

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE – VICTORIAN BUDGET SUMMARY – May 2024

Victorian 2024-25 State Budget’s ‘historic investment’ in health system fails to deliver for Aboriginal Health

The Victorian State Budget 24-25, released on 7 May 2024, aims to help families with the cost of living through [key investments](#) in education, transport, and housing affordability.

One of the budget’s major investments includes \$118.9 million in the next financial year to progress Treaty and continue the truth-telling process. This includes \$6.3 million for the extension of the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2024-25 and \$500,000 in 2025-26. The Victorian Government has expressed an intention to enable self-determination and deliver outcomes-focused reporting with this funding.

The Victorian Government also boasts ‘[a historic investment in our health system, providing certainty for hospitals](#)’ with a focus on frontline care. However, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and Aboriginal health more broadly have not benefited equally from this historic investment.

The new budget allocates \$11 billion to the health system, and an additional \$1.7 billion for hospital upgrades, which is intended to provide long term funding security for hospitals. This investment includes funding for new hospitals, ambulances, the health workforce, and women’s preventative health services.

The question is, how helpful is this for Aboriginal Victorians? Without a significant investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, cultural safety and culturally safe health systems and services, these investments are almost meaningless for mob.

As detailed below, the budget only commits \$19.3 million in new direct funding to Aboriginal health programs and services. This is a drop in the ocean compared to the \$11 billion for the mainstream health system and is out of step with the government’s commitment to closing the gap and its [stated commitment in this budget to self-determination](#). Investment in Treaty and Truth is required but Aboriginal Victorian’s health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing needs cannot be put on hold in the meantime. Concurrent and equally significant investment is needed in Aboriginal health, particularly resourcing for our ACCHOs, who do vital work on the ground keeping Aboriginal community members healthy and well.

Aboriginal Health

The government's direct investment in Aboriginal Victorians, which covers more than health services, is small, totalling \$273 million. The \$19.3 million commitment in new direct funding to Aboriginal health is allocated to:

					(\$ million)
Service / program	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Total over 4 years
VAHS paediatric services	1	1	1	1.1	4.1
Implementation of <i>marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri</i> : The Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	4.4
<i>Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands: Strengthening cultural safety and supporting culture and kinship</i>	2.6	3.2	3.0	2.0	10.8

The four-year funding allocations are a positive step and VAHS hopes to see a move to ongoing funding more broadly for ACCHOs. However, the above amounts committed annually are modest. As noted by [VACCHO](#), the budget only commits a quarter of what they requested for programs aimed at removing systemic barriers for Aboriginal health and wellbeing and enhancing cultural services and infrastructure.

The budget also includes investment in mainstream programs and services that have Aboriginal-led components or focuses. These are:

- Preventative health support for women: funding to establish 20 new women's health clinics, including a dedicated Aboriginal-led clinic (\$18.3 million)
- Responsive health care in Maternal Health Services including targeted and flexible support for Aboriginal families (\$28.8 million).
- Funding for the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance to improve cancer outcomes for Victorians. This includes enabling the sector to better respond to the complex care needs of Aboriginal Victorians (\$7.4 million).

These three investments total a combined \$54.5 million; it is unclear how much of this will be allocated to ACCHOs.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

The only direct new investment relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing is the above \$10.8 million for *Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands*. This program includes the development of

- 1) A cultural safety accreditation scheme in public hospitals and culturally safe standards.
- 2) Investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver an expanded Culture and Kinship program, which aims to reconnect young Aboriginal Victorians to their culture, community, kinship and Country.

Suicide Prevention

Funding is also being continued next year for suicide prevention initiatives, with an allocation of \$3.8 million overall. Some of this funding will support:

- VAHS's [Yarning Safe N Strong](#), the free and confidential counselling phone service.
- The Strong Brother Strong Sister program for young Aboriginal people in Geelong.

Closing the Gap

The [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (National Agreement) is an agreement signed in 2020 between Australian governments and Aboriginal Peak Organisations (the Coalition of Peaks) that aims to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes. It commits to 19 socio-economic targets and four Priority Reform areas. Aboriginal health and social and emotional wellbeing is holistic and is impacted and influenced by cultural and social determinants, so the targets include and extend beyond health. Things like education, contact with the justice system and child protection, and separation from community, culture, and Country all impact on and are interconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.

The [Priority Reforms](#) are intended to transform the way that governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This is a necessary foundation for achieving the socio-economic targets. They are:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Priority Reform 1. | Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making |
| Priority Reform 2. | Building the Community Controlled Sector |
| Priority Reform 3. | Transforming Government Organisations |
| Priority Reform 4. | Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level |

The National Agreement requires a holistic and cross-portfolio approach from all levels of Government, which means that investments outside of health also support Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Notable investments in this budget include:

	(\$ million)				
Service / program	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Total over 4 years
Funding for ACCOs for self-determined justice diversion and family violence supports	5.3	5.4	5.6		16.3
Specialist alcohol and other drug services for Aboriginal Victorians	1.6				1.6
Supporting representation and participation of Aboriginal young people through the Koorie Youth Council	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.6
Funding for <i>Yuma Yirramboi</i> and for extending the government's partnership with Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce.	2.9	2.9	2.9		8.7
Funding for increased Aboriginal-led decision making in schools	8.9	14.9	14.1	13.1	
Continued funding to support Traditional Owners access to water and decision making in water management.	69.3				69.3

As noted in the Productivity Commission's recent [Closing the Gap review](#), since signing the National Agreement, the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments have failed to commit sufficient resourcing to deliver on the Priority Reforms. This budget is no different. While some funding commitments do support the Priority Reforms, in particular Priority Reforms One and Three through *Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands* and increased Aboriginal-led decision making in schools, this budget will not support the transformative reform that the Victorian Government has committed to under the National Agreement.