indigenous Reform Agenda and some specific Victorian initiatives are described below in more detail and it should be noted that there are many synergies between these initiatives. Together they provide a very powerful platform for improvement.

At a sector or program level in Victoria there is a range of both long-established and innovative strategies that aim to support Aboriginal children and their families. Some examples of these are presented in the relevant areas of this report, but more specific information can be found through the relevant Victorian government departments.

Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework

The overarching goal of the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF) is to raise life expectancy and quality of life for Aboriginal Victorians. The framework is intended to enable better alignment and integration of policy and program effort across sectors and to identify accountabilities for government departments and agencies to deliver measurable improvements against agreed indicators of Aboriginal wellbeing.

Six Strategic Action Areas have been set out under this framework:

1. Improve maternal health and early childhood health and development.
2. Improve education outcomes.
3. Improve economic development, settle native title claims and address land access issues.
4. Improve health and wellbeing.
5. Build Indigenous capacity.
6. Prevent family violence and improving justice outcomes.

The full set of VIAF strategic change indicators can be found in Appendix 10.4. VIAF and COAG Indicators that overlap with VCAMS indicators have been noted in footnotes, for information.

COAG closing the gap

The COAG Indigenous Reform Agenda aims to address the systemic and structural problems that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face, resulting in poorer health, education and economic outcomes than the general community. This reform agenda recognises the variability and complexity of issues faced by Aboriginal Australians and that sustained effort over time is required to close the gaps between the lives of Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians. COAG has set measurable and time-specific goals to improve outcomes for all Aboriginal Australians. COAG has adopted the following targets to:

- close the gap in life expectancy within a generation
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years within a decade
- ensure all Indigenous four year olds have access to early childhood education within five years
• halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade
• halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent rates by 2020
• halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

Every child, every chance
Every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of their family circumstances and background.

Developed by the Department of Human Services in extensive consultation with a wide range of people involved in the delivery of services to Victoria’s vulnerable children, young people and families, every child every chance is committed to ensuring that all our children and young people have access to nurturing and stimulating environments in which to grow and reach their full potential.

The Aboriginal components of the every child, every chance child and family welfare reforms highlight best interests, self-determination, cultural plans and connection to culture as central.

A Fairer Victoria
The Government has made a strong commitment to improve the lives of Victorian children and young people through A Fairer Victoria (Department of Victorian Communities 2005), which has a specific focus on reducing inequality. Key priorities under this strategy include: supporting those children, families and young people who are most at risk; reducing health and educational inequalities; promoting wellbeing; reducing barriers to workforce participation and strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities. Giving Victorians the best start in life, improving education and employment opportunities, health and wellbeing and strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities are priorities for the future. It was within the parameters of this strategy that the Victorian Government articulated its commitment to developing a new partnership with Aboriginal Victorians, which has been implemented through the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework (VIAF).

Dardee Boorai: Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People
The Victorian Government is also focusing on Aboriginal children and young people more specifically in accord with the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, which expressly placed responsibility on the Victorian Government to develop and promote a charter of wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal children and young people.

Dardee Boorai is an important government/community statement that commits to working together to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. The charter sets out shared values and principles and articulates key actions and measures of progress that will positively influence the lives of Aboriginal children and young people.

The charter recognises the impact of the past removal of Aboriginal children from their families and also highlights the strength and resilience of Aboriginal families and cultures. The charter is to be complemented by Balert Boorron: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020).

Balert Boorron: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020)
The Victorian Government is currently developing a 10-year plan for Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria. This plan will set out Victoria’s goals, actions and measures of progress in improving the health, safety, learning development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people across the state over the next 10 years. Balert Boorron: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020) will complement Dardee Boorai and will fulfil the requirement to report on progress, actions and outcomes for Aboriginal children as outlined in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. The plan has been developed through significant consultation with Victoria’s Aboriginal community and through reviews of the best available evidence on outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. This State of Victoria’s children 2009 has underpinned the development of this 10-year plan and as companion documents they will drive Victoria’s reform in this area over the next decade.