

Victoria Legal Aid

# Reconciliation Action Plan

September 2023–September 2025



RECONCILIATION  
ACTION PLAN

INNOVATE



Victoria Legal Aid



## **‘Changing Ways’ (2022) Jackson H, Wadawurrung**

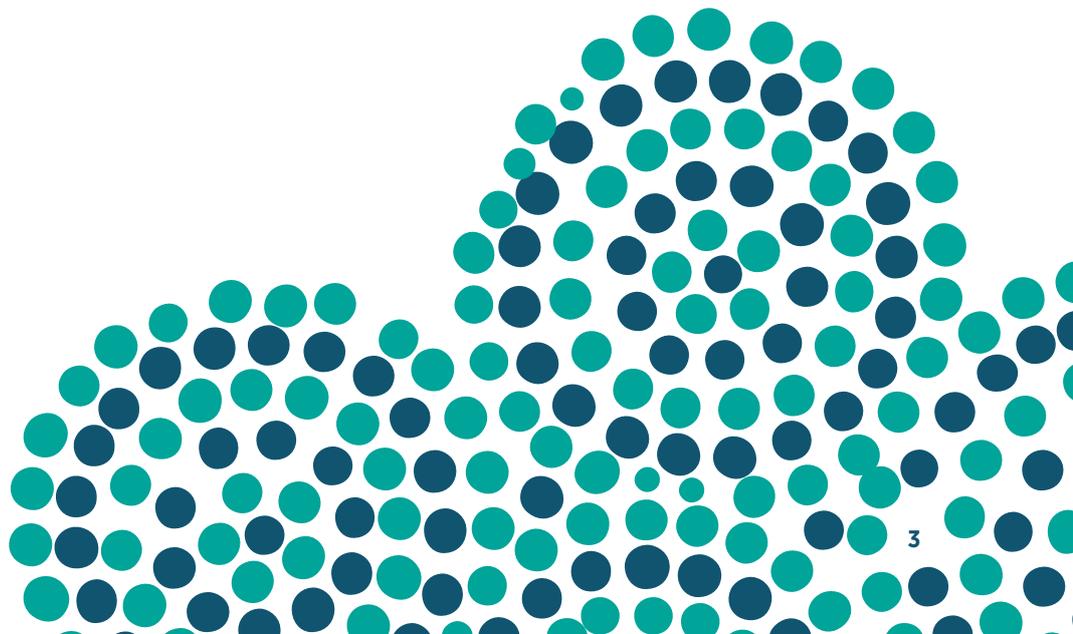
When I do paintings I don't expect to make a story out of it but as I go along the story comes into my head. I grew up in Geelong and Warrnambool and swam everyday out near Stingray Bay to Penguin Island; it's deep, it's dangerous, it's exciting. The handprints are the many people over the years reaching into our oceans and taking what they want. My Mob only took what they needed, the newcomers took too much and destroyed our sea life. The splatters represent the blood that has been shed. The white lines are the connection back to where the turtles were born to lay their eggs, they go back and forth, they always go back.

## **The Torch**

The artwork has been supplied by The Torch, a project which provides support to First Nations people with lived experience of the Victorian criminal legal system through art, cultural and arts vocational programs. By embracing program participants as artists, The Torch provides an avenue to change. [www.thetorch.org.au](http://www.thetorch.org.au)

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# Acknowledgement of Country

Victoria Legal Aid acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise their continuing connection to and care for Country and the resilience and strength of First Nations communities across the state.

# Foreword

On behalf of Victoria Legal Aid, we are pleased to present our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for 2023–25.

This RAP reflects our continued commitment to reconciliation and our support for First Nations-led solutions to improve outcomes for First Nations people in the legal system.

With the ongoing over-criminalisation of First Nations people by the Victorian legal system and their continued over-representation in child protection, this work is as important as ever. That's why reconciliation is a priority at Victoria Legal Aid.

We're proud of the notable shift in our organisational culture over recent years around how we approach reconciliation and First Nations justice issues. This has translated into tangible initiatives that make a real difference for First Nations clients and communities.

Among our achievements to date is the expansion of our successful Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer (ACEO) Program, which improves access for First Nations people to culturally safe and responsive legal assistance. We've also increased employment opportunities for First Nations people, created an internal support network for First Nations staff and elevated the head of our First Nations Services program to an executive position.

The evaluation of our last RAP acknowledged that while our achievements in our first two RAPs have provided a solid foundation, more work is needed to improve our services for First Nations people. This third RAP seeks to continue this important work.

A key priority will be to improve the accessibility, cultural safety and responsiveness of legally aided services for First Nations people. This includes our ongoing expansion of the ACEO Program, a pilot of a specialist First Nations legal helpline and work to build cultural capability in our organisation and across the sector.

The voices of First Nations people will be at the heart of our service design and performance, as we strive to embed their lived experience and expertise in our work. We'll also develop a framework to better understand the meaning of self-determination and its implication for our organisational practice through a collaborative process involving First Nations staff and stakeholders.

Recognising that increasing employment opportunities for First Nations people contributes to self-determination, we commit to growing the proportion of First Nations staff to five per cent – an increase from the current 2.8 per cent. This target will be backed by initiatives to improve recruitment processes and foster an inclusive and supportive work environment.

At Victoria Legal Aid, we believe that reconciliation is everyone's responsibility and are committed to making it everyday business for our organisation.

We wish to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this plan, including our RAP Working Group, First Nations Services team, Karen Milward Consulting Services and our sector partners.



**Bill Jaboor**  
Chairperson, Board



**Louise Glanville**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Supporting statement

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

With over 2.3 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. Victoria Legal Aid continues to be part of a strong network of more than 1,100 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and transformed it into action.

The four RAP types – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – allow RAP partners to continuously strengthen reconciliation commitments and constantly strive to apply learnings in new ways.

An Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build the strong foundations and relationships that ensure sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

An integral part of building these foundations is reflecting on and cataloguing the successes and challenges of previous RAPs. Learnings gained through effort and innovation are invaluable resources that Victoria Legal Aid will continuously draw upon to create RAP commitments rooted in experience and maturity.

These learnings extend to Victoria Legal Aid using the lens of reconciliation to better understand its core business, sphere of influence, and diverse community of staff and stakeholders.

The RAP program's emphasis on *relationships*, *respect*, and *opportunities* gives organisations a framework from which to foster connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rooted in mutual collaboration and trust.

This Innovate RAP is an opportunity for Victoria Legal Aid to strengthen these relationships, gain crucial experience, and nurture connections that will become the lifeblood of its future RAP commitments. By enabling and empowering staff to contribute to this process, Victoria Legal Aid will ensure shared and cooperative success in the long-term.

Gaining experience and reflecting on pertinent learnings will ensure the sustainability of Victoria Legal Aid's future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, providing meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Victoria Legal Aid on your third Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.

**Karen Mundine**

Chief Executive Officer

Reconciliation Australia

# Our vision for reconciliation

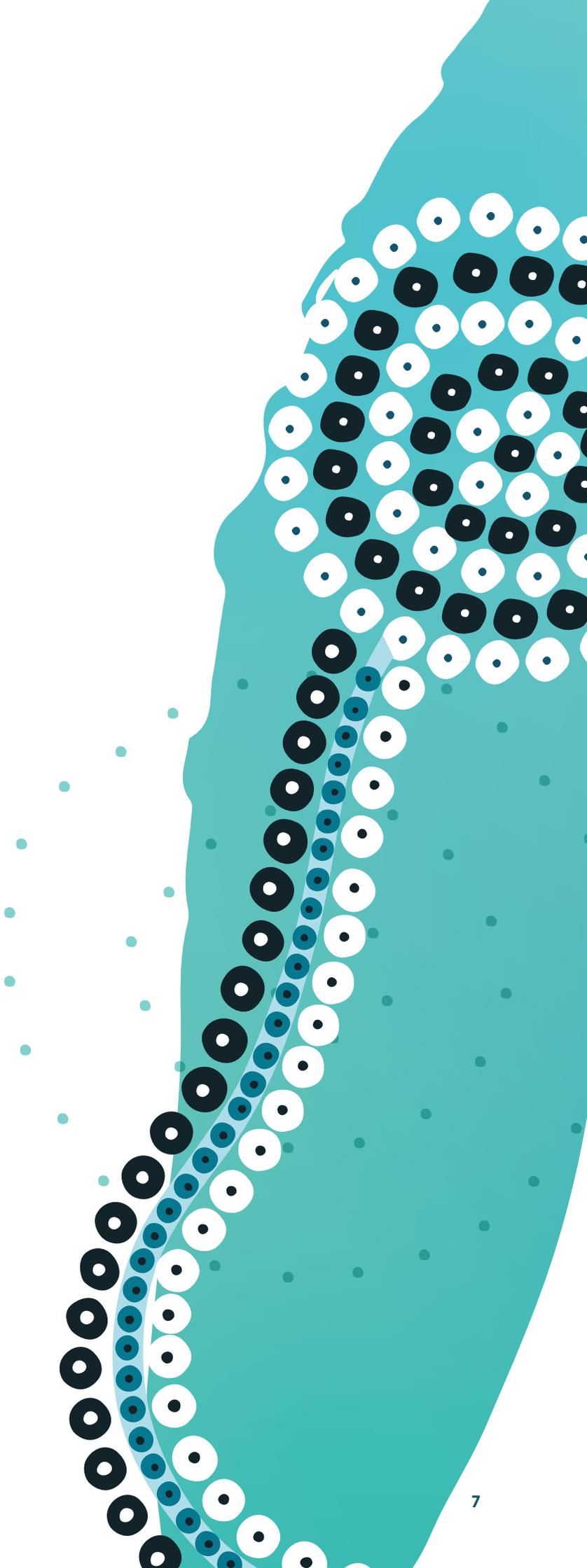
Our vision for reconciliation is that we have a fair and just society where everyone is equal.

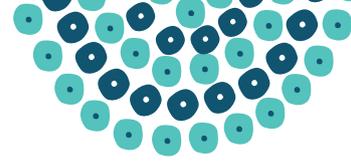
We recognise the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the resulting harms faced by many First Nations people in the Victorian legal system. These harms can be far-reaching and intergenerational. They've resulted from centuries of laws, policies, systems and structures that have entrenched systemic and structural racism, normalised the exclusion and disempowerment of First Nations peoples and denied their right to self-determination.

As the largest provider of legal services in Victoria, we acknowledge our systemic role in these injustices and our collective responsibility to grow the capability of the legal assistance sector to improve outcomes for First Nations people in the Victorian legal system.

We strongly support First Nations peoples' inherent right to self-determination and are committed to the actions in this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We will implement them in ways that are consistent with the expertise and ambitions of First Nations communities across Victoria and our key practice partners, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and Djirra.

The work of reconciliation too often falls on First Nations people. This RAP represents our continued commitment as a mainstream organisation to drive meaningful and substantive changes across Victoria's legal and social systems. It seeks to strengthen meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal legal services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, build culturally appropriate and responsive services and enhance accountability to First Nations communities.





# Our business

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is a statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978 (Vic)* that provides information, advice and assistance in response to a broad range of legal problems. We help people every day and night in courts and tribunals across Victoria in both state and federal jurisdictions. We are funded by both state and federal governments, and as a statutory agency, we are part of government.

In line with our values – fairness, care, courage and inclusion – we provide services and legal information to improve access to justice and support people to strengthen their legal capability and have a voice in their legal problems. We also pursue systemic change by advocating to reform laws and systems to address injustices and improve equality for clients and the community.

Our range of services include information and advice, prevention, early intervention, dispute resolution and ongoing assistance and representation. We provide:

- Legal Help phone and webchat for information and advice
- community legal education and information
- family dispute resolution
- help before court for criminal charges
- early resolution service for family violence matters
- help at courts and tribunals through duty lawyer services and grants of legal assistance
- family advocacy and support
- independent mental health advocacy
- legal representation in a range of civil, family and criminal law matters.

We help people in a range of areas, including criminal law, family breakdown, child protection, family violence, mental health, discrimination, disability, tenancy, fines, social security, immigration, guardianship and administration, debt and assistance for victims of crime. *The Legal Aid Act* requires us to pursue innovative means of providing legal aid to reduce the need for individual legal services.

Our specialist legal teams and allied professionals work with our legal assistance sector partners in the private profession, community legal centres and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. This mixed model of service delivery supports clients to select a legal practitioner of their choice and allows us to respond to changes in demand for legal aid services.

In 2022-23, we helped 86,321 unique clients, provided 111,236 duty lawyer services (together with private practitioners and community legal centres) and responded to 138,969 requests for assistance through Legal Help.

We also use our practice and evidence base to address systemic injustices, inequality and discrimination through strategic litigation, advocacy and policy and law reform. We promote the voices of clients when advocating for fairer laws and systems.

We are the largest legal service in Victoria with over 1,000 staff – including 33 who identify as First Nations people – across 15 offices in metropolitan and regional Victoria. Our First Nations Services team provides guidance and advice to support the organisation to deliver on our RAP commitments. The team provides:

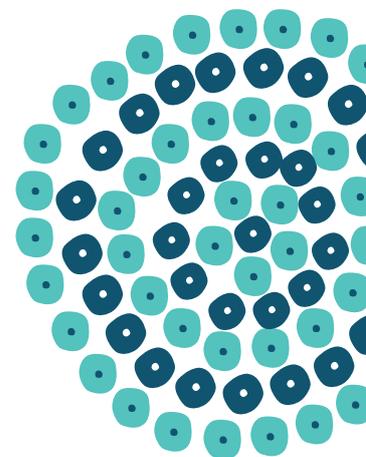
- subject matter expertise for submissions and strategic advocacy
- advice on the recruitment, retention and progression of First Nations staff
- advice on the delivery of cultural learning for our staff and practice partners
- support for our First Nations Staff Network
- oversight of our Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer (ACEO) Program.



*First Nations Staff Network meeting in August 2023. Back row (L-R): Courtney McGann, Ashlee Moffatt, Andrew Jackomos, Lorena Burney, Jessica Thomson, Belinda Foley, Shakirah Ilesley and Steph McStay. Front row (L-R): Alethea Belford, Lawrence Moser, Simone Lim, Terri Pollard, Stacy Lovett-Kanoa, Jessica McDonald, Ann Spittles, Ron Davis and Kye Hardie.*

The ACEOs are specialist non-legal roles that make a significant contribution to improving access for First Nations people to culturally safe and responsive legal assistance. They focus on client support, community engagement and legal education, and play a vital role in building trust and strengthening relationships between VLA and First Nations communities and organisations. The ACEO Program operates in six of our regional offices – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Morwell and Shepparton – and is set to be expanded to more locations through this RAP.

This RAP commits us to strengthening the ACEO Program, including by making improvements to our data collection practices, expanding to new offices and sector settings, and ensuring that we empower the ACEOs to be agents of change. We recently created a program manager role to lead and oversee implementation of these changes over the coming years.



# Our RAP journey

We acknowledge the comparative disparity and inequality that First Nations people experience in all areas of public life, including in health, economics, education and the legal system. First Nations people are over-criminalised by the legal system as a direct result of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation and generations of dispossession and exclusion.

These years of systemic racism have caused First Nations people to be grossly and disproportionately represented in the adult and youth prison populations and the child protection system.<sup>1</sup> The harms of the child protection system on First Nations children and families are intergenerational and reminiscent of the traumas of the Stolen Generations.

This has led to a large need for legal assistance for First Nations people in Victoria. We see through our everyday practice that this legal need is often complex, with civil, family and child protection issues often intersecting and exacerbating criminal law matters.

However, our sector often fails to adequately support and assist First Nations people. The legal system has its origins in colonialism and operates in ways that are inherently unsafe for First Nations people. Many barriers limit access to the help and support they need, including gaps in service availability, low competence among the legal profession to deliver services in a culturally safe and responsive way, and an understandable distrust by First Nations people of mainstream legal systems and government services.

Our RAP journey acknowledges our role in addressing these barriers and improving outcomes. Our RAPs are an important mechanism in ensuring organisational accountability for improving the way we work with and support First Nations clients, staff and stakeholders and pursuing necessary systemic reforms.

## First RAP (2015–18)

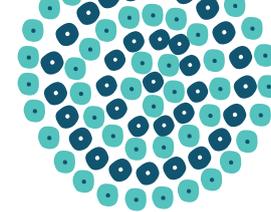
In 2015, we established our first RAP (RAP1) – an Innovate RAP. It committed us to practical actions built on relationships, respect and opportunities with First Nations people. At the end of RAP1, the University of Technology Sydney Institute for Public Policy and Governance evaluated its implementation and identified areas for improvement and growth.

The evaluation report noted key achievements, including increased employment opportunities for First Nations people, with the creation of an associate director role for First Nations Services, two ACEO roles and an Aboriginal Clerkship Program. It also identified a modest organisational cultural shift, with improved efforts to recognise and support cultural diversity and inclusion.

The report offered 10 recommendations to improve efforts to develop and maintain culturally safe, responsive and accessible services for First Nations peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Legal Aid, Submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission investigation into systemic injustice in the criminal justice system; Submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission investigation into systemic injustice in the child protection system.



## Second RAP (2019–21)

Our second Innovate RAP (RAP2), launched in 2019, built on the foundations of RAP1 by strengthening key actions and introducing new initiatives to progress each of the five dimensions of reconciliation.

A key success was the creation of our internal First Nations Staff Network. Made up only of First Nations staff, the network provides a collective voice of lived experience expertise and offers cultural support and connection among staff across the state. Our Chief Executive Officer is very supportive of the network and frequently attends meetings to ensure an open and direct line of communication about the experiences and views of First Nations staff. The network is a key internal consultative group and four members sit on our current RAP Working Group.

RAP2 also saw:

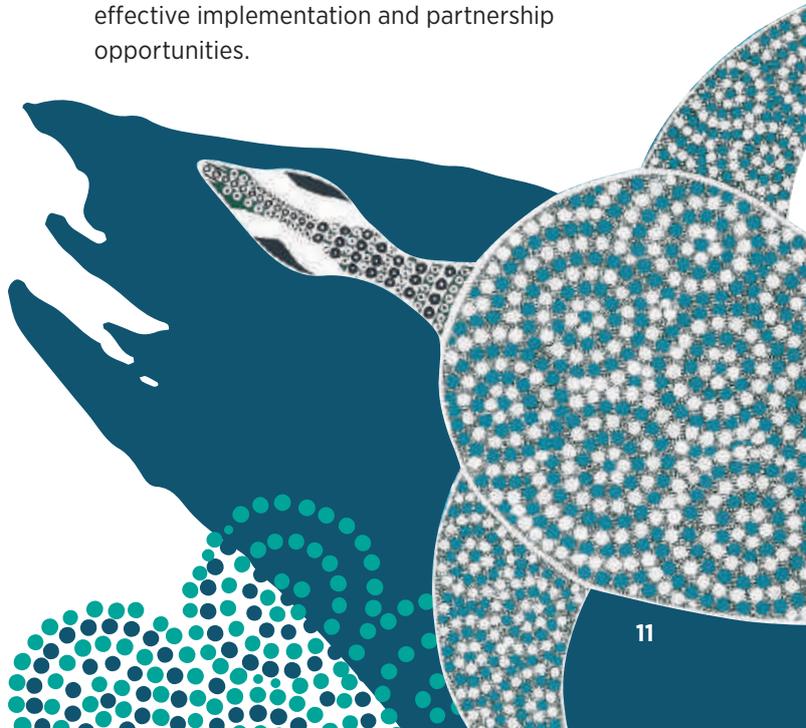
- the continuation of our Aboriginal Clerkship Program
- dedicated positions for First Nations applicants in our Graduate Law Program and New Lawyers Program
- a modest expansion of the ACEO Program, with new roles created in Ballarat, Geelong and Shepparton
- a new cultural learning strategy to ensure our staff and services are culturally safe and responsive
- a refreshed employment strategy to strengthen recruitment, retention and career pathways for First Nations staff
- an increased First Nations employment target of 3 per cent
- enhanced service collaboration with our practice partners, VALS and Djirra.

In 2021, Karen Milward Consulting Services evaluated the implementation of RAP2 and found key achievements and significant progress. This included a notable shift in organisational culture and the way we approach our work and the ongoing success and value of the ACEO Program.

The evaluation also noted that the impacts of COVID-19 slowed progress on implementation and suggested that we were not yet ready to move to a Stretch RAP, as more time was needed to consolidate the gains made and refocus effort and investment. It recommended retaining several actions and deliverables from RAP2 into future plans, particularly in the areas of relationships and opportunities.

In addition, the evaluation made 10 recommendations aimed at:

- strengthening and elevating actions and initiatives of strategic importance
- developing collaborative efforts and partnerships with First Nations staff, clients and stakeholders, embedded in a self-determination framework
- expanding the First Nations Services team and ACEO Program
- strengthening governance arrangements and accountability for RAP initiatives
- committing additional resourcing to support effective implementation and partnership opportunities.



## Third RAP (2023–25)

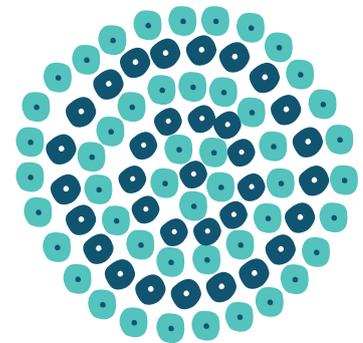
Our third Innovate RAP (RAP3) represents our continued commitment to progressing this important work. RAP3 also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our learnings from RAP1 and RAP2 and embed these in how we seek to progress reconciliation. We have reengaged Karen Milward Consulting Services to assist in developing RAP3 to ensure the implementation of recommendations made in the RAP2 evaluation.

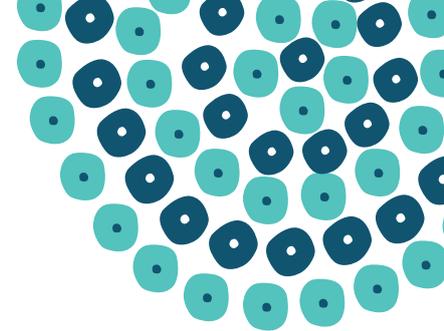
Key external and internal stakeholders have been consulted, including:

- VALS
- Djirra
- our First Nations Staff Network
- our RAP3 Working Group
- our Executive Management Group
- our Board.

## RAP3 Working Group

Our RAP3 Working Group is made up of key staff across the organisation who are best placed to progress the development of RAP3. With RAP2 evaluation findings in mind, members collaboratively identified relevant organisational strategies, initiatives and projects to develop RAP3 actions and deliverables that are strategically relevant, achievable and proactively resourced. The working group benefits from the leadership and expertise of four First Nations staff members.





## The working group members are:

Ala Al-Mahaidi	<b>Senior Communications Advisor</b>	Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
Alethea Belford	<b>Associate Director</b>	Outcomes and Evidence First Nations Staff Network member
Ashley Morris	<b>Director</b> ( <i>from October 2023</i> )	First Nations Services
Brie Muston	<b>Strategic Resourcing Manager</b>	People and Workplace Services
Courtney McGann	<b>Strategic Policy and Projects Manager</b>	First Nations Services First Nations Staff Network member
Daniella Calkoen	<b>Director</b>	People and Workplace Services
Jackie Anders	<b>Manager</b>	Child Protection
Jacqueline Storey	<b>Manager</b>	Research and Evaluation
Jasmine Fiegehen	<b>Associate Director</b>	Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
Jon Cina	<b>Associate Director</b>	Access and Equity
Lawrence Moser	<b>Director</b> ( <i>up to November 2023</i> )	First Nations Services First Nations Staff Network member
Kamna Muddagouni	<b>Strategic Advocacy Manager</b>	Civil Justice
Karen Milward	<b>Consultant</b>	Karen Milward Consulting Services
Kimberley Ison	<b>Associate Director</b>	Grants and Quality Assurance
Lauren Galvin	<b>Associate Director</b>	South West Region
Peter Noble	<b>Executive Director</b>	Regions and Service Delivery
Steph McStay	<b>Project Manager, Portfolio Management</b>	Outcomes and Evidence First Nations Staff Network member
Yeng Phang	<b>Finance Business Partner</b>	Finance, Planning and Projects

Membership of the working group may change from time to time as required across the lifespan of this RAP. While the working group will remain our main formal governance mechanism, we will also develop a forum for deeper discussion and reflection about RAP3 progress, successes and challenges, informed and defined by First Nations perspectives and experiences.

## Reporting

The RAP3 Working Group will meet quarterly to drive and monitor RAP3 implementation. After each meeting, a quarterly progress report will be shared internally with staff and senior leaders. We will provide an update to our Executive Management Group and our Board quarterly. We will also publicly report on our achievements, challenges and learnings annually through a mid-term progress report in October 2024 and a final delivery report in October 2025.



# Relationships

Strong relationships with First Nations communities and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in Victoria are vital to our position of supporting First Nations peoples' self-determination. We particularly acknowledge the expertise and leadership of VALS and Djirra in advocating for change and improving outcomes for First Nations people. We seek to continue strengthening our relationships with these organisations and be led by their perspectives on appropriate service delivery and policy priorities and law reform for First Nations communities. We will also seek to expand the breadth of our relationships to include Aboriginal community-controlled health and other relevant organisations, such as VACCHO, that may support and facilitate more holistic service delivery to First Nations people.

**FOCUS AREA:** The focus area targets in this section are designed to progress the reconciliation dimensions of unity and race relations by establishing, maintaining and strengthening key internal and external relationships. The objective of these relationships is to ensure a collaborative and coordinated approach to service delivery, strategic advocacy and other relevant activities, led by the expertise of First Nations people.

## **ACTION 1** Establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>1.1</b> Continue to meet with local First Nations stakeholders and organisations to ensure guiding principles for future engagement in each region is self-determined.	September annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>1.2</b> Consolidate existing work to develop and implement an engagement plan for working with First Nations stakeholders and organisations and the broader justice system.	September 2024	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>1.3</b> Strengthen collaboration with First Nations communities, organisations and networks to inform service design.	March and September annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery

## **ACTION 2** Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>2.1</b> Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	May annually	Chief Executive Officer
<b>2.2</b> RAP3 Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May–3 June, annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>2.3</b> Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May–3 June, annually	Chief Executive Officer
<b>2.4</b> Organise at least one NRW event each year and ensure attendance of senior leaders and the Board.	27 May–3 June, annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>2.5</b> Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May annually	Director, First Nations Services



## **ACTION 3** Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.

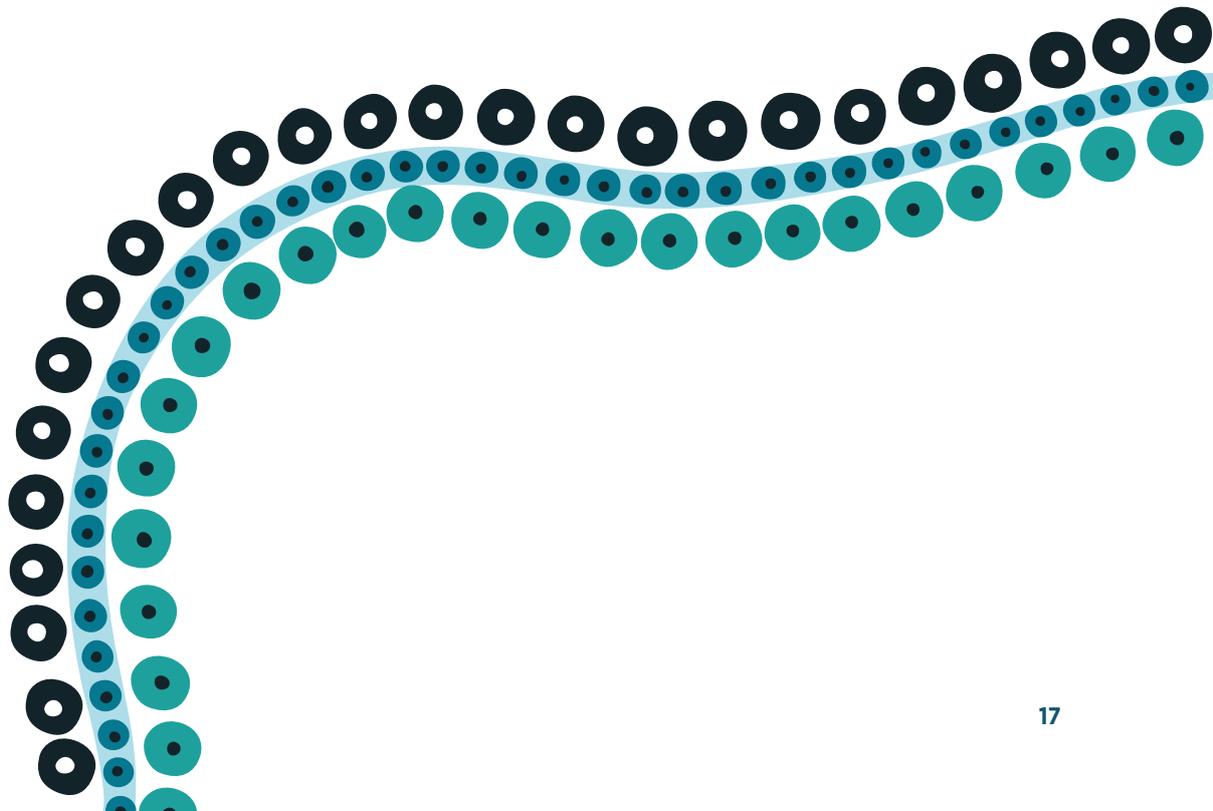
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>3.1</b> Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy to raise awareness of reconciliation across our workforce.	September 2024	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information  Director, First Nations Services
<b>3.2</b> Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly.	March and September annually	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>3.3</b> Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes.	March and September annually	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>3.4</b> Collaborate with RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations to develop innovative approaches to advance reconciliation.	September annually	Director, First Nations Services

## **ACTION 4** Promote positive race relations through anti-racism and anti-discrimination strategies.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>4.1</b> Identify and engage an external expert to conduct a review of human resource policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination and unconscious bias provisions and future needs.	May 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>4.2</b> Review and update our Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Action Plan to ensure we continue to proactively identify and address racism and discrimination within our workplace and across the legal assistance sector.	December 2024	Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>4.3</b> Engage with First Nations staff and advisors to consult on our Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Action Plan.	December 2024	Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>4.4</b> Continue to ensure that senior leaders, including the Board, proactively build their knowledge and capability on racism, its impacts and harms, and how it occurs in our workplace and sector settings, including through participation in a cultural activity.	March annually	Chief Executive Officer Board RAP Champion

## **ACTION 5** Ensure the development of collaborative efforts and partnerships with Aboriginal legal services are underpinned by principles of self-determination.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>5.1</b> Convene conversations with our staff, practice partners and other relevant stakeholders about the meaning of First Nations self-determination and its implications for organisational design and practice.	June 2024	Chief Executive Officer Director, First Nations Services
<b>5.2</b> Support and resource the First Nations Staff Network to participate in the development of a First Nations self-determination framework for the organisation, in partnership with First Nations communities.	September 2024	Chief Executive Officer
<b>5.3</b> Work with First Nations staff, stakeholders and advisors to explore how to ensure First Nations self-determination is embedded into our partnerships.	June 2024	Chief Executive Officer



## ACTION 6

Strengthen strategic advocacy on First Nations justice issues in collaboration with Aboriginal legal services, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

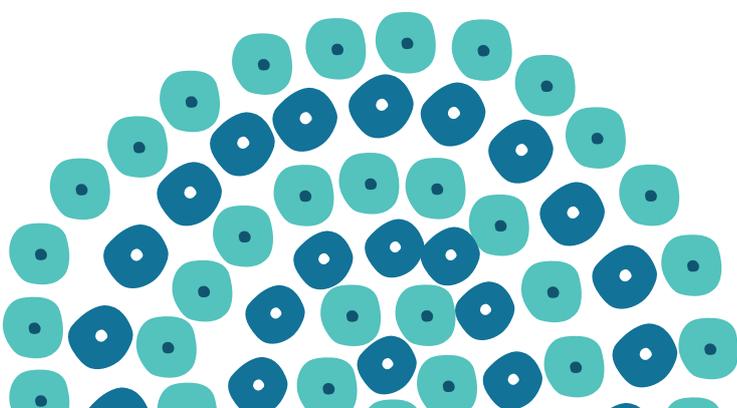
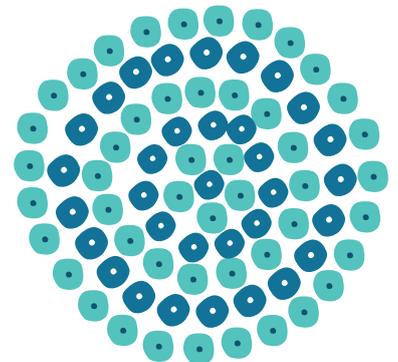
Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>6.1</b> Work with First Nations staff, stakeholders, and advisors to ensure strategic advocacy priorities across the organisation identify and prioritise areas for First Nations justice and reform.	June annually	Executive Director, Criminal Law Executive Director, Family, Youth and Children's Law Executive Director, Legal Practice, Civil Justice, Access and Equity
<b>6.2</b> Amplify the voices of VALS and Djirra in our strategic advocacy work and explore opportunities to set joint advocacy agendas.	June annually	Executive Director, Criminal Law Executive Director, Family, Youth and Children's Law Executive Director, Legal Practice, Civil Justice, Access and Equity
<b>6.3</b> Engage with VALS, Djirra and other key stakeholders to design a re-imagined justice system for First Nations communities.	September 2024	Chief Executive Officer
<b>6.4</b> Work with Aboriginal legal services and community-controlled organisations to support the development of a self-determined approach to the wellbeing of First Nations children and transformation of the child protection system.	September annually	Executive Director, Family, Youth and Children's Law
<b>6.5</b> Engage with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to identify opportunities for engagement, collaboration and support.	September annually	Chief Executive Officer Director, First Nations Services
<b>6.6</b> Work with VALS, Djirra, and First Nations staff and communities on our response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission.	March and September annually	Chief Executive Officer Director, First Nations Services

## **ACTION 7** Continue joint VLA and VALS board meetings to identify opportunities for ongoing collaboration.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>7.1</b> Engage in formal discussions with the VALS Board around the potential for integrated, shared and co-located service delivery.	June 2024	Board RAP Champion
<b>7.2</b> Proactively identify opportunities for collaboration and support between VLA and VALS.	June annually	Board RAP Champion

## **ACTION 8** Initiate joint VLA and Djirra board meetings to identify opportunities for ongoing collaboration.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>8.1</b> Proactively identify opportunities for collaboration and support between VLA and Djirra.	June annually	Board RAP Champion





# Respect

The foundations of respect will be built, maintained and strengthened through education, which will focus on the richness and diversity of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights. We have a responsibility and leadership role within the legal assistance sector to improve the cultural safety and responsiveness of our workplaces and services for First Nations people. This will require review of our cultural learning strategy to strengthen engagement and learning opportunities and develop a suite of learning resources that continuously build the capacity of our staff and practice partners.

**FOCUS AREA:** The focus area targets in this section are designed to progress the reconciliation dimensions of historical acceptance, unity and institutional integrity through cultural learning opportunities.

## **ACTION 9** Increase understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.

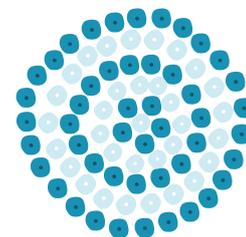
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>9.1</b> Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	June 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>9.2</b> Engage local Traditional Owners and/or First Nations advisors to inform our cultural learning strategy, and the development of appropriate cultural capability training offerings.	December 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>9.3</b> Conduct a mid-term review of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Learning Strategy 2020–25.	December 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>9.4</b> Provide opportunities for the Board, RAP3 Working Group members, People and Workplace Services managers and other key leadership roles (including First Nations staff) to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.	March annually	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>9.5</b> Establish a new role to support and implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Learning Strategy 2020–25 and related activities.	December 2023	Director, People and Workplace Services

## **ACTION 10** Demonstrate respect to First Nations peoples by observing cultural protocols.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>10.1</b> Increase staff understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	September annually	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>10.2</b> Continue to review, improve, and promote a cultural protocols document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.	September annually	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>10.3</b> Continue to invite local Traditional Owners or Custodians to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year.	June annually	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>10.4</b> Continue to include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of all meetings, including at all Board meetings.	September 2024	Chief Executive Officer Board RAP Champion
<b>10.5</b> Review our use of terminology relating to First Nations peoples, cultures and issues to ensure consistency with the preference of the First Nations Staff Network.	March 2024	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information

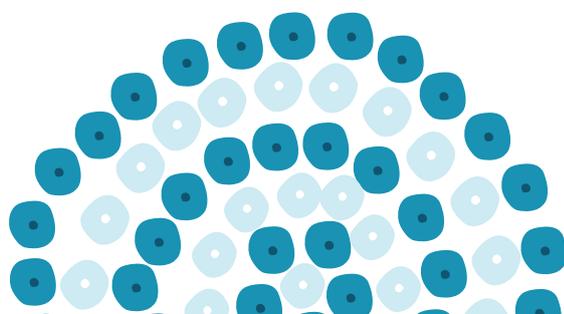
## **ACTION 11** Build respect for First Nations cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>11.1</b> RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	First week in July annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>11.2</b> Review human resource policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	May 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>11.3</b> Communicate the importance of supporting staff participation in NAIDOC Week events to all managers.	June annually	Chief Executive Officer Board RAP Champion
<b>11.4</b> Promote, encourage and enable participation by all staff in external NAIDOC events, including the annual state-wide NAIDOC march.	First week in July annually	Chief Executive Officer
<b>11.5</b> Board members and Executive Management Group to participate in annual state-wide NAIDOC march.	First week in July annually	Board RAP Champion



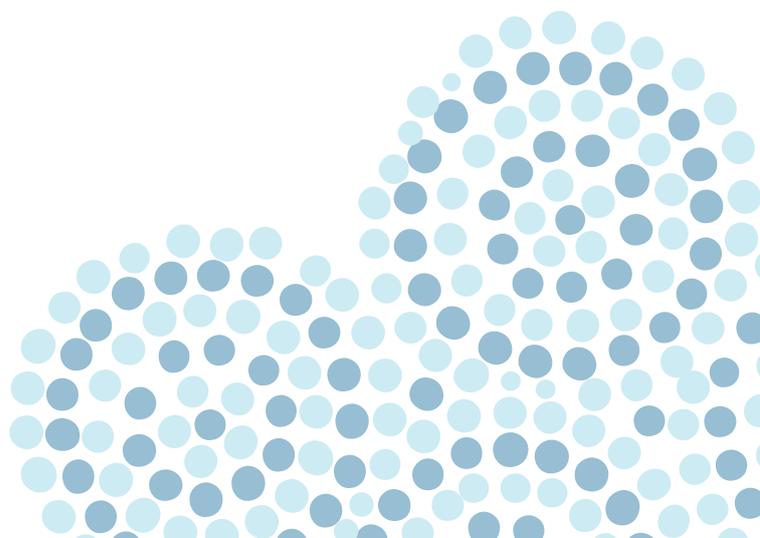
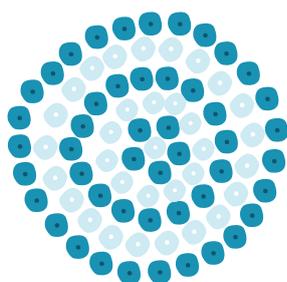
## **ACTION 12** Improve the accessibility, cultural safety and responsiveness of legally aided services for First Nations people.

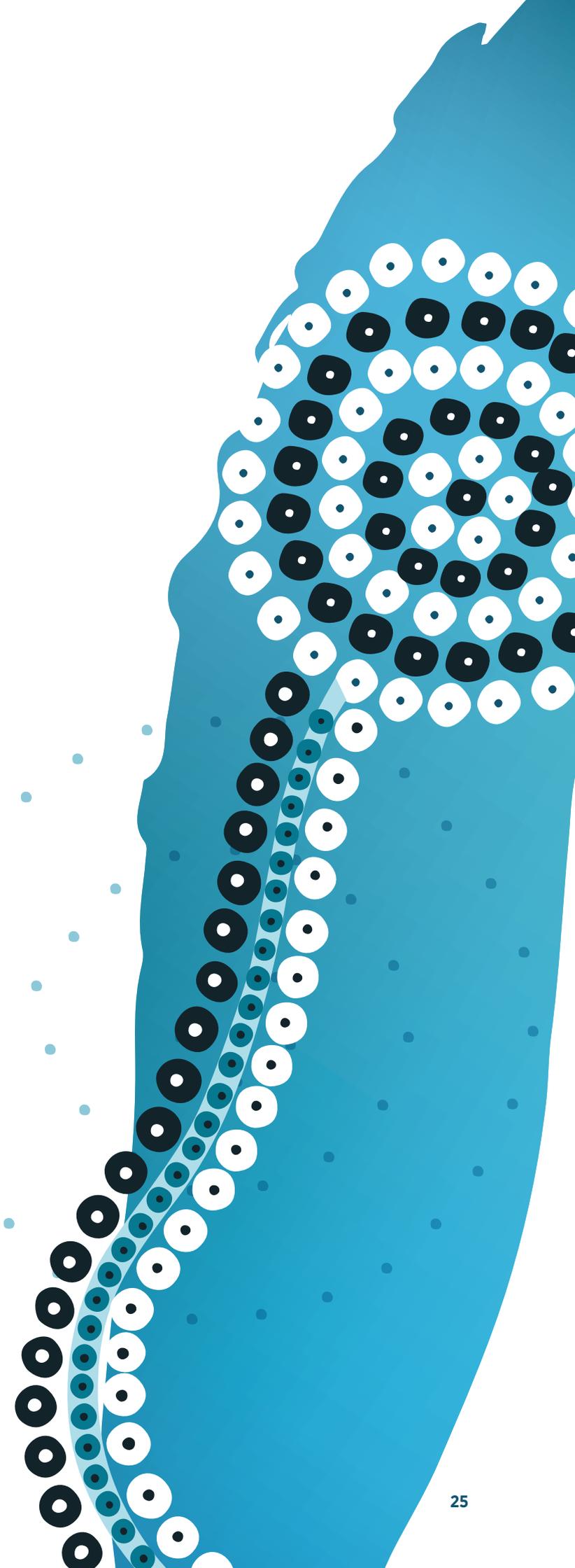
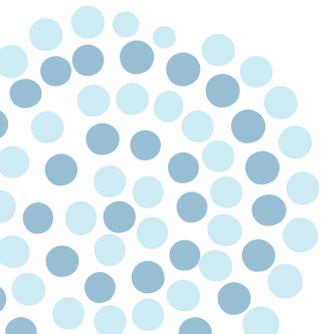
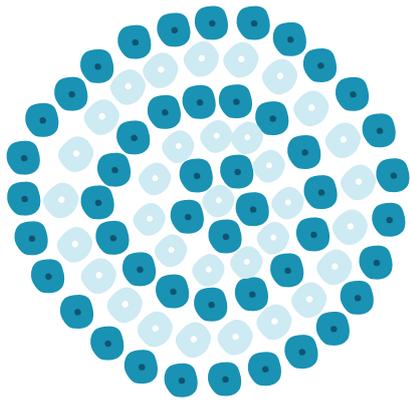
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>12.1</b> Collaborate with Aboriginal legal services and community-controlled organisations to establish and pilot a specialist First Nations Legal Helpline to provide more responsive, intensive and culturally appropriate assistance to First Nations people.	September 2025	Associate Director, Access and Equity
<b>12.2</b> Review eligibility criteria and funding guidelines to identify and reduce barriers for First Nations people accessing legal assistance.	September 2025	Director, Legal Practice
<b>12.3</b> Increase the level of support provided to First Nations clients before the day of court, including greater accessibility and availability of early resolution support services.	September 2025	Executive Director, Criminal Law Executive Director, Family, Youth and Children's Law
<b>12.4</b> Proactively identify and pursue other opportunities to reimagine and redesign our service delivery for First Nations people by working with and being led by the lived experience and expertise of First Nations clients, stakeholders, and staff.	March and September annually	Director, First Nations Services
<b>12.5</b> Build the cultural capability of staff, practitioners and barristers providing legally aided services to First Nations clients by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● strengthening our practice standards</li> <li>● strengthening our panels entry requirements and assessment processes</li> <li>● introducing minimum audit targets for First Nations client files</li> <li>● continuing to develop tailored cultural capability training offerings</li> <li>● improving access by the legal assistance sector to existing and new cultural capability training offerings.</li> </ul>	June 2024	Director, Legal Practice Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>12.6</b> Continue to develop, implement and promote best practice guides in the mainstream legal assistance sector on working with and supporting First Nations clients and stakeholders.	September annually	Director, Client Services and Sector Engagement



## **ACTION 13** Improve the cultural safety of our workplaces for First Nations staff.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>13.1</b> Work with the RAP Champions, First Nations Services team and Health, Safety and Wellbeing team to develop an approach to embedding cultural safety in each VLA region.	September annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>13.2</b> Adopt a definition of cultural safety that applies to the employment of First Nations people and is incorporated into our learning programs and relevant policy and guidance materials.	June 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>13.3</b> Implement the Aunties and Uncles Cultural Mentoring Program to ensure the availability of culturally appropriate and responsive supports for First Nations staff wellbeing.	June 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services Director, First Nations Services
<b>13.4</b> Review, refine and monitor use of the cultural safety self-reflection tools and make completion mandatory for all staff.	June 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>13.5</b> Ensure staff at all levels have obligations related to reconciliation knowledge and deliverables as part of their 'VLA and Me' development and performance review processes.	December 2023	Director, People and Workplaces Services







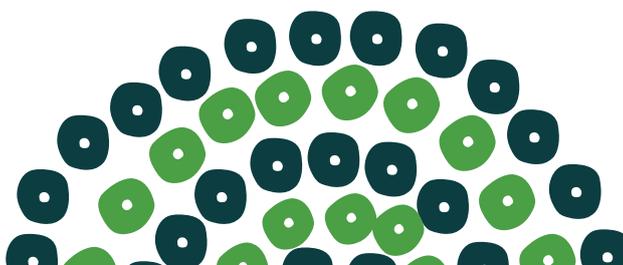
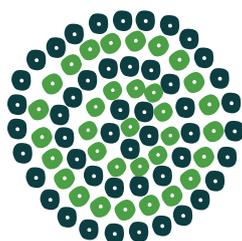
# Opportunities

We acknowledge that increased employment opportunities for First Nations people contributes to supporting self-determination. We aim to increase our First Nations workforce and commit to a five per cent employment target by the end of RAP3. The importance of a diverse workforce is essential to achieving services that are culturally safe and responsive for our clients. First Nations staff bring unique knowledge, skills and expertise to our workforce and understand the needs and aspirations of the First Nations community.

**FOCUS AREA:** The focus area targets in this section are aimed at progressing the reconciliation dimensions of equality and equity, and institutional integrity by increasing First Nations employment in both legal and non-legal roles and ensuring a career pathway with professional development opportunities is provided to all First Nations staff.

## **ACTION 14** Improve employment outcomes by increasing First Nations recruitment, retention and professional development.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>14.1</b> Increase the proportion of First Nations staff at VLA to five per cent.	September 2025	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.2</b> Build understanding of current First Nations staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	May 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.3</b> Engage with First Nations staff to conduct a mid-term review of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2025–25.	February 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.4</b> Advertise job vacancies to reach First Nations stakeholders effectively.	September annually	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.5</b> Identify and engage an external expert to review human resource and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to First Nations people’s participation and leadership in our workplaces.	May 2024	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.6</b> Proactively identify and provide leadership development and mentoring opportunities for First Nations staff who wish to become leaders within VLA, including in the Senior Leadership Team, Executive Management Group and Board.	August annually	Director, People and Workplace Services
<b>14.7</b> Continue to support our First Nations employment pathway programs to expand and create new opportunities in legal and non-legal roles.	August annually	Director, People and Workplace Services

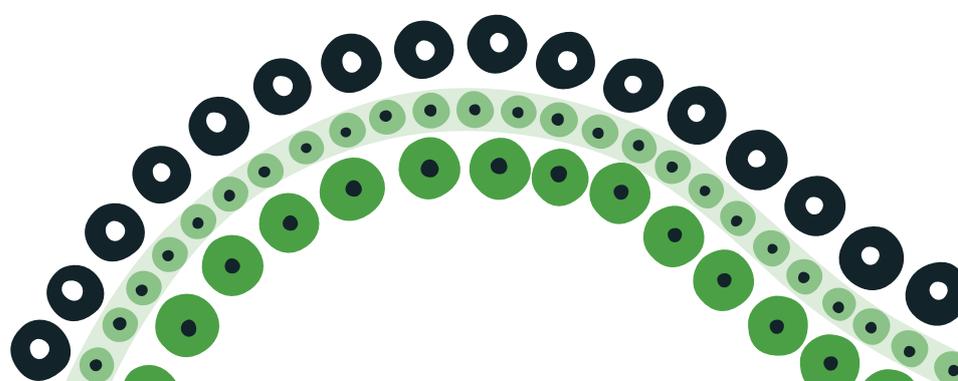
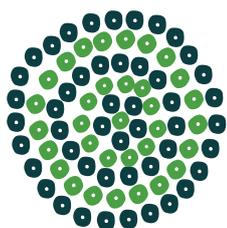


## **ACTION 15** Increase First Nations supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>15.1</b> Continue to implement our Social Procurement Strategy to strengthen support for First Nations suppliers and businesses.	March annually	Chief Financial Officer
<b>15.2</b> Continue Kinaway Chamber of Commerce Victoria membership and investigate future procurement opportunities with First Nations businesses in Victoria.	March annually	Chief Financial Officer
<b>15.3</b> Develop and communicate opportunities for procurement of goods and services from First Nations businesses to staff.	March annually	Chief Financial Officer
<b>15.4</b> Review and update procurement practices to remove barriers to procuring goods and services from First Nations businesses.	March annually	Chief Financial Officer
<b>15.5</b> Develop commercial relationships with First Nations businesses.	March annually	Chief Financial Officer

## **ACTION 16** Continue to build the capacity and capability of the First Nations Services team.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>16.1</b> Support the continuation of a dedicated ACEO Program Manager role to oversee operation of the ACEO Program state-wide.	September 2024	Director, First Nations Services
<b>16.2</b> Support the continuation of the Senior Policy and Projects Manager role in the First Nations Services team to lead and support implementation of key reconciliation initiatives.	September 2024	Director, First Nations Services
<b>16.3</b> Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy to raise awareness of the work of the First Nations Services team, including promotion of the ACEO Program.	March 2024	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information





## **ACTION 17** Expand the Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer (ACEO) Program.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>17.1</b> Expand ACEO positions across the state to continue building the capability of our staff to engage with and deliver a culturally responsive service to First Nations people in all regions.	September annually	Director, First Nations Services  Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>17.2</b> Review the scope and classification of the ACEO role to ensure recognition of their unique and valuable contribution.	September 2025	Director, People and Workplace Services  Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>17.3</b> Work in partnership with Aboriginal legal services to establish community support in the Bail and Remand Court to ensure that legal practitioners respond and assist First Nations people on remand in a culturally appropriate, responsive and informed manner.	September 2024	Director, First Nations Services  Executive Director, Criminal Law
<b>17.4</b> Work with the ACEOs and their managers to identify formal and dedicated professional development opportunities for each ACEO supported by professional development plans.	September 2025	Director, First Nations Services
<b>17.5</b> ACEO Program Manager to convene joint meetings between the ACEOs and their regional managers to share learnings and best practice.	March and September annually	Director, First Nations Services
<b>17.6</b> Develop a communication strategy to raise the profile of the ACEO Program among staff and further promote it to stakeholders in the justice and legal sector.	March 2024	Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Information  Director, First Nations Services

## **ACTION 18** Review and improve current data collection practices with regards to First Nations people.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>18.1</b> Develop First Nations data sovereignty principles and supporting governance mechanisms that ensure culturally appropriate and ethical collection, management and use of data about First Nations people.	September 2025	Associate Director, Outcomes and Evidence
<b>18.2</b> Develop an application to support the work of the ACEOs and capture appropriate data to monitor, manage and evaluate the ACEO Program on an ongoing basis.	September 2025	Chief Information and Digital Officer





# Governance

## **ACTION 19** Establish and maintain effective mechanisms to drive implementation of RAP3.

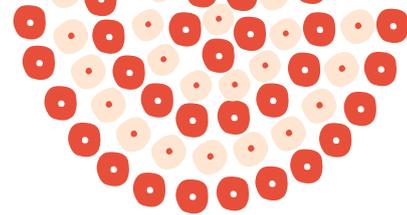
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>19.1</b> Maintain a RAP3 Working Group with First Nations representation.	September annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>19.2</b> Establish and apply terms of reference for the RAP3 Working Group.	September 2023	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>19.3</b> Meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP3 implementation.	December, March, June and September annually	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>19.4</b> Review RAP3 governance arrangements to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clarification of roles and responsibilities for implementation, promotion, measurement and progress reporting</li> <li>• ample opportunity for meaningful reflection about the progress of the RAP3, informed by First Nations perspectives and experiences.</li> </ul>	September 2023	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery

## **ACTION 20** Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP3 commitments.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>20.1</b> Appropriately cost and target budget allocation for planned RAP3 actions, providing necessary resourcing for successful implementation.	June annually	Chief Financial Officer
<b>20.2</b> Engage our senior leaders and other staff in the delivery of RAP3 commitments.	April and October annually	Chief Executive Officer
<b>20.3</b> Create a new role to coordinate, monitor and report on RAP3 implementation.	September 2023	Executive Director, Regions and Service Delivery
<b>20.4</b> Redesign and maintain appropriate systems and processes to track, measure and report on RAP3 commitments.	September annually	Director, First Nations Services
<b>20.5</b> Redefine the role of the RAP Champions and strengthen communication mechanisms across the organisation.	November 2023	Director, First Nations Services Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Legal Information
<b>20.6</b> Appoint and maintain internal RAP Champions from all levels of the organisation.	November 2023	Director, First Nations Services
<b>20.7</b> Appoint a designated senior staff member to drive RAP3 implementation across the organisation.	September 2023	Chief Executive Officer

## **ACTION 21** Ensure the voices and lived experiences of First Nations people are regularly informing service design and performance.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>21.1</b> Ensure ongoing representation of at least two First Nations people on all of our lived experience groups.	September 2025	Director, Client Services and Sector Engagement
<b>21.2</b> Identify additional mechanisms to embed the lived experience of First Nations people in our everyday practice.	September 2024	Director, First Nations Services Director, Client Services and Sector Engagement
<b>21.3</b> Review policies and processes with regards to the support and remuneration of First Nations lived experience experts whom we engage.	September 2024	Director, Client Services and Sector Engagement

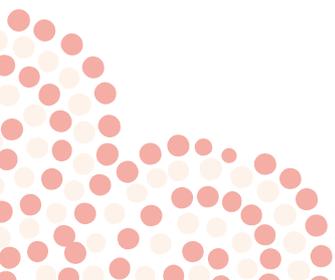


## **ACTION 22** Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP3 achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>22.1</b> Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date to ensure we do not miss important RAP correspondence.	January annually	Director, First Nations Services Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>22.2</b> Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	1 August annually	Director, First Nations Services Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>22.3</b> Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September, annually	Director, First Nations Services Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>22.4</b> Report RAP3 progress to all staff and senior leaders quarterly.	January, April, July, October annually	Director, First Nations Services Associate Director, Communications, Engagement and Information Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>22.5</b> Publicly report our RAP3 achievements, challenges and learnings, annually.	September annually	Chief Executive Officer Board RAP Champion
<b>22.6</b> Submit a traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of RAP3.	September 2025	Chief Executive Officer

## **ACTION 23** Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>23.1</b> Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	September 2025	Director, First Nations Services
<b>23.2</b> Formally evaluate implementation of RAP3.	June 2025	Chief Executive Officer



## Contact

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