

# Policy Concordance: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health, Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention

VICTORIA



The Centre of Best Practice in  
**Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander**  
Suicide Prevention



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**In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention, government policies are critically important because they influence what services are available and how they are delivered – with enormous consequences for people’s lives.**

This Concordance is a collection of guides to policy and decision-making at national and State/Territory levels. It includes:

- profiles of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, government departments and agencies and other organisations with an important role in policy processes
- formal policies that describe governments’ commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and how they intend to deliver on them
- other essential documents – for example community submissions to policy processes and the most influential research reports.

The Concordance is for anyone seeking information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention policy in any part of Australia, including government and ministerial policy staff, researchers, service providers and community organisations. The focus is on current

policy documents. However some older publications are included where they have been particularly influential, and policies and strategies are included after their intended finish date if they have not yet been replaced and are still guiding practice.

Social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention are complex and multi-faceted and do not fall neatly into a single policy domain. This Concordance focuses on the organisations, processes and policies most directly related to these issues, acknowledging that important policy work also takes place in other domains – including education, justice and family services. The Concordance is a living resource and the CBPATSISP welcomes suggestions for additional inclusions.

This section of the Concordance focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention policy in Victoria. Chapters on the other States and Territories, and national policy, can be found at [cbpatsisp.org.au](http://cbpatsisp.org.au).

# Key organisations

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Organisation	Purpose
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	<p>VACCHO is the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing in Victoria, with a membership of 33 community-controlled organisations. It is the peak representative organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Victoria, and represents the Victorian community-controlled health sector through its affiliation and membership on the Board of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).</p> <p>VACCHO supports Members to deliver high-quality, culturally safe health and social services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocating on issues related to community health and wellbeing</li> <li>• strengthening support networks</li> <li>• increasing workforce development opportunities</li> <li>• partnering with government and mainstream health organisations to embed self-determination and culturally informed approaches across health services and systems.</li> </ul> <p>VACCHO operates through the principle of self-determination, seeking to embed Culture, Community and Country in all healthcare settings, to promote equitable health access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>
The Balit Durn Durn Centre	<p>The Balit Durn Durn Centre coordinates a collaborative approach to the expansion of Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) services in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and mainstream mental health services.</p> <p>It ensures there is ‘no wrong door’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking a culturally safe SEWB service and advocates for accessible culturally safe SEWB services at both mainstream health providers and local ACCOs.</p> <p>The Centre draws on clinical, research and Community expertise to coordinate best practice across services through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical, organisational and cultural governance planning and development</li> <li>• Workforce development: training, professional development activities and supporting a proposed scholarship program</li> <li>• Guidance and practical supports to build clinical effectiveness in assessment, diagnosis, and treatment</li> <li>• Developing and disseminating research and evidence for social and emotional wellbeing models and for convening associated regional and local communities of practice.</li> </ul> <p>The Centre was established in 2022 and supports the strength and advocacy of Aboriginal communities and leaders in working towards the vision set out in Balit Durn Durn, VACCHO’s submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and Balit Murrup, the Victorian Government’s 10-year Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework 2017-2027.</p>
First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria	<p>The First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria is the independent and democratically elected body to represent Traditional Owners of Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. It met for the first time on Wurundjeri Country on 26–27 July 2023. With representatives from five regions, it will engage with the Victorian Government to develop a state-wide Treaty process and timetable for transferring power from Government to Community, and empower local groups to develop their own Treaties.</p>
Treaty Authority	<p>Within the First Peoples’ Assembly, the Treaty Authority – established under the Victorian Treaty Act 2022 and <b>led by five First Peoples representatives</b> – has been established to oversee Treaty-making in Victoria and moderate and determine disputes either between First Peoples and the Government or between different Traditional Owner Groups.</p> <p>To support its independence, the Treaty Authority sits outside of the bureaucracy and does not report to a Minister. Its recurrent funding is also provided outside the usual budget cycle.</p>

## Government

Organisation	Purpose
Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission	<p>The new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission is an independent statutory authority that holds government to account for the performance, quality and safety of Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system. The Commission, created in September 2023, will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support people with lived experience to lead and partner in reform and play a key role in leading actions to reduce stigma related to mental health.</li><li>• Provide a system-monitoring and oversight role, handle complaints, conduct investigations, and promote effective complaint handling by mental health service providers.</li><li>• Publish reports on the performance, quality and safety of the mental health and wellbeing system and progress towards improving mental health and wellbeing of Victorians.</li></ul> <p>The Commission replaced the previous Mental Health Complaints Commission and operates under the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022), which commenced on 1 September 2023, replacing the previous Mental Health Act 2014.</p>
Department of Health – Mental Health	<p>The Mental Health branch of the Department of Health oversees mental health policy and standards in Victoria, including research and reporting, consumer inclusion and reform. It includes the offices of the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Mental Health Nurse.</p>
Victoria's mental health services	<p>This online listing provides details of all VicHealth mental health services.</p>
Wellbeing Promotion Office	<p>The Victorian Government has established the Wellbeing Promotion Office in response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which recommended a renewed focus on mental health promotion and prevention, highlighting the value of a public health approach in reducing the prevalence of mental illness.</p> <p>The Wellbeing Promotion Office is responsible for developing Victoria's first wellbeing strategy: <i>Wellbeing in Victoria: A Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health</i>. This plan will provide a coordinated approach that shifts the focus of the mental health system from treatment and care towards prevention, promotion and healing. The Wellbeing Promotion office also delivers programs including Social Inclusion Action Groups and Local Connections - a social prescribing initiative.</p>
First Peoples – State Relations	<p>First Peoples – State Relations is established within the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet and is responsible for leading the Government's work in the areas of cultural rights, self-determination, treaty and truth. It is committed to building ongoing, just and respectful relationships between self-determining First Peoples and the State, and to promoting Aboriginal leadership. First Peoples – State Relations incorporates the former Aboriginal Victoria and its statutory functions, and was established following consultation with Victoria's Aboriginal community and peak bodies. Its work streams include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural Rights: Working with First Peoples on cultural heritage management and protection in ways which recognise the leading role of strong and engaged Traditional Owners as the holders of cultural rights.</li><li>• Self-Determination: Driving whole of government strategic policy and reform that recognises that Aboriginal affairs needs to be driven by self-determining Aboriginal communities, Traditional Owner Groups and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations</li><li>• Treaty: Leading treaty negotiations with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria on behalf of the State and driving whole of government engagement with the treaty process.</li><li>• Truth: State engagement in and response to the historic Yoorrook Justice Commission and its inquiry into historic and ongoing injustices committed against Aboriginal Victorians since colonisation, across all areas of social, political and economic life.</li></ul>

# Policy documents

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Date	Title	Organisation	About
2022	Treaty Negotiation Framework	First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the State of Victoria	This policy guides Treaty-making, In the spirit of reconciliation, for all Victorians. It sets out the principles and legal terms for a future Treaty or Treaties, which should acknowledge truth and healing – as guided by the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.
2020	Balit Durn Durn ... Strong Brain, Mind, Intellect and Sense of Self	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)'s Report to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System outlines five solutions for the Victorian mental health system to implement by 2025 to better meet the needs of Aboriginal Communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish five on-country healing centres (or camps) to support resilience, healing, and trauma recovery through fostering connection to Country, kinship, and culture.</li> <li>• Ensure long-term, sustainable, and flexible investment in Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing to create generational change.</li> <li>• Invest in recurrent funding arrangements into multidisciplinary social and emotional wellbeing teams in ACCOs to secure long-term state-wide coverage.</li> <li>• Critically invest in Aboriginal-led solutions to prevent suicide and self-harm.</li> <li>• Appropriately invest in Aboriginal leadership and culturally safe service delivery across mainstream primary, secondary and tertiary health services.</li> </ul>
2021-2026	On Solid Ground: VACCHO Strategic Plan 2021 — 2026 Strength, Sustainability and Innovation for Generational Change	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	VACCHO's strategic plan focuses on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal ways of Knowing, Being and Doing</li> <li>• Innovation and Systems</li> <li>• Sustainability and Growth</li> <li>• Workforce</li> <li>• Empowering Community Voice</li> <li>• Research and Evidence</li> </ul>

2017-2027	Balit Murrup Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017–2027	Victorian Government	<p>Balit Murrup, the Victorian Government's SEWB framework, is based on the following vision, objective and principles:</p> <p><b>Vision:</b> Victorian Aboriginal people, families and communities achieve and sustain the highest attainable standards of social emotional wellbeing and mental health.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> The health gap between Aboriginal Victorians and the general population attributable to suicide, mental illness and psychological distress is reduced.</p> <p><b>Principles:</b></p> <p><b>Self-determination and community control:</b> Self-determination is recognised as essential to overcome the disadvantage that Aboriginal people experience. Government and services will support the leadership role of Aboriginal communities and organisations in the planning, delivery, evaluation and measurement of services delivered to Aboriginal people, including social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and healing and recovery services.</p> <p><b>Embedding healing and protective factors:</b> Connection to culture, family, community and country are built into all approaches across the promotion, early prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery continuum.</p> <p><b>Culturally capable services:</b> Cultural perspectives are embedded into clinical and therapeutic practice and services respect the rights, views and expectations of individuals and families.</p> <p><b>Person-centred care:</b> Mental health and alcohol and other drug services for Aboriginal Victorians are designed around the needs and expectations of individuals, families and communities rather than service providers.</p> <p><b>Community engagement:</b> Aboriginal communities self-determine and participate in the codesign and delivery of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services and programs.</p> <p><b>Partnerships:</b> Integrated partnerships between all health service providers and Aboriginal communities will provide the best opportunity to improve mental health outcomes and optimise social and emotional wellbeing and will foster trust, connectivity, and appropriate care.</p>
2017-2027	Korin Korin Balit-Djak Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027	Victorian Government	<p>Self-determination is at the heart of this plan, which commits the government to achieving the best health, wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal Victorians within five priority domains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal community leadership</li> <li>• prioritising Aboriginal culture and community</li> <li>• system reform across the health and human services sector</li> <li>• safe, secure, strong families and individuals</li> <li>• physically, socially and emotionally healthy Aboriginal communities</li> </ul>

## Whole of community

Date	Title	Organisation	About
2015-2024	Victoria's 10 Year Mental Health Plan	Victorian Government	This over-arching plan for Victoria's mental health system has been largely superseded by reform initiatives in the wake of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – Final Report.
2016-2025	Victorian suicide prevention framework 2016-2025	Victorian Government	<p>The Victorian suicide prevention framework 2016-2025 is constructed around five objectives:</p> <p><b>Build Resilience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new focus on building resilience across the Victorian Government, including in schools, health and emergency services</li> </ul> <p><b>Support Vulnerable People</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniting behind groups who are experiencing higher risks of distress and suicide, including early responses to concerns among dairy farmers, regional communities, Aboriginal communities, emergency services workers, paramedics, police, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and intersex people</li> </ul> <p><b>Care for the Suicidal Person</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened approaches to assertive outreach and personal care when a person who has attempted suicide leaves hospital, emergency department or mental health service</li> </ul> <p><b>Learn What Works Best</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new commitment to test and evaluate new trial initiatives and share data with local communities</li> </ul> <p><b>Help Local Communities Prevent Suicide</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trialling over six years a systemic approach to suicide prevention in six local government areas across Victoria.</li> </ul> <p>The Framework was developed before Balit Murrup, the Victorian Government's SEWB framework, which now takes precedence in matters of Aboriginal suicide prevention.</p>
2022 (draft)	Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework	Victorian Government	The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework. The framework is intended to provide a way to understand and measure the impact of Victoria's mental health system reforms and the difference they make to people's lives, driving shared responsibility and accountability for mental health and wellbeing outcomes across government.

2021	Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – Final Report	Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System	<p>The final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System articulates mental health system reforms focused on service delivery in the community close to where people live, work and study.</p> <p>It emphasises preventing mental illness and promoting good mental health and wellbeing and providing responsive community-based services, with hospitals reserved for highly specialised or acute care needs.</p> <p>The report includes the need to ensure a reformed system responds appropriately to the needs of Aboriginal people, supporting principles of self-determination with Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing services designed and led by Aboriginal communities.</p> <p>Recommendations of direct relevance to Indigenous people include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to expand Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing teams throughout Victoria, supported by a new Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Centre.</li> <li>• block funding to Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations with the flexibility to support self-determination in funding decisions, so that the distribution of funding is led by Aboriginal communities.</li> </ul>
2022-2026	Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention	Victorian Government, Commonwealth Government	<p>The Bilateral Schedule is the Victorian agreement under the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, which sets out the shared intention of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work in partnership to improve the mental health of all Australians, reduce the rate of suicide toward zero, and ensure the sustainability and enhance the services of the Australian mental health and suicide prevention system.</p> <p>The Bilateral Schedule include Victoria-specific commitments including funding allocations and sites for service expansion.</p>