



Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

304. Invest in training and employment programs attuned to local needs

That spending on training and other active labour market policy programs (such as CDEP and job subsidy schemes) be given preference over spending on unemployment relief programs. The determination of priorities for particular training programs must be better attuned to the particular needs expressed by local Aboriginal groups in their regional and community plans, and the skill requirements of the local labour market.¹

Background²	<p>The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) found that many Aboriginal people faced barriers, such as location and cultural factors, that limited access to mainstream employment. The Aboriginal Employment Development Policy acknowledged poor job prospects in regional and rural areas and supported creating local employment through community projects.</p> <p>The Commissioners noted that job creation programs were more effective than unemployment relief. Training programs proved to have greater impacts on employability but need to align with labour market needs. Importantly, policies should respect cultural ties, ensuring Aboriginal people are not required to leave their communities for work.</p>
Intent	To prioritise investment in labour market policy programs that are attuned to local needs, rather than invest in unemployment relief programs.
Responsibility	The Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments.
Key contact	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR).
Key action taken	
2005 Review³	<p>The Department for Victorian Communities assessed Recommendation 304 as partially implemented.</p> <p>Department of Victorian Communities</p> <p>The department noted several initiatives in their response, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wur-cum barra, the Indigenous Employment Strategy, aimed to open careers for Aboriginal people in the Victorian Public Service, with 230 jobs created for Aboriginal workers across all government agencies and levels between June 2002 and June 2005. • The Indigenous Employment Initiative was a partnership between the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the City of Greater

¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991) vol 5, 136 ('RCIADIC').

² Ibid vol 4, 378-379.

³ Aboriginal Justice Forum (Vic), Department of Justice (Vic), *Victorian Implementation Review of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Review Report, October 2005) vol 1, 165-167 ('2005 Review').

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	<p>Shepparton, which placed 100 unemployed Aboriginal people into permanent employment over a three-year period across 61 Shepparton employers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community Jobs Programs was a grants-based program, that employed participants (long-term unemployed) at full wages in community development projects that combined work experience and accredited training and skills development. • The Youth Employment Scheme provided 650 apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities within the Government for people aged 15-24. Aboriginal jobseekers were a specific target group.
<p>2018 Review⁴</p>	<p>Deloitte concluded that the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments had partially implemented Recommendation 304.</p> <p>Commonwealth Government</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government introduced the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011–2018, which included programs such as Youth Career Pathways, the Indigenous Procurement Policy, and the Community Development Employment Projects Program, alongside initiatives like Closing the Gap – Employment Services and Parents Next. Additionally, the Tailored Assistance Employment Grants program provides funding to help Aboriginal people overcome barriers to employment and secure sustainable jobs.</p> <p>Victorian Government</p> <p>Employment and training initiatives remained an ongoing focus of the Victorian Government under the third phase of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement.</p>
<p>Since then</p>	<p>Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions⁵</p> <p><u>National Skills Agreement – Closing the Gap – Bilateral Implementation Plans</u></p> <p>The National Skills Agreement provides Commonwealth funding to improve outcomes for Aboriginal learners in the VET sector. In 2023, the Victorian Government signed the agreement, securing funding to strengthen VET through initiatives aligned with national priorities, including Closing the Gap. This priority emphasises self-determination and shared decision-making to better meet Aboriginal needs. In Victoria, the NSA Bilateral Implementation Plan is delivered by three Aboriginal community-controlled registered training organisations (Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd and Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre) forming the Victorian First Nations VET Alliance.</p> <p>Under the Bilateral Implementation Plan, Alliance members will trial and assess training models that incorporate wrap-around supports, culturally relevant learning, and peer support to improve accessibility for Aboriginal learners in both metropolitan and regional</p>

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Report, August 2018) 631-632 ('2018 Review').

⁵ Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (Vic), 'Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Review of Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody' (Response to AJC Request) 25-27.

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areas. Success will be measured by increased participation in VET programs via Aboriginal community-controlled registered training organisations, greater engagement with student support services, and the number of students and trainers supported.

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) aims to embed Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives to improve engagement practices, recruitment, induction, and cultural auditing to create more inclusive TAFE environments. It will build VET sector capability to adopt culturally inclusive practices and drive systemic behavioural change, strengthening cultural competency across training organisations.

Employment initiatives

The Community Revitalisation program engaged communities, local leaders, organisations and governments to work together to respond to local needs and create pathways to economic inclusion for those experiencing multiple and interrelated forms of disadvantage. This has included support for Aboriginal communities supported by Kaiela Institute in Shepparton and Gunnaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation in East Gippsland. The Community Revitalisation program concluded in June 2025.

The Youth Employment Scheme (YES) Traineeship Program provides opportunities to young people facing barriers to employment to take on traineeships in participating Victorian public sector departments and agencies.

Evidence of impact

Authorising documents

None identified.

Outputs

Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions⁶

The Community Revitalisation program

The Community Revitalisation program received over \$18 million in funding between 2018-19 and 2024-25 (across all sites) to take a place-based approach to economic inclusion for those for those experiencing multiple and interrelated forms of disadvantage.

Since 2018, there has been approximately 180 Aboriginal graduates and trainees that have commenced roles within the Victorian Public Service through the YES Traineeship Program.

Outcomes

Yoorrook for Transformation⁷

Yoorrook heard from Rueben Berg, Co-Chair of the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria, that Aboriginal people are often put through training programs and courses that do not lead to employment:

A constant cycle of being put through training but no actual jobs at the end of it.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report* (Summary Report, 2025) 37-38 ('Yoorrook for Transformation - Summary Report').

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Generally, Yoorrook heard calls for continued investment in supportive workforce programs, including mentoring programs, cultural competency training and Reconciliation Action Plans.

Community views

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation⁸

Our people are still locked out of the upper levels of income and employment due to factors such as a lack of cultural safety, a lack of targeted mentoring and development support, a lack of political representation, and due to racism and discrimination among staff, managers, and employers.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation⁹

Aboriginal people often face barriers to accessing employment opportunities, leading to higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. This does not mean that Aboriginal people are not fit for employment, but shows an ongoing, systemic problem.

Related recommendations

Yoorrook for Transformation¹⁰

Recommendation 92

The Victorian Government must assist recruitment, development, and retention of Aboriginal peoples in the workplace by:

- a) Amending the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic) to include an obligation on employers and employees to take steps to ensure cultural safety and capability in Victorian workplaces.
- b) Creating a pipeline of Aboriginal talent for identified industries with skills shortages, including bolstering access to education and vocational training for Aboriginal people to prepare them for high-value employment sectors.
- c) Monitoring and ensuring proper pay and conditions against defined targets for Aboriginal people in the public sector.
- d) Monitoring and ensuring proper remuneration for the cultural load borne by Aboriginal people in the workplace.
- e) Ensure the private sector develops recruitment, development, mentoring and retention strategies for Aboriginal people and support the private sector in developing such strategies.

2005 Review¹¹

Recommendation 5

That the Department for Victorian Communities advise on how the needs of local Aboriginal communities are linked to mainstream labour market programs and what proportion of

⁸ Ibid 38.

⁹ Ibid 36.

¹⁰ Ibid 81.

¹¹ 2005 Review, vol 1, 31-33.

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the resourcing for those programs is allocated to Aboriginal groups, and provide a report to the Aboriginal Justice Forum.

That the Victorian Government continue to implement and monitor Recommendation 304 through any monitoring process established as a consequence of this Review.

Recommendation 8

That the Department of Education and Training:

- a) provide advice on the implementation of the Wurreker strategy, particularly with reference to its effectiveness (including evaluation from an Aboriginal perspective, numbers in courses and how the contribution of local Aboriginal communities in the process is being strengthened), and
- b) provide a report to the Aboriginal Justice Forum on (a).

That the Victorian Government continue to implement and monitor Recommendation 304 through any monitoring process established as a consequence of this Review.

Assessment summary¹²

The intent of Recommendation 304 was to prioritise investment in labour market policy programs that are attuned to local needs, rather than invest in unemployment relief programs.

Consultation with the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) highlighted that the National Skills Agreement Bilateral Implementation Plan is delivered through the Victorian First Nations VET Alliance—comprising Aboriginal community-controlled organisations—which pilot accessible, culturally responsive training models with wrap-around and peer supports. DJSIR also noted the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) Traineeship program, which has supported around 180 Aboriginal participants into roles within the Victorian Public Service since 2018.

In our discussion, we echoed the findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, whereby Rueben Berg noted that Aboriginal people are often put through training programs and courses that do not lead to employment, ‘a constant cycle of being put through training but no actual jobs at the end of it.’ Training programs are often undermined by the absence of guaranteed jobs at completion, forcing participants to take unrelated or short-term roles or relocate to metropolitan areas. This reduces employment opportunities and disrupts community and family connections for Aboriginal people in regional Victoria.

I'd like to see training or traineeships that leads into long-term full-time employment, because a lot of Aboriginal organisations and government departments give a 12-month contract and that's it. (Bobby Nicholls, Chairperson, Hume Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC))

These challenges also apply for people that must travel for training opportunities that are not available regionally. Although VACCHO and VACSAL are making great efforts towards boosting capabilities of the Aboriginal workforce through Certificate IV, Diplomas and other training programs, these programs are predominantly metropolitan based.

¹² Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, Online, 22 August 2025) ('Working Group Meeting (22 August 2025)'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Project Team, Online, 21 October 2025) ('AJC Meeting (21 October 2025)').

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There's not enough out locally without our people having to travel, going away from their home. It's hard because a lot of people, especially our younger mob, don't want to go too far away from home. (Merle Miller, Representative, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated)

We want to see increased investment in Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL), including creating an ACC-RTO classification to expand training delivery and funding.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are more likely to employ Aboriginal people but currently lack sufficient funding to grow their workforce.

Aboriginal organisations will take on people, but they're not funded to increase their workforce because they don't have the dollar to match it. That's the challenge. (Bobby Nicholls, Chairperson, Hume RAJAC)

Mainstream and government organisations are often less culturally safe, city-based, and have stricter qualification requirements, making them less accessible to Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal organisations are providing what the community needs. Mainstream isn't touching it with a ten-foot-pole. (Chris Harrison, Co-chairperson, Aboriginal Justice Caucus)

Limited opportunities in regional areas can lead to skills shortages, weaken local economies, and reduce demand for institutions like TAFEs and universities. To address this, there is a need for greater investment in place-based, community-informed training and employment pathways that lead to stable, long-term jobs across Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, mainstream, and government sectors.

Assessment of Recommendation 304¹³

Is the intent of the recommendation accurately described?

Yes No

Does the action taken align with the intent of the recommendation?

- 0 – No action taken
- 1 – Action taken is of little relevance to the intent of the recommendation
- 2 – Action taken partially aligns with the intent of the recommendation
- 3 – Action taken fully aligns with the intent of the recommendation

MS1*
ACCOs
2.5

(Score out of 3)

Is there evidence of the desired impact or outcome/s?

- 0 – No evidence
- 1 – Evidence of output rather than outcome
- 2 – Some evidence action contributed to outcome/s
- 3 – Clear link between action and impact or outcome/s

MS1*
ACCOs
2.5

(Score out of 3)

How relevant is the recommendation in the current context?

- 0 – No relevance – refers to practices, agencies or laws that no longer exist
- 1 – Low – some relevance, but most aspects of the recommendation no longer apply
- 2 – Moderate – remains relevant, but some aspects of recommendation no longer apply
- 3 – High – entirely relevant to current context

3

(Score out of 3)

¹³ The Aboriginal Justice Caucus provided separate assessments of actions taken and evidence of outcomes for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and mainstream training programs as indicated in the assessment scores and matrix.

Does full implementation have the potential to reduce incarceration, increase safety in custody and/or progress Aboriginal self-determination?

0 – No potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes

1 – Low – potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, but none of the three identified

2 – Moderate – potential to progress one or two of the outcomes identified

3 – High – potential to reduce incarceration AND increase safety in custody AND self-determination

2

(Score out of 3)

Potential actions for further work

Investment in employment pathways

In conjunction with implementation of Recommendation 92(b) from Yoorrook for Transformation, the Victorian Government must invest in creating long-term employment pathways in mainstream and Aboriginal organisations for Aboriginal people that graduate from training programs, particularly across regional Victoria.

Support the creation of an ACCO Registered Training Organisation

Support the creation of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Registered Training Organisation (RTO) classification so that more ACCOs can become RTOs and receive funding through Employment Pathway Brokers Service to provide culturally safe work programs.

High priority for further work

Relevance and potential impact

		Low (0-2)	Moderate (3-4)	High (5-6)
Extent of action taken and evidence of outcomes	High (5-6)			Rec 304 (ACCOs)
	Moderate (3-4)			
	Low (0-2)			Rec 304 (Mainstream)

Bibliography

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