JUNE 2024

Supporting and Advancing Aboriginal Communities in Metropolitan Melbourne

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Acknowledgments

We pay our respect to the Wadawurrung, Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung people, as the Traditional Owners of Country where this project took place. We acknowledge that sovereignty of this land has never been ceded.

We acknowledge the contribution of the Aboriginal partner organisations and the Aboriginal community members for sharing their expertise and knowledge and for committing and contributing their time to this project.

Special thanks to Leanne Brooke, Deborah Mellet and Karen Jackson as the Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships and key contributors to the overall project and this report.

This research was funded by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

Prepared by Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit, Victoria University, with Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation, Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, and Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association.

Abbreviations and Terminology

MPDF	Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (can include health organisations)
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
TO	Traditional Owner, recognised as Aboriginal people who have traditional connection to an identified area of Country
LGA	Local Government Area
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee: National NAIDOC Week celebrations are held annually to celebrate and recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan

Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, First Nations, First Peoples, Traditional Custodians, Traditional Owners are different terms used in Australia. In this report, the term Aboriginal has been used to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. When referring to a policy or research paper, we may repeat the term used in cited works to best reflect the original author's intended meaning. However, we acknowledge the complexities of collective terminology and respect the right of each group to determine their preferred terms.

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Executive Summary

This report explores issues of self-determination for Aboriginal communities within Metropolitan Melbourne as part of the broader Melbourne Metropolitan Partnership Development Project. This project arose from the need for consistent metropolitan-wide data and more equal access to services for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A common approach to addressing social disparities is through policy and programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, these are often needs based and can have problems with deficit frames, placing the responsibility on individuals and not addressing broader systemic and structural issues.

The current project worked with local Aboriginal communities within the Melbourne Metropolitan Regions to establish a knowledge base of research literature pertaining to services and programs for Aboriginal people, review existing local, state, federal, and international policies relating to Aboriginal people and self-determination, and capture region data. This was developed in collaboration with key Aboriginal stakeholders as members of their respective metropolitan regions.

The project's aims for each stage of the project were as follows:

Community Consultations

- Assess local Aboriginal community needs through surveys distributed within the community.
- Partner with key local Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations within the Melbourne Metropolitan regions to inform the project and research, and collaboratively develop on the ground projects.

Literature Review

- Explore and synthesise existing research that has examined services and programs for Aboriginal people within metropolitan Melbourne.
- Outline how aspects of self-determination are understood and practiced, such as local community input, Aboriginal involvement and leadership, accountability, and advocacy.

Policy Review

- Explore and synthesise local and state policies that pertain to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Audit relevant policies relating to themes of Indigenous self-determination, advocacy, and community involvement.

Methods

Community Consultations:

Community consultations took place throughout the project, beginning with community surveys that gathered information regarding the use of both mainstream and Aboriginal-run programs and services, activity in community, cultural safety, and barriers and enablers of access. The 103 respondent surveys directed a focus on the Northern, Southern, and Western regions of Metropolitan Melbourne and informed the broader research and the additional on the ground programs.

Following surveys, researchers consulted with the Aboriginal representatives of the Northern, Southern, and Western regions from Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association, and Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation respectively. Consultations took place to develop and implement on-ground projects in each region, to inform the direction of the research including the literature and policy reviews.

Literature Review:

Researchers completed a systematic review of the literature on programs and services targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that were implemented in Metropolitan Melbourne. A total 919 papers across five research databases as well as additional grey literature sites were screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria. A final 10 program evaluations met all criteria and data was inferentially extracted and inductively analysed for key concepts and ideas relevant to the research questions and overall aims.

Policy review:

A policy review was undertaken to develop an understanding of Aboriginal self-determination by local and state Governments with additional declarations from international context endorsed by Australia. Attention was paid to the enablers to accessing programs and services according to the survey participants. Council documents were then reviewed against the expressed interests from survey respondents regarding what services and programs they would like to see in their local communities.

Findings

Community Consultation Findings

Key barriers to accessing services and programs were identified as distance to travel, a lack of programs, racism within mainstream services/lack of cultural safety, and a lack of knowledge of available services and programs. Key enablers for accessing programs were Aboriginal staff, ease of access, having family that also access the organisation or services, and having a program Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members enjoy participating in. The most common program or service that survey participants identified as missing were general services that were in their local area, youth programs, and cultural activities/groups (such as traditional arts or dance).

Key themes analysed from participants' open-ended survey responses highlighted the importance of centring the voices of the local Aboriginal communities, coming together as Mob and being inclusive and welcoming for all Aboriginal people, particularly considering the complexities with identity and culture. Another theme that came through frequently was that many Aboriginal services were located in the inner north of Melbourne and not accessible to many. Finally, participants highlighted the importance of family, connection, community, and culture.

Systematic Literature Review Findings

Key concepts such as self-determination were largely missing from the reviewed papers and deficit discourse remained common within research. Self-determination was explicitly mentioned in three of the reviewed evaluations and was strongly linked with two of those articles through its inclusion within their methodology and theoretical frameworks. Overall, community consultation tended to be present through the early and pre-stages of the programs including their design and before implementation, rather than throughout all program stages. Obtaining community input to inform program logics was a strength of many of these evaluations. Where embedded Aboriginal involvement was lacking, Aboriginal participants and communities were constructed as program recipients in need of assistance, rather than equal stakeholders. Two evaluations emphasised ongoing consultation and input from Aboriginal community and/or participants, resisting paternalistic relationships by demonstrating the positive effects of continuous consultation and input from Aboriginal program participants and the wider community (Black et al., 2019; Trounson et al., 2019). These evaluations exemplified the link between community-driven initiatives and programs and the perceived benefits for communities and individuals within those programs.

Themes that were analysed in relation to self-determination included community consultation and input, advocacy, Aboriginal involvement and leadership, and accountability. These were addressed inconsistently within the reviewed evaluations, highlighting differing proprieties among groups and programs. Those with stronger and more embedded community consultation, Aboriginal leadership, and circular accountability, had stronger research methodologies and stronger outcomes regarding participant involvement and feedback (see Black et al., 2019; Trounson et al., 2019). The implications of being not Aboriginal led or having input from local communities means that programs are often less culturally safe or sensitive, creating blind spots to allow for racism and other barriers to accessing services (see Bailie et al., 2015).

Policy Review Findings

The current review noted an inconsistency in how Aboriginal self-determination was addressed through international, state, and local policies. Chiefly, there appears to be a lack of acknowledgement of the local Aboriginal community within many of the local government policies of Wyndham and Frankston, and an overall lack of discussion of self-determination across all LGAs. This suggests an inconsistent and insufficient application of the principles of Aboriginal self-determination in the development of such policies and plans. Progressing towards alignment with international and state understandings of self-determination will see councils develop better relationships with Aboriginal locals through authentic partnership, accountability, and transferring power to community. Good will and engagement were demonstrated through local council RAPs, demonstrating an approach to policy development that may be expanded throughout the entire LGA policies and processes. Continuing council education and authentic partnership with local Aboriginal people is expected to see a meaningful improvement toward progressing self-determination.

Overall, the reviewed government documents show that more conversations between governments and Aboriginal communities need to take place to establish mutual understandings and expectations around self-determination for it to be meaningfully and effectively embedded in policy and practice.

On-ground Projects

On-the-ground projects were initiated in collaboration with the project partners. On-ground projects are understood as activities informed by the Aboriginal community in a metropolitan region and further designed and implemented by the project partners within their local communities. All three on-ground projects are based around a central finding within the community survey and conversations with all three project partners. These projects included advocacy documents for each organisation to support them in advocating for their community with local government and assist in grant applications, as well as potentially hiring staff to strengthen their existing programs and services and work toward future goals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this project, several recommendations have been made, addressing multiple sectors and community and government levels. Within the recommendations section, suggested actions related to the recommendations have been included to provide ways that groups may enact and apply these recommendations.

1. Recommendations for Hume Region: Hume City Council
    1.1. Work with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to co-design and establish a culturally safe Gathering Place where one is lacking.

2. Recommendations for Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities
   - 2.1. Improve trust and relationships with local Aboriginal groups
3. Recommendations for local council policy and practice
   - 3.1. Utilise existing state resources
     - 3.1.A. Conduct audits of existing policies to ensure Aboriginal self-determination is considered and incorporated throughout.
     - 3.1.B. Commit to and apply action logic of existing state government frameworks.
     - 3.1.C. Commit to actions within state and local government strategies.
   - 3.2. Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
     - 3.2.A. Incorporate Country-based approaches to uphold sustainable engagement.
     - 3.2.B. Embed recognition and application of cultural determinants of health, acknowledging the cultural factors that shape, protect and support traditional cultural practice.
     - 3.2.C. Ensure the inclusion of Healing and the Social Emotional Wellbeing Framework within local policy to support cultural responsiveness.
   - 3.3. Progress towards Aboriginal Self-determination
     - 3.3.A. Incorporate circular accountability where services that are funded to target Aboriginal people are not only accountable to funding bodies, but to the communities they service.
     - 3.3.B. Ensure local policies and plans have embedded evaluation measures and frameworks informed by Aboriginal communities.
     - 3.3.C. Develop a self-determination local action plan with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal organisations and local Aboriginal communities.
     - 3.3.D. Seek opportunities for Aboriginal agency and partnership regarding local matters, with the intent of sharing and transferring decision-making to local Aboriginal people within those contexts.
     - 3.3.E. Ensure embedded and ongoing community consultation with local Aboriginal people at all stages of development.
     - 3.3.F. Ensure reporting requirements are accessible for smaller organisations.
4. Recommendations for Future Research
   - 4.1. Additional evaluations of programs and services targeted at Aboriginal people within urban areas, such as Melbourne.
   - 4.2. Strengthen academic literature and discourse through increased studies focusing on strength-based approaches and their efficacy.
   - 4.3. Increase clarity in research regarding accountability and consultation processes.
   - 4.4. Explore the significance of culturally safe meeting places for Aboriginal community.
   - 4.5. Further explore local cultural safety within local Aboriginal contexts.

I: Project Background and Design

Aboriginal people are the first people of Australia, peoples comprising rich and diverse cultural groups. Since European colonisation, Aboriginal people have faced generations of adversity and trauma on their own land and have been subjected to continued disparities in social justice issues, human rights, and health outcomes (Griffiths et al., 2016; Paradies, 2016). In recent decades, there has been a push for reducing these health disparities through policies including Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap n.d.) and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), with varying degrees of priority at federal, state, and local government levels. There have been mixed approaches to achieve these goals, with a tendency to focus on deficits, often missing important structural, political, cultural issues. Within Victoria, a Treaty is currently being developed by Aboriginal community members with Traditional Owners and government, which serves as an embodiment of self-determination for Aboriginal people.

A dominant approach to addressing disparities has been through services and programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at local and national levels. These are often needs-based and publicly funded by governments to meet specific targets outlined in various action plans and policies. Since the late 1990s the programs have often favoured measures that targeted employment, housing, education, and health outcomes as per public policies at the time (Gunstone, 2008). This has been approved through the opinions of prominent Aboriginal leaders, validating this approach to the wider Australian public (Altman, 2018; Mundine, 2018). These focuses on socioeconomic outcomes reflect a widespread understanding and view of what constitutes a 'good life', whereby economic independence and participation in the mainstream economy are considered markers of success. Dawson et al. (2021) argues that this ignores how many Aboriginal people conceptualise a good life and success, where connection to Country, family, community and language, and self-determination can be considered equally important. It also fails to address other aspects contributing to disadvantage such as racism, dispossession, family removal, intergenerational trauma, and social exclusion (Howard-Wagner, 2019). Researchers have suggested that focuses on economic indicators are merely veiled methods of assimilation, given that they are premised on individual wealth building, which conflicts with collectivist approaches (Altman, 2018; Bulloch & Fogarty, 2016; Dodson, 2007; Marks, 2008).

Current policy tends to problematise Aboriginal people as inherently dysfunctional (Dawson et al., 2020). Since the enacting of the doctrine of discovery (Miller et al., 2010), policy discourse has defined Aboriginal people in terms of what they lack in comparison to a "utopian, non-Indigenous ideal" (Fogarty et al., 2018a, p. 1). This deficit frame of Aboriginal people is maintained through policy, media, and public discourses, and relates to how funding is allocated, outcomes are measured and who accountability rests with (Fogarty et al., 2018b).

Within Australian practice, providing funding to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to meet local needs has been a way for governments to allow local communities to self-determine. ACCOs exist as incorporated organisations that are owned and run by Aboriginal communities to address local needs and provide services for their communities. However, the Australian Government's relationship with ACCOs has been identified as paternalistic, as ACCOs rely on the government for funding and the requirements associated with this obstruct the organisations' effectiveness and independence (Silburn et al., 2016). Silburn et al.

(2016) identified that complex funding and reporting requirements created substantial barriers for ACCHOs, creating significant technical burden and organisational risk, and can impede service delivery. Most of the funding allocated to Aboriginal people is received by mainstream services, meaning services other than those that are Aboriginal community-controlled, and there is little accountability or transparency in how these funds are spent. Moran et al. (2016) similarly found that small, short-term grants place organisations in a perpetual cycle of applying for and reporting against funding for very specific purposes. Funding cycles are often based on policies and justified against targets such as Closing the Gap, which can continue to perpetuate deficit discourses and judges Aboriginal progress against Western neoliberal ideals.

This was exemplified in a recent case study with the Indigenous population in Vanuatu by Westoby et al. (2020), highlighting similar issues that exist in Australia. They found that 'experts' are working with communities, conducting assessments asking what 'community' needs are, designing projects away from community and returning to implement them, which communities are then challenged to sustain once funding ceased. They argued for these programs to not only be community-based, but locally led, as these paternalistic arrangements fail to view these local Indigenous communities as the best litmus test of "their own agendas, needs, aspirations, and futures and in the best position to make decisions for themselves about what and how they might become more resilient" (Westoby et al., 2020, p. 1466). In a recent report by the Aboriginal Executive Council (2019), demand for Aboriginal services already exceeds capacity in many sectors, and this is continuing to rise due to significant Aboriginal population growth in Victoria.

Self-Determination

An antithesis to assimilation is self-determination, which is considered a fundamental human right for all Indigenous peoples by the United Nations (2007). The United Nations (2007) describe self-determination as the ability for Indigenous peoples to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. Here, self-determination is considered a human right of peoples rather than of individuals. Understandings of what self-determination is and how it is practiced have meant different things to people at different times (Rademaker & Rowse, 2020). Some have conceptualised Aboriginal self-determination as a 'bottom-up' approach that is primarily local, involving the power to create and control their own institutions, manage their own affairs, and hold accountable those who exercise power among them.

Support for bottom-up, strengths-based approaches have grown in recent years, acknowledging the expertise that local communities have in their own issues and the harm that deficit discourses can have on already marginalised communities. Within Indigenous contexts, strength-based approaches promote a set of values and practices that foregrounds Indigenous self-determination and that attends to the resources and capacities of Indigenous people, seeking to support and strengthen these resources to minimise problems (Brough et al., 2004). This approach to research and program design helps to reframe the expectations presented in institutional policies, programs, and interventions, and to disrupt assumptions about deficits (Bond, 2019). Strength-based approaches should not be mistaken for calls to deflate the realities or deny the disadvantage that Aboriginal people experience in socioeconomic circumstances and health conditions. Discourses of deficit exist when policy aimed at alleviating disadvantage

becomes overrun with narratives of failure and inferiority, meaning that those experiencing these challenges are perceived as the problem (Fogarty, Lovell et al., 2018).

The Current Project

The current project is part of the Metropolitan Partnerships, a Victorian Government project that has sought to bring together experts and leaders from all levels of government, business, and the community to identify and progress issues that matter in their region of Melbourne. At the beginning of this project, there were six partnerships representing the metropolitan regions of Melbourne. With commitments to Treaty, self-determination, and Truth Telling, each region has an Aboriginal leader representative, and these Aboriginal members also work as a group and guide metropolitan-wide projects to support and advance Aboriginal communities.

As part of the broader project and led by Moondani Balluk, the Indigenous Academic Unit at Victoria University, the Supporting and Advancing Aboriginal Communities project arose from the need for consistent metro-wide data and unequal access to services. The project team has worked with the other Aboriginal representatives within the Melbourne Partnerships program to identify local community needs. This research was derived from the project's objective to design and develop an evidence-based report on programs, services, and needs of Aboriginal communities across Melbourne, seeking to support those identified local needs and recommend actionable steps to address them.

While there is growing research in Australia concerning Aboriginal peoples' rights to self-determination and strengths-based programs and services (see Bullen et al., 2023; Dudgeon et al, 2020; Gibson et al., 2020), there remains a major gap that synthesises these topics together. Research within Aboriginal communities has often focused on remote regions, such as those in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, while inquiry in urban areas such as Melbourne remains under researched. Metropolitan Melbourne has its own unique social and cultural landscape, including a growing Aboriginal population who is often perceived as less visible compared with other Australian states and territories. Given the significant barriers to service delivery by ACCOs, examining research around programs and services for Aboriginal people in these areas could not only help develop an evidence base on current services and programs, but help inform how self-determination can be better achieved in these contexts. This project aims to provide justification for further action and community-led research in this area, as research can inform and justify funding for government bodies, advocating for the communities that it has worked with as well as the wider Aboriginal population.

Given the broader project objectives, this research was driven by the following objectives, which are linked to each section of the project:

Community Consultations

- Assess local Aboriginal community needs through surveys distributed within the community.
- Partner with key local Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations within the Melbourne Metropolitan regions to inform the project and research, and collaboratively develop on the ground projects.

Literature Review

- Explore and synthesise existing research that has examined services and programs for Aboriginal people within metropolitan Melbourne.
- Outline how aspects of self-determination are understood and practiced, such as local community input, Aboriginal involvement and leadership, accountability, and advocacy.

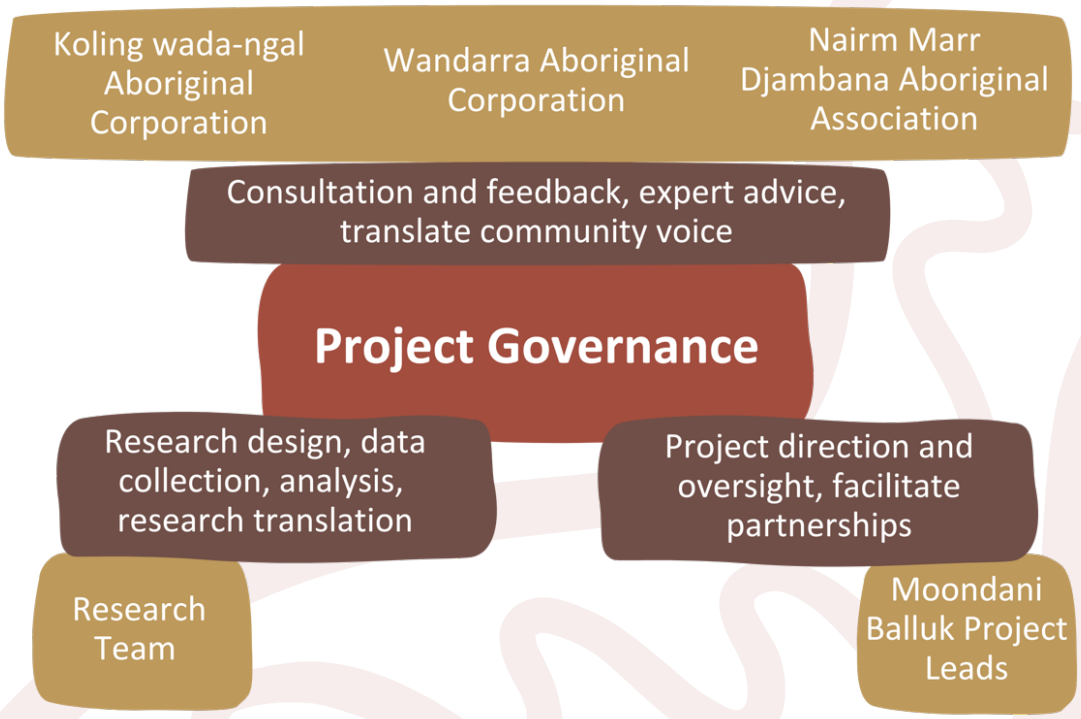
Policy Review

- Explore and synthesise local and state policies that pertain to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Audit relevant policies relating to themes of Indigenous self-determination, advocacy, community involvement, and

Project Governance

This research project was led by Moondani Balluk in collaboration with three Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships and three Aboriginal community organisation partners, Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, Nairm Marr Djambana Association and Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Coporation. In the following report, these organisations are referred to as partnering organisations, collaborating community partners, participating ACCOs or local partner ACCOs. The research group was led by two Aboriginal project managers, with three white, non-Aboriginal researchers assisting with various research activities. Together, the Aboriginal community organisations, the Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships and the researchers formed the project group.

The Aboriginal project leads facilitated engagement with the Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships, who are also in leading positions at the three ACCOs participating in this project. They provided expert advice on project design and activities and gave feedback and direction regarding documentation and dissemination of research findings. This ensured for the research to be led by priorities and interests of Aboriginal community in metropolitan Melbourne and further ensured relevance and applicability of the findings to be practicable and actionable in community contexts. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were established with each partner to reinforce community accountability and strengthen Moondani Balluk's relationships with the Aboriginal community.



Project Design

The project comprised multiple stages, including initial and ongoing community consultation which included surveys with the broader Aboriginal community in metropolitan Melbourne, conversations with Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships, a systematic literature review, a review of international, state and local policies and frameworks, and the initiation of on-ground projects with the participating ACCOs. Each stage mutually informed other parts of the project throughout, and all directly informed the on-ground projects within local communities.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopted a decolonial lens through which to review existing research. Such frameworks aim to decentre Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and ways of being, critiquing the perceived universality and superiority of Western knowledges and the systems that reinforce these perceptions and powers (Sonn et al., 2022). For concepts such as self-determination, this is especially relevant as mainstream Western understandings and practices of the term can differ from those held by Indigenous peoples, impacting the human rights of Indigenous people. Centring Aboriginal knowledges is important to avoid previous assimilatory approaches that have been critiqued, especially regarding issues that concern Aboriginal peoples such as programs and services targeted at them. This framework is evident in the current study as Indigenous knowledges and methods are centred at each stage of the research and are also a central focus for analysis within the reviewed articles.

Community Consultation and Surveys

As part of the broader project, the Aboriginal communities of metropolitan Melbourne were surveyed to capture information regarding their use of services and programs, general demographic information, and their experiences in their regions. A 38-question survey was created that included multiple choice and open-ended questions. The questions were designed to deepen understanding and inform the project design and areas of inquiry based on community feedback and views.

Survey participants

Participants were recruited through purposive convenience sampling from within the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in each region by the Aboriginal members of the Metropolitan Partnerships. This was deemed appropriate due to the existing relationships the partnership members have with these groups and given the respondents were likely to be directly impacted by the outcomes of the current project. There were 103 respondents to the survey, all identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, although not all participants completed all questions. Of the total participants, 77.7% (*n* = 80) identified as female and 22.2% (*n* = 23) identified as male. Demographic information is presented in Table 1 below. The participants represented 43 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island language groups across Australia. The metropolitan regions were determined from participants' reported suburb/postcode, of which two results were either entered incorrectly or missing, and two resided in regional Victoria, outside of metropolitan Melbourne. Those outside metropolitan Melbourne have been included, as these members used the services questioned about. Of the five metropolitan regions, the Western Region had the highest frequency of respondents with 35% from that area (*n*=36), followed by 30.1% (*n*=31) in the Northern Region, and 27.2% (*n*=28) in the Southern Region.

Table 1. Survey participant demographics.

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	23	22.2%
	Female	80	77.7%
	Total	103	
Age	18-25	14	13.6%
	26-35	11	10.7%
	36-44	19	18.4%
	46-55	19	18.4%
	56-65	20	19.4%
	66+	20	19.4%
	Total	103	
Metro Region	Eastern	1	1%
	Inner	2	1.9%
	Inner South-East	0	0%
	Northern	31	30.1%
	Southern	28	27.2%
	Western	36	35%
	Regional Vic	2	1.9%
	No answer	2	1.9%
	Total	103	

Toward the end of the project, the designations of the metropolitan regions within the project changed in line with restructuring of the broader Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund. These designations are relevant to when the surveys were completed in early 2023.

Based on the engagement with the surveys, the Northern, Western, and Southern Metropolitan Regions were identified as partner regions as they accounted for majority of survey responses. Several community consultations took place between the research team and members from the Western, Northern, and Southern metropolitan region's local ACCOs to drive the project based on community priorities. The ACCOs included Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation in the west, Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation in the north, and Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association in the southern region of Melbourne.

Data Collection and Analysis

Survey responses were collected and entered into the online software Qualtrics and were analysed through Qualtrics and Excel by the research team to view trends within the data relating to each metropolitan region. The survey findings are presented in Part II of this report.

Systematic Literature Review

Given the history of deficit discourse surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Australia, examining the approach of both the research and the service or program that was being studied was a key focus in this review. The current study drew on work by Fogarty et al. (2018), which examined the use of strength-based approaches within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing contexts. In the context of programs, examples of approaches include deficit-based, strengths-based, asset-based, participatory and rights-based approaches. Top-down approaches are programs initiated by authorities or larger organisations and collectives such as local and state Government. In contrast, bottom-up approaches include community-level initiation and implementation of programs, driven by individuals, collectives or organisations based locally or with strong, reciprocal community ties. Importantly, a program might be initiated in a deficit-thinking context, however the actual implementation of a program might still be community-driven. In the context of this review, those approaches are called combination approaches.

The authors understand that categorising these evaluations into types of approaches can be somewhat reductionist as these evaluations may be complex, have overlap between several approaches, or not neatly fit into the categories outlined. This complexity was further evident as most of the reviewed articles did not clearly outline their own approaches. While this may be imperfect, this categorisation helps to outline and differentiate between the papers, approaches, and resources used to develop and implement programs and research. The current research is not seeking to critique or analyse the nature of strength-based approaches (see Fogarty et al., 2018), but use it as a framework to situate other aspects of focus, such as self-determination and community involvement through their methods and outcomes. This review was driven by the following research question: **What are the common themes concerning Aboriginal engagement with targeted services and programs, regarding self-determination in metropolitan Melbourne?**

The purpose of the systematic literature review was to review, evaluate, and synthesise what has been published around the services and programs for Aboriginal people in metropolitan Melbourne. The review was performed by two non-Indigenous researchers under the guidance of two Aboriginal research project leads. Regular discussions took place between the research team throughout the research design, implementation, and analysis phases.

The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PISMA) statement (Moher et al. 2009). The research procedures and thematic considerations were documented in a research protocol, which was registered with PROSPERO, an electronic database of systematic review protocols (registration number CRD42023400079).

Search Strategy

The review was performed across 5 databases: InfoRMIT, HealthInfoNet, ProQuest, Scopus, PubMed, and Taylor & Francis, as well as grey literature sources from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Lowitja Institute. Grey literature, being literature published informally, non-commercially, or unpublished, was deemed appropriate to allow a more comprehensive engagement with the research topic and reduce risks of biases in publication agenda and requirements (Paez, 2017). Key search terms for the database searches included “Indigenous”, “Aboriginal”, “services and programs”, and “Melbourne”.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles that were available in English and that were published between 2009 and 2023 were included. Any articles before 2009 were deemed inappropriate, as research around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities experienced ethical and methodological shifts when Australia formally endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2009. Further inclusion criteria included articles that specifically focused on programs and services in metropolitan Melbourne that targeted Aboriginal people and communities. Studies that were available in multiple Australian states but had at least one service or program site in Melbourne were included, as were those located in Victoria without further specification of their location.

The focus on metropolitan Melbourne in the literature review was selected due to the nature of the broader project, as well as by the unique context that this area has for Aboriginal people. Exclusion criteria included any articles that were not targeted at Aboriginal people and had no program sites in Melbourne. Papers that focused on broader services or programs aimed at mainstream populations where Aboriginal people were studied as a subgroup were not included in the review. This was justified due to the challenges that Aboriginal people still face when attending mainstream services (Herrings et al., 2013; Nolan-Isles et al., 2021).

Review process

The data was screened in three phases: title screening, abstract screening, and full-text screening. During the title and abstract screenings, two of the reviewers independently reviewed all titles against inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total 811 articles were reviewed during the title screening and 274 were removed as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 494 articles' abstracts were then independently screened by the reviewers. Their results were cross-referenced and there was an overlap of 28 articles to include, and another 32 that only one reviewer had included. To reduce bias, all 60 articles were included for full-text review.

The 60 papers were divided between the reviewers, where they were screened on the full-text level against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Regular consultation took place to cross-reference questions and meet consensus for criteria, given the presence of ambiguity and subjectivity in the articles. The full-text screening evidenced that most papers meeting the inclusion criteria were evaluations of programs or services. Other publication types included discussion papers based on program or service evaluations, with a focus on distinct aspects of the evaluated program or service.

At this stage of the review process, the reviewers agreed to focus the review on evaluations of programs or services. This decision was justified as the characteristics of evaluative papers provide in-depth answers to the review questions and overall research focus. Amongst the 60 papers, the reviewers identified 10 evaluations of programs that met all inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Extracted information from each evaluation including participants, location of program, type and description of program, targeted population, participants, and outcomes. Data was then extracted using a modified quality appraisal tool by Harfield et al. (2020) (see table 1.), and then further examined to explore how researchers and programs engage with self-determination and community.

Quality Appraisal

The 10 evaluations were reviewed against 14 questions outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander quality appraisal tool (QAT) developed by Harfield et al. (2020). The QAT is an alternative to common appraisal tools that

are grounded in western research principles and standards, which enables researchers to appraise studies from an Indigenous viewpoint (Harfield et al. 2020). Along with the QAT, Harfield et al. (2020) developed a companion document, which further defines key terms and provides advice on how to justify decision-making during the appraisal of included papers. The reviewers used this document as they appraised the 10 evaluations.

The QAT has commonly been used in addition to other appraisal tools (see Davies et al., 2023; Sadler et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2022), and appraisal tools are often used as another tool to exclude papers if they do not meet a certain level of 'quality'. However, this review was interested in the current state of literature, rather than measuring the outcomes of studies. Thus, no papers were removed following the appraisal with the QAT. More so, the QAT was used as an analytical tool to support the assessment and review of the included evaluations and to examine how research has engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ethics and values.

The QAT was amended to better suit the analysis of not only research, but the services and programs that the articles evaluated. The following adapted questions were used to guide the reviews (see Appendix A).

Data synthesis

As most articles were qualitative, an inferential process of data extraction was required (Noyes & Lewis, 2011). The researchers read and re-read eligible articles to inductively assess them for key points and ideas relevant to the research questions and overall aims, which were then summarised into key themes. The key themes are presented in Part II of this report.

Policy Review Design

The third component of this project was a review of the understanding of Aboriginal self-determination by local and state Governments. This was extended by a review of key declarations from international contexts. Examining local, state, and international policies are important for understanding the balance of power for marginalised communities, particularly Aboriginal people.

How groups are framed and problematised within legislation and public strategies informs discourse around these communities and whether human rights of self-determination are enabled and practiced. It is crucial to consider if and how Aboriginal self-determination is conceptualised, accounted for, and actioned within the policies that affect Aboriginal people. Previous research has shown that policies reflect power imbalances experienced by Aboriginal people (Kehoe et al., 2022).

Victorian Government

Local Government

International

Policies operationalise government agendas (Coveney, 2010) and reify issues through the way they are described and addressed (Dawson et al., 2020). Despite this, the voices of Aboriginal people in policy are limited, if included at all (Couzos & Murray, 2008). Given the key role of self-determination in underpinning Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB; Gee et al., 2014), it is crucial to consider if and how Aboriginal self-determination is conceptualised, accounted for, and actioned within the policies affecting Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal self-determination to be embedded in policy, it would require decisions to recognise and empower Aboriginal people to determine and control their lives through having input to the design, implementation, management, and control of service delivery for and by Aboriginal people (Wilson, 1997). This would mean the responsibility and power for decision-making is transferred to Aboriginal communities so they can make decisions about the matters that affect them.

A focus area for this review was exploring the understanding of Aboriginal self-determination held by local councils and the proposed actions to translate Aboriginal self-determination and community-driven solutions from ideas into effective and sustainable practices. To align this review with the priorities and aspirations of the local Aboriginal communities based in Frankston (Southern Metropolitan Region), Hume (Northern Metropolitan Region), and Wyndham (Western Metropolitan Region), the survey responses of the project were also used to guide the review.

Local policies were identified by searching websites of Hume, Wyndham and Frankston Council. Policies were collated through a desktop search of the three LGAs, with additional search terms including “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”, “First Nations” and “self-determination”. The inclusion of state policies was informed by the project leads and conversations with the project partners as well as through a search of the Victorian State Government department websites using the search terms above.

Within the policy review, attention was paid to the enablers to accessing programs and services according to the survey participants. Council documents were examined against the expressed interests from survey respondents regarding what services and programs they would like to see in their local communities. This review was lastly contextualised with key international documents endorsed by Australia, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (endorsed in 1948), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (endorsed in 2009) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (endorsed in 2015). By doing so, the review was undertaken through a human rights lens.

The selected policies were analysed with reference to the following questions:

- How is self-determination defined according to local and state government?
- What enables self-determination according to those strategies and frameworks?
- Who is accountable for these strategies and frameworks to be translated into practice?

The selected policies were reviewed and summarised, speaking to the common and notable themes identified throughout the analysis process. The review was completed by one of the researchers, with the guidance and collaboration of the project leads. The findings can be found in Part II of this report. In response to these findings, recommendations were created to support local council in better accounting for Aboriginal self-determination through policy revision and Aboriginal community control. The recommendations can be found in Part III of this report.

Metropolitan Regions: A Growing Aboriginal Population

This project acknowledges and respects the Traditional Owners of each region – the Wurundjeri people in the Northern Region, the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people in the Southern Region and the Wadawurrung, Wurundjeri and Bunurong people in the Western Region. These language groups are part of the Kulin Nation. According to the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL), there were approximately 40 Aboriginal languages spoken in Victoria prior to colonisation (Maggolee n.d.), as shown in the map below.

Greater Melbourne is home to a growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. In 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021b), the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population was 32,952 which is a significant rise from 24,062 in 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

A report published in 2019 estimated the Victorian Aboriginal population to grow by 43 per cent by 2028 (Social Ventures Australia, 2019). It is known that traditional population forecasting has underestimated population growth in Victoria, resulting in underfunding of pivotal support services and programs for population groups such as Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, along with this population increase comes an increased demand for culturally safe programs and services (Social Ventures Australia, 2019). In many Victorian regions, the demand for such programs and services is expected to exceed the capacity of mainstream services. ACCOs are expected to respond to this need and will therefore be required to increase organizational capacity and to extend service provision (Social Ventures Australia, 2019). The mentioned under

resourcing due to inaccurate population forecasting places ACCOs in a difficult situation.

The following provides brief overviews of each metropolitan region. Most of the accessible data and information pertaining these regions is based around local government areas (LGAs). While the team refers to this data, it is strongly recommended to anyone engaging with Aboriginal communities and collectives in metropolitan Melbourne to adopt Aboriginal approaches and understandings of describing places and regions; whereby Aboriginal people determine engagement informed by Country boundaries as opposed to local council boundaries. The Victorian Government (2020, p. 13) advocates for this approach in the Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026 Pathways to Stronger Partnerships.

Each region overview comprises a profile of the partnering ACCO based in the metropolitan region. Each of the three ACCOs is considered a local ACCO, as opposed to a state-wide ACCO.

A local ACCO with appropriate facilities is positioned well to respond to and be shaped by arising and dynamic interests of the local Aboriginal community. Smaller, local ACCOs often run programs intending to promote community connection and cohesion and to strengthen culture amongst the local Aboriginal community. Participating in cultural activities, practicing language across family and kinship strengthens cultural identity. This has been acknowledged especially in the health context and has proven to lead to better social and emotional wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). Recently, research and governments acknowledged the importance and link between shared decision-making between service providers and Aboriginal people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). This importance was already communicated in research and government papers almost a decade ago. For example, Morley (2015, p. 2) concluded the following factors as enabling successful community-managed programs and organisations:

- the community has ownership of and control over decision-making;
- culture is central to the program, including an understanding of local context, history and community leaders;
- local Indigenous staff work on the program or in the organisation;
- good corporate governance exists;
- Indigenous staff are working on programs and existing capacity is harnessed;
- trusting relationships with partners are established;
- and flexibility in implementation timelines.

Northern Region

The Northern Metropolitan Region covers an area of more than 1,600 square kilometres, ranging from inner city suburbs like Brunswick, Northcote and Richmond to rural interface communities and remote areas such as St. Andrew and Kinglake, respectively. The Northern Metropolitan Region comprises substantial green wedge areas, including state and national parks.

This region comprises several growth area communities, including the suburbs of Craigieburn, Wallan, Wollert and Mernda. It is estimated that these areas are home to majority of the Northern Metropolitan Region's population (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019, p. 2), and the Northern Metropolitan Region accounts for approximately 19 per cent of metropolitan Melbourne's total population (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019, p. 2). This region is highly ethnically and socio-economically diverse (Northern Integrated Family Violence Services, n.d., Victoria State Government, 2023). The LGAs of Whittlesea

and Hume are areas of rapid population growth (Northern Integrated Family Violence Services, n.d.).

The combined population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the seven LGAs in the Northern Metropolitan Region was 8,426 in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021c). The Northern Metropolitan Region is home to approximately 13 per cent of Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (Northern Integrated Family Violence Services Partnerships, n.d.). In the Hume and Merri-bek region alone, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to reach 3,962 by 2028.

City of Hume: Local Aboriginal population

The City of Hume covers a land area of 503.6 square kilometres. Alongside Whittlesea, Hume is considered a population growth corridor, with a significant increase in people residing in these two areas. In 2019, Hume LGA was home to approximately 1,463 Aboriginal people (Hume Council, 2020). Two years later in 2021, this increased to 1,870 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021c), indicating an Indigenous population growth of 28% in just two years. The Hume LGA had the second largest Aboriginal population in the Northern Metropolitan Region after Whittlesea, where 2,270 Aboriginal reside. Within Hume, Aboriginal people account for 0.8 per cent of the overall population, being the third highest percentage of Aboriginal people in an LGA in the Northern Region (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021c).

ACCOs in Hume and the Northern Metropolitan Region

There are several ACCOs located in the Northern Metropolitan Region. The majority of those are state-wide organisations, delivering health, housing, justice and child and youth services to the Aboriginal community in the north. These ACCOs are well-established and have created strong and ongoing relationships with local and state Government. The ACCOs based in the north are:

- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in Epping, Fitzroy and Preston
- Victorian Aboriginal Children Agency (VACCA) in Preston and Northcote
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) in Northcote
- Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL) in Thornbury
- Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) in Fitzroy North
- Djirra in Abbotsford
- Balit Durn Durn Centre in Collingwood

As established organisations with set visions, purposes and principles, these state-wide organisations have set practices and processes underpinning their services. While their presence and work are essential for their service provision, their established routines and priorities may be limited when responding to and act upon interests and ideas of the local Aboriginal community in the north. While the focus of these state-wide ACCOs is to offer services to the Aboriginal community, they do not have the capacity nor room for certain activities. This is especially true for organised cultural strengthening activities and programs such as speaking in and revitalising language, traditional dance and music, cooking, and arts and craft.

Local ACCOs and Aboriginal community collectives therefore play a key role in listening to and responding to the interests of the local Aboriginal community. Noted local ACCOs based in the Northern Metropolitan Region are:

- Dardi Munwurro
- Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation

Local ACCO: Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation

Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation is an Aboriginal community organisation based in Broadmeadows. Wandarra supports, advocates for, and provides services and programs to Aboriginal people and communities in the Hume and Merri-bek municipalities. By doing so, Wandarra empowers and builds the capacity of Aboriginal people and communities in those municipalities and creates an opportunity to practice culture and come together. Wandarra is volunteer run and does not employ paid staff.

While Wandarra does not currently have a permanent facility to gather at, members meet regularly at the Lynda Blundell Community Centre in Broadmeadows. Wandarra is not a health service provider. However, the culturally safe space provided by Wandarra fosters SEWB amongst the local Aboriginal community and by doing so, contributes to better health outcomes. Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation was registered under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 in 2012.

History

Wandarra was established by Aunty Gloria Norrey as an Aunties group in 2005 in response to local Aboriginal women not having an opportunity to come together. It then broadened its membership to include all Aboriginal people to foster a sense of belonging and community. Wandarra was incorporated in 2012 but has always been community driven with local Aboriginal community members driving the direction of the organisations. Wandarra also out of need has had several homes due to not having a permanent base of its own.

Governance

In 2022, Wandarra had six members of which two are currently directors. Directors are elected by the members on rotation for a two-year term. To become a member of Wandarra, a person must be at least 18 years of age and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. The person is either invited by existing Wandarra members to apply for membership or attends Wandarra on a regular basis, meaning at least fortnightly. There is no membership fee. Wandarra holds and annual general meeting (AGM), which is an opportunity for members to ask questions and to provide feedback.

Programs and services

A key activity is to provide hot lunches for Aboriginal families and Elders, bringing community members together to promote connectedness and a sense of belonging. Wandarra also has an advisory role and supports other non-Aboriginal, mainstream organisations in the Hume and Merri-bek region. Wandarra supports those organisations in establishing more culturally appropriate service provision for Aboriginal community in the Northern metropolitan region. This includes supporting organisations that provide services to Aboriginal families caring for a child with additional needs and/or a disability.

Wandarra currently delivers and coordinates the Wandarra MyTime Group which is a support and respite group for families/people supporting and caring for Aboriginal children or

young people with a disability. The group meets on a regular basis and has become an important source of support, advocacy, and information. Wandarra helps to organise National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) activities within the broader community in the Northern metropolitan region as well, creating opportunities to celebrate and strengthen culture and traditional knowledge.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Wandarra provided emergency relief to the Aboriginal community by coordinating the drop-offs of care packages. Wandarra received no funding but relied on the connections of its directors to put together care packages which were then dropped off by volunteers. Wandarra also established a group on Messenger and supported and trained members to use the app to reduce isolation and maintain connectedness during the pandemic. Wandarra has also partnered on a variety of programs including with Merri Health to deliver Speak Up, Speak OUT; Wandarra Young Doctors at Broadmeadows Valley Primary School; and Elders on The Move, a gentle exercise program.

Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation functions as a platform to share upcoming events and relevant information around programs and services for the Aboriginal community in and around Hume. These include but are not limited to health, education and employment programs, services and training. Wandarra shares and celebrates cultural events of significance for their local Aboriginal community, including sporting, culinary and art events. This is mostly done through their Facebook page and word of mouth. Wandarra also uses their Facebook platform to disseminate information around political developments with the wider community, for example Treaty Community Forums run by the Victorian Treaty Assembly.

Role of Wandarra for Aboriginal community in the Northern Metropolitan region

While Wandarra is based in Broadmeadows, Aboriginal community engaging with Wandarra reside in other areas of the Northern Metropolitan Region. The survey undertaken for this project indicated areas of residence in the following LGAs additional to Hume: Banyule, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Merri-bek, Darebin, Mitchell and Brimbank.

Nillumbik, Merri-bek, Darebin, Mitchell and Brimbank.

Western Region

The Western Metropolitan Region spans across an area of 133,023 hectares and comprises established inner suburbs like Footscray and Williamstown and newer suburbs such as Werribee and Melton. The Western Metropolitan Region covers some of Melbourne's fastest growing outer suburbs (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019).

With the Western Metropolitan Region stretching from dense inner suburban suburbs to coastal and rural areas, the region is home to a culturally diverse population, accounting for approximately 19% of metropolitan Melbourne's total population in the year of 2019 (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019). This population was estimated to grow by 15% by 2021. This is a higher estimated growth rate compared to the other metropolitan regions, except for the Inner Metropolitan Region (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019). This growing population is likely to be residing in outer suburban areas like Wyndham Vale and Melton, while the region's inner areas are expected to undergo intensification to create more homes for the growing population.

The combined population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the six LGAs in the Western Metropolitan Area was 5,386 in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021d) and was 5,183 in 2016 (ABS 2016).

Western Melbourne is identified as a potential population growth area, projected to be home to the highest population of Aboriginal people by 2028 in Metropolitan Melbourne, alongside the Bayside Peninsula (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2019, p. 10).

The LGA of Wyndham was home to approximately 2,511 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in 2021, accounting for 0.9% of Wyndham's total population. The median age of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community in the Wyndham LGA was 23 years which is significantly younger than the median age of the total population, which was 32 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021d).

ACCOs in Wyndham and the Western Metropolitan Region

There are a few ACCOs located in the Western Metropolitan Region. The majority of those are state-wide organisations, delivering health, housing, justice and child and youth services to the Aboriginal community in the West. These state-wide ACCOs are well-established and have created strong and ongoing relationships with Local and State Government.

State-wide ACCOs based in the West include:

- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) in Werribee
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in St Albans

As organisations with set visions, purposes and principles, these state-wide organisations have established practices and processes underpinning their services. They are also acting within their funding guidelines. While their presence and work are essential to provide certain services, their established routines and priorities might be limited in responding to and act upon interests and ideas of the Aboriginal community based in the west.

While the focus of these state-wide ACCOs is to offer services to the Aboriginal community, they do not have the capacity nor room for such activities. This is especially true for organised cultural strengthening activities and programs such as speaking in and revitalising language, traditional dance and music, cooking, and arts and craft.

Therefore, local ACCOs and Aboriginal community collectives play a key role in listening to and responding to the interests of the local Aboriginal community. Local ACCOs based in the Western Metropolitan Region include:

- Aboriginal Wellness Foundation
- Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation
- Cooee Bunji
- Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation

Local ACCO: Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation

Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation is based in Wyndham Vale in Melbourne's west. Their main objective is to provide a culturally safe place for the Aboriginal community to gather, as an Aboriginal place in Aboriginal hands. Their gatherings are underpinned by concepts of self-determination, expressed through equal and respectful relationships. They are based in the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung

Community Centre, which was purposely built to enable connection to nature, to place, and to community. Koling wada-ngal means walking together in Wadawurrung, which embodies their overarching vision. Members of the Koling wada-ngal board describe their Aboriginal community as diverse and not necessarily being originally from the west or even Victoria.

History

Koling wada-ngal was originally established as the Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre Committee (WACCC), following a recommendation from the Wyndham Aboriginal Forum held in 2013. The Aboriginal community called for a dedicated centre to provide a space for the growing number of community programs, including cultural workshops, dance groups, and homework centres. In 2014, Wyndham City and the state government funded WACCC to investigate and establish an Aboriginal Centre within the Wyndham region. Ongoing funding was granted through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Neighbourhood House Coordination Program.

Governance

Koling wada-ngal is governed by a board comprising local Aboriginal community members with two co-chairs, and 8 board members (maximum 12). WACCC is formally represented on the board. Decisions are made by the board, which incorporates Aboriginal ways of governing through open conversation, deep listening, and trying for a consensus. Where this is not possible, they adapt western democratic processes by obtaining a majority vote.

The Aboriginal community can become formal members of the corporation. An Annual General Meeting (AGM) provides the opportunity for members' voices to be heard. Members have the right to vote at the AGM, be nominated as board members and provide feedback to inform and contribute to the space and programs. They are kept up to date through emails, social media, community events, and in person at the centre.

Koling wada-ngal has developed six key cultural pillars and protocols to guide and define their cultural governance model. These set the cultural standards for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who work within and collaborate with Koling wada-ngal. The pillars aim to provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal people while paying respect to both the Traditional Custodians on whose land the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung centre is built, and the cultural diversity of the Aboriginal people who access the centre. The six pillars include: Country; Culture; Community; Individual; Organisation; and Wider community.

Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Community Centre

Wunggurrwil Dhurrung means Strong Heart in Wadawurrung language, and this is encapsulated in the design of the centre. The centre combines Balim Balim, a kindergarten and MCH services; two Council operated community rooms for the broader community, shared staff offices and the Aboriginal community spaces. Koling wada-ngal is not service provision focused, rather prioritising providing a space for Aboriginal people to meet, gather, and connect with community.

Southern Region

The Southern Metropolitan Region spans across five LGAs, Cardinia Shire Council, Casey City Council, Frankston City Council, Greater

Dandenong City Council, and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. The Southern Metropolitan Region ranges from Cheltenham and Moorabbin to the southern tip of the Mornington Peninsula. Pakenham and Officer create the eastern boundary of the Southern Metropolitan Region. The region covers established suburbs and greenfield areas and several coastal and inland towns (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019). In total, the Southern Metropolitan Region accounts for 31% of the total land area of metropolitan Melbourne (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019).

Approximately 22% of metropolitan Melbourne's total population call this region their home (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019). The population in the Southern Metropolitan Region is ethnically diverse and indicators around socio-economic status range widely across the region. According to the census in 2021, this has an Aboriginal population of 8,401 people. This number is the sum of the Aboriginal population in all six LGAs, according to the census in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

City of Frankston: Local Aboriginal community

NAIRM MARR DJAMBANA
GATHERING BY THE BAY

In 2021, 1,800 Aboriginal people were residing in Frankston. This is the second largest Aboriginal population in the Southern Metropolitan Region, following the LGA of Casey with a population of 2,395 Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal population in Frankston comprised 1.3% of the overall population in Frankston (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a). This is the highest percentage of Aboriginal people living in an LGA in the Southern Metropolitan Region (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a). In the context of this project, the Frankston LGA is not only where the community partner organisation Nairm Marr Djambana is located, but is also the LGA in which half of the community survey respondents reside.

ACCOs in Frankston and the Southern Metropolitan Region

There are several ACCOs, collectives and enterprises located in the Southern Metropolitan Region:

- Casey Aboriginal Gathering Place in Doveton
- Derrimut Weelam Gathering Place in Mordialloc
- VACCA Dandenong
- Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in Frankston
- Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association in Hastings

As established organisations with set visions, purposes and principles, state-wide ACCOs such as VACCA Dandenong, have established practices and processes underpinning their services. While their presence and work are essential to provide certain services, their established routines and priorities may be limited in responding to and act upon interests and ideas of the Aboriginal community based in the South. Local ACCOs and Aboriginal community collectives play a key role in listening to and responding to the interests of the local Aboriginal community.

Local ACCO: Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association

Nairm Marr Djambana is a community space for the growing Aboriginal community in Frankston and surroundings. Nairm Marr Djambana is a welcoming safe place to improve Aboriginal health, cultural, recreation and social activities. It is a meeting place to provide opportunities to further advance and improve the health of Aboriginal people of all genders and ages.

'Our dream is to continue on the journey our Elders started to create a culturally welcoming, safe and accessible space for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Frankston – a place to gather, to connect, to heal and to have a sense of belonging.'

While Nairm Marr Djambana is not a health service provider, the culturally safe space provided by Nairm Marr Djambana fosters SEWB amongst the local Aboriginal community and by doing so, can contribute to improved health outcomes. Fundamental to the way that Nairm Marr Djambana operates is the incorporation of strengths-based approaches that support self-determination, community strengthening and connection to culture and country, and build self-esteem and resilience.

Nairm Marr Djambana has established partnerships with Traditional Owner groups, other community and state-wider Aboriginal organisations and is represented on multiple Aboriginal networks and committees. Nairm Marr Djambana invites non-Aboriginal community to their space and learn about Aboriginal history and culture in a culturally welcoming environment. Nairm Marr Djambana is an Incorporated Association registered under the Associations Incorporations Act (1981). In late 2018, Nairm Marr Djambana was appointed as a Neighbourhood House.

History

The local Aboriginal community in Frankston have worked tirelessly to open Nairm Marr Djambana's doors and to keep them open. Nairm Marr Djambana was conceived in the late 1990s by local Aboriginal Elders, dreaming of a time and place where Aboriginal people could gather in a culturally safe environment to build cultural pride, understanding, and knowledge together and share the cultural wisdom with the broader community of the region. Nairm Marr Djambana was registered as an Incorporated association in 2012 and was officially launched in November 2016 as a gathering place for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Frankston.

Governance

Everything that Nairm Marr Djambana does is underpinned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality, the wisdom and teachings of Elders, and tradition. Nairm Marr Djambana has an active Aboriginal Board of Management, comprising five Aboriginal community members living locally. The Board is responsible for setting and monitoring the organisation's strategic direction; ensuring that legal and regulatory requirements (including Occupational Health and Safety, child safe compliance, and insurance) are met; recruiting senior staff in leadership roles and overseeing operational, financial and risk management.

Programs and activities

Nairm Marr Djambana's services, programs and activities are informed by community needs and aspirations. These include the vision for more opportunities for cultural strengthening, connection to community, and a 'place to belong'. In response to those needs and aspirations, Nairm Marr Djambana runs women's, men's, and youth and play groups. Excursions, cooking workshops, and a community garden project are part of Nairm Marr Djambana's program too and days and events of significance for Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander peoples are celebrated at Nairm Marr Djambana as well. Lastly, certain rooms at Nairm Marr Djambana can be booked by non-members and external organisations. Nairm Marr Djambana Catering staff and volunteers can cater for internal meetings and activities, as requested. Nairm Marr Djambana lists the following activities and events organised with the Frankston community and beyond in 2022:

- Delivered the Spirit Dreaming Lantern Lighting Festival
- Hamper Distribution over Christmas and presents for children in the community
- Hosted BayMob Expo during Reconciliation Week
- Continued to deliver medical transportation for community members with chronic disease
- Delivered online cooking classes. Community Consultations Findings

II: Programs, Services, and Policies Targeting Aboriginal Community

Community Consultations Findings

The community surveys assisted in identifying enablers and barriers to accessing services and programs, according to Aboriginal communities in the Northern, Southern and Western Metropolitan Regions. Further, the survey responses provided insight into community members' preferences regarding future programs and services. In total, 103 community members participated in the survey. Most responses came from communities in the Northern Region (28 responses), followed by the Southern Region (27 responses) and the Western Region (25 responses).

Survey Responses

Engagement with Aboriginal Services

More than half of participants reported a local Aboriginal organisation in their area, and three-quarters of participants reported using an Aboriginal service and accessing a local Aboriginal organisation. Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation and Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association were listed by 10 participants. Many participants (87%) reported attending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities or events like the ones listed in Figure 1. Over half (60.4%) of the survey participants responded being involved in an Aboriginal community organisation, while 39.6% were not.

Barriers to accessing services and programs

The key barriers to accessing programs and services were a lack of targeted services or programs. Participants indicated that they often had to travel to the other side of the city or to Melbourne's inner suburbs to access Aboriginal services. Others indicated that the lack of services was not just about distance, but also that existing targeted programs and services do not align with their program need

Figure 1 Types of activities survey participants attend.

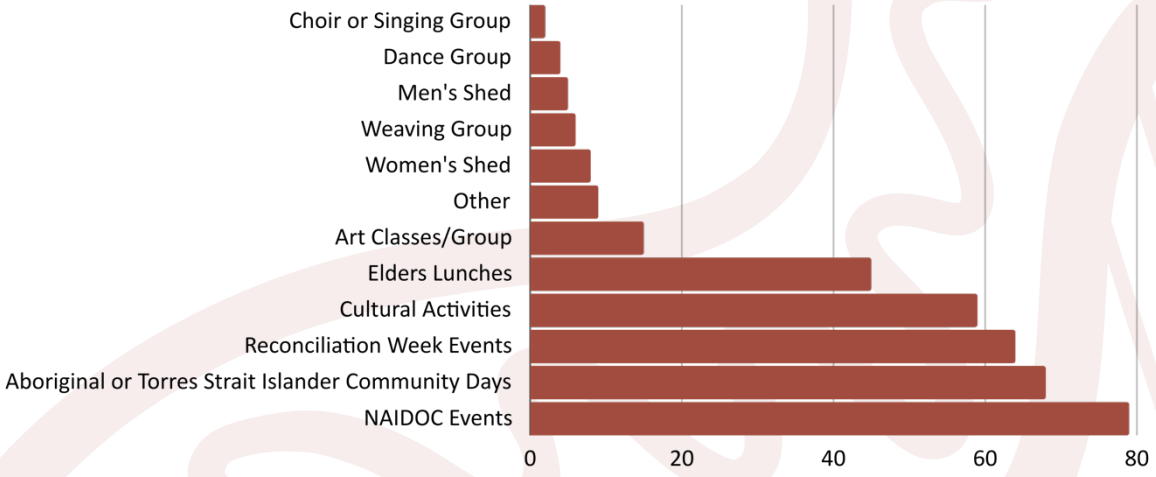


Table 2. Barriers to service and program access

Northern Region (21)	Southern Region (14)	Western Region (17)
Distance (11)	Not enough programs (2)	Distance/lack of local programs (5)
Racism/mainstream services culturally unsafe (3)	Transport (4)	Safety (1)
Transport/cost of transport (6)	Lack of knowledge (3)	Lack of connection/knowledge of services (2)
Other members in the community, safety (1)	Distance	Wait-times (2)
Lack of services/support (3)	Lockdowns (1)	Program times (e.g., during business hours) (2)
	Issues between community members/not feeling safe (1)	
	Availability (1)	

Cost was a key barrier for many participants, in general but also regarding cost of travel, including cost of petrol and public transportation. Multiple participants indicated they are homeless, which created further complex barriers.

For those in closer proximity to services or programs, additional barriers include wait-times for admission, and the times that programs run during the day if participants worked during those hours. One participant responded that if they miss a session, it is another 4-week wait to reconnect. Some participants responded they do not feel safe accessing mainstream programs, or experience racism. Lastly, a lack of connection with their community is a challenge for some, as they do not have the social connections or the knowledge about what services are available.

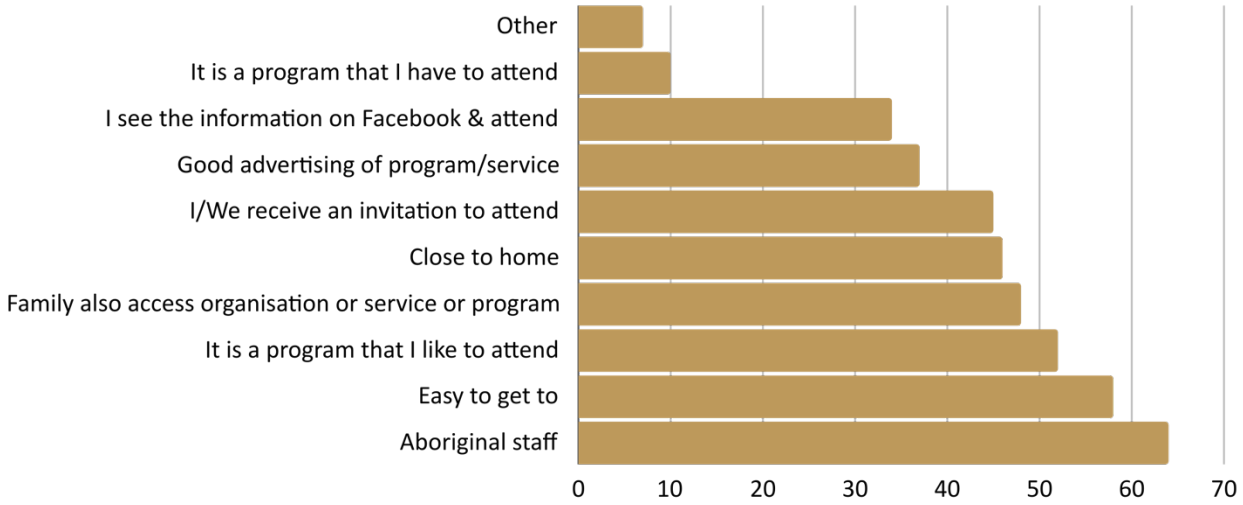
Missing programs and services

Across all three metropolitan areas, survey participants mentioned various services and programs as being missing in their local area. There are nuances between regions relating to the types of programs and services participants would like to see. For example, participants in the northern region indicate a general lack of targeted local services and Youth Programs, Elders programs and family support programs were listed as missing, among others. In the southern region, participants indicated a lack of Kids programs, cultural activities and Women and Men programs, among others. Participants in the western region indicated an overall lack of targeted local programs and services, specifically cultural groups and activities, like practicing traditional arts.

Enablers to accessing services and programs

The key enablers for accessing services or programs are Aboriginal staff (76.9%), ease of access (61.5%), having family that also access the organisation or service (61.5%), having a program that survey participants like to attend (57.7%), and being close to home (50%). The percentages reflect the proportion of total participants that selected those options as being helpful or supportive in accessing services or programs (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Enablers for service and program access



Community advice to Aboriginal organisations

Survey participants were asked what is important for any Aboriginal organisation to know when providing events and programs to the local Aboriginal community. The following is an overview of survey responses.

Centring and diversity of culture

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the relevance of culture in this context. Being culturally aware, respectful, and safe was noted by multiple participants. One community member recommended to Aboriginal organisations to know "how to be respectful of the Aboriginal culture", and another person recommended "that all activities are culturally appropriate". Ensuring cultural appropriateness is linked to acknowledging the cultural diversity among Aboriginal communities residing in Melbourne, as indicated by survey participants on this page.

This suggested that Aboriginal organisations plan, prepare and appreciate differing opinions and views among Aboriginal community, rather than jumping to conclusions or generalisations. On a practical program level, a participant suggested "learning more about culture" is important, with another person suggesting "cultural activities and Aboriginal entertainers" as being included in programs and at events. Culture was also the central response when survey participants were asked what is important to them and their family.

Community voices driving programs and events

Another common focus in the survey responses was the emphasis on community-driven programs and ideas. Those suggestions and insights were backed by other participants recommending to organisations to ask the community what they would like in terms of programs and events.

"To not express tokenism and be genuine. Remember to let mob speak for mob, but not in a way that is implying we have to do all the talking."

"That there are people here doing a lot of work without support or funding."

"It's important that they are designed and driven by Aboriginal people, preferably local people."

Local relationships and collaborations

Many participants asked for local events and programs, with some clearly stating that services and programs are predominantly based outside their local areas, see across the page.

On a practical level, participants recommended to Aboriginal organisations to "involve locals", to find out "who the locals are" and that organisations "need to put in the time to build a relationship". Another person suggested to Aboriginal organisations to speak with locals who know of "blackfellas" in the local area:

"That we live somewhere with no Aboriginal organisation. Everything is in the northern suburbs."

"Everything is done the other side of town like Preston etc."

Coming together

Another theme in the responses was the recommendation to bring the local Aboriginal community together and create opportunities for community members to meet (see below). Being welcoming, inviting, and inclusive was seen as important when planning to bring community together. Another participant recommended to "be in mind of all mob", which was supported by other participants noting that "kids are important" and others saying that elderly community members may need support with certain things. This links back to the importance of safety and trust in the context of Aboriginal organisations, reminding

"To bring the aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders together have a feed, and making them culturally safe and understood."

"That people need to know you to feel safe to attend. That it takes time for people to be comfortable sometimes."

"That not everyone knows their mob and feel safe."

[Being] welcoming, inclusive for all Aboriginal people and those who are not confident to identify.

organisations to ensure that anyone should be able to attend programs, services, and events.

Enabling easy access to organisations and participation in programs and events

On a practical level, the respondents provided actionable ideas to Aboriginal organisations. Advertising programs and events with sufficient notice was mentioned by many participants. A few participants indicated their lack of awareness about programs and events as they have limited internet access. Considering several ways of information sharing around upcoming programs and events seems pivotal. Another aspect regarding participation was accessing the actual organisation and getting to a program or event location.

Those suggestions and insights align with other responses, emphasizing the need of accessible transport to organisations and other program and event locations.

"Using venues that are easy to get to either by car or public transport."

"That all community is welcome and make sure they put out flyers for each events and be culturely safe within our own community."

"Sometimes we need support. Not everyone has access to the internet. I don't have a computer, I use my phone for everything and I run out of data a lot."

What is important to survey participants and their families

The responses to this question centred on culture, family, friends, and the community. Being around family, friends, and community is understood as promoting a sense of belonging, feeling safe and feeling included. A selection of responses reads:

"That we are respected and seen as Aboriginal people and that mainstream services or organisations aren't racist."

"Having the ability to connect with the Aboriginal community. That we know that there is Aboriginal nearby that can support us if needed."

"Programs for young people/events for families that are not too far away."

"Community, culture. The opportunity to be around mob. Supporting our people and community. Practicing culture."

"Family, feeling culturally safe and being heard in community."

"Kids. Family. Strong culture."

"We are proud Aboriginal people and want to feel comfortable and also be around our own people."

"The environment, friendships, relationships with family. Love."

Literature Review Findings: Self-Determination in Programs and Services

Study characteristics

The results of the literature review search strategy identified 10 evaluations for inclusion in the review from a total of 919 studies. Each included study was conducted in Australia and focused on a program or service that was in Melbourne. Of the 10 included studies, three had services or programs located only in Victoria, while the remaining seven were implemented across multiple states in Australia. Nine of the evaluations were qualitative, while one was mixed methods (see Bailey et al., 2015). The 10 reviewed articles were published between 2013 and 2020. Brief descriptions of the service or programs in each evaluation are presented in Table 4, including the type of approach the program or service adopted.

Thematic Findings

See Appendix B for a summary of thematic findings from the reviewed evaluations.

Self-determination

Self-determination is considered a human right for all Indigenous peoples. Within the Australian context, it is a key concept to be working towards for Aboriginal people. Within this review, discourse and practice relating to self-determination were analysed to better understand how this concept has been practiced within programs and services targeted at Aboriginal people. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012), for Indigenous people self-determination means:

1. ***Having the choice in determining how our lives are governed and our development paths.***
2. ***Participating in decisions that affect their lives. This includes a right to formal recognition of our group identities.***
3. ***Having control over their lives and future including our economic, social and cultural development.***

From this understanding, self-determination relates to the broader community, rather than the individual. It also encompasses other key concepts within this review such as community consultation, Aboriginal involvement, advocacy, and accountability. Within the reviewed evaluations, explicit mention of self-determination was largely missing. The inclusion or exclusion of self-determination may reflect the underlying values of the program and service, as well as the priorities and values of the research.

Self-determination was explicitly mentioned in three of the 10 reviewed papers, as shown in . Of these three papers, it was predominantly used in the context of Aboriginal individuals and their positions within the programs. Two articles stood out as having the strongest links with it, including evaluations by Black et al. (2019) and Trounson et al. (2019), both including self-determination as part of their methodologies. Black et al. (2019) formally defined and communicated self-determination as a right of Indigenous peoples, and its place within research as a practice and means of being culturally sensitive. While how it related to each stage of research was not explicitly described, this conceptual framework of centring Indigenous knowledges and self-determination in research underpinned the research design and justified the research itself: to empower Aboriginal people participating in research. Within Trounson et al. (2019), self-determination was communicated as a way of

Table 3. Summary of reviewed evaluations.

Auth				Targeted population of service/program	Approach
Armstrong et al. (2020)	Across Australia	Education (mental health)	5-hour suicide prevention program to educate workers how to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing suicidal thoughts.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous frontline workers who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Needs-based
Bailie et al. (2015)	Across Australia	Health Promotion	National chronic disease health package that includes health promotion, free/subsided medications, training, workforce support, education, and increased health assessments.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Needs-based
Browne et al. (2013)	Victoria	Health Promotion, capacity building	A 6-month peer-mentoring program that paired Aboriginal health workers with non-Aboriginal allied health professionals.	Aboriginal health workers and non-Aboriginal health professionals.	Needs-based
Black et al (2019)	Victoria	Wellbeing support	A healing and support program based on Aboriginal knowledges and culture, included a healing camp, a women's healing program, and cultural healing gatherings.	Aboriginal survivors of sexual abuse and the Stolen Generation.	Asset-based and resilience
Genat et al. (2016)	Victoria	Nutrition	The development of health promotion resources to facilitate nutrition policy development in ACCHOs, support diabetes education, strength food and nutrition literacy among Victorian Aboriginal communities.	Victorian Aboriginal people who are serviced by or work in ACCHOs/agencies.	Strength-based
MacDonald et al. (2016)	Across Australia	Education (mental health)	18-month pilot project strengthening nutrition policy development and implementation in Victorian ACCHOs.	ACCHO staff.	Needs-based
Moodie et al. (2014)	Western Australia and Victoria	Education (financial literacy), capacity building	The My Moola program included a series of workshops to improve participants' abilities to set goals, develop and apply skills in budgeting, and become more confident in using financial tools and products.	Members of specific Indigenous community organisations.	Needs-based, empowerment
Stajic et al. (2019)	Across Australia	Research capacity building	A 1-, 2-, or 3-day masterclass to educate and strengthen the research capacity of ACCHO staff.	ACCHO personnel.	Empowerment, rights-based
Trounson et al. (2019)	Melbourne	Learning support	A culturally safe learning support program designed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison, where 8 student volunteers were teamed with inmates to relate and reflect. Yarning, storytelling, music, and art were incorporated into the sessions.	Incarcerated Indigenous men at Port Phillip Prison.	Rights-based, participatory
Walsh et al. (2016)	Victoria	Youth program	4-day camp focusing on leadership, active citizenship, political literacy, health and wellbeing, education and employment pathways.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and girls between the ages of 15-17, nominated by participants' teachers.	Needs-based, empowerment

**Number of participants interviewed. **Number of participants in focus groups.*

creating agency for participants within the program to self-direct sessions and learning goals. While this did not address the broader meanings of self-determination for all Aboriginal people, it gave agency to incarcerated Aboriginal people that would otherwise likely have little power within their settings.

Moodie et al. (2014) used self-determination as an individual capacity to support the strength of a financial program: "Through partnership with local organisations, FNF is able to articulate and respond to these imperatives and empower individuals to achieved self-determined financial goals" (p. 27). The use of self-determination seemed to serve as a buzzword to describe how an Aboriginal person's participation in their financial literacy program supports their individual self-determination. While individuals can become empowered by strengthening literacy and building related capacities, it fails to address the systemic issues that many Aboriginal people encounter regarding controlling economic development.

From the reviewed articles' inclusion of self-determination, it was clear that self-determination has often been conflated with individual agency, conceptualising agency as something one possesses, rather than something that is relational and socially and politically situated. While an individual may be able to 'self-determine' how they use the hours that they spend at a program or increase their knowledge of finances, it does not afford them meaningful power as individuals or as a community within the broader context. The omission of self-determination in the remaining seven evaluations suggested that this concept was deemed as unimportant or irrelevant to either the program or the research.

While evaluations of services and programs are unlikely to adequately address self-determination in detail unless that is the focus of inquiry, it is useful to understand how it has been positioned within these contexts, as programs are generally framed to address an existing problem, problematising something about society or the group they service. Including self-determination within the program contexts can be useful, as it can help examine problems and programs within the broader present and historical context of colonisation and human development.

Community Consultation and Input

In the context of this review, community consultation refers to the processes undertaken to enable local Aboriginal community and Aboriginal program participants to provide input in the program design, activities and evaluations. The intention of community consultation is to obtain community insight and feedback regarding a potential program or initiative. Community consultation may occur directly, where input plays a direct role in the program or indirectly, where input may inform knowledge around community needs or a general issue, but not directly shape the program itself. Examples for direct consultation are community meetings and forums, online meetings, focus groups, interviews, yarning circles, and workshops. Examples for indirect consultation are surveys, polling, voting and consultation via online engagement platforms, evaluations, and recommendations from previous community programs.

In accordance with current guidelines and frameworks around community programs with Aboriginal Australians (Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), this review views consultation with and input from the local Aboriginal community as an essential foundation to equitable program design, implementation and evaluation. This is supported by a large body of Australian and international literature and links to Indigenous self-determination as a right held by Indigenous people, formally endorsed through the United

Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The review of the 10 program evaluations revealed an inconsistent approach to community consultation and input across the program stages. Inconsistency here means that not all reviewed evaluations mention that community consultation took place, or that Aboriginal community input was gathered and embedded in the programs.

Some programs were designed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project reference groups (Armstrong et al., 2020), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders (Bailie et al., 2013), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums (Bailie et al., 2013), or combinations of consultations with Elders, community organisations and community members (Genat et al., 2016). Two evaluations did not mention or describe any methods of community consultation (see Walsh et al., 2016; Stajic et al., 2019).

Two evaluations emphasised ongoing consultation with and input from Aboriginal community and/or Aboriginal program participants (Black et al. 2019, Trounson et al. 2019). Trounson et al. (2019) provided a detailed outline of the development and evaluation of the Indigenous Group of Learning (IGL). The IGL is a culturally safe learning support program designed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison. Trounson et al. (2019, p. 24) recurrently emphasised the importance of setting up the program "in a way that allowed participants input into its development, and a sense of collaboration, rather than imposition". A tangible example to demonstrate this collaboration is the acknowledgement that the program moved away from its initial intention to provide formal tutoring to assist the Aboriginal men to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and shaped into a program providing broader support to the men to engage in conversations around how education might shape their futures post-release. Trounson et al. (2019, p. 13) stated that listening to and embedding participants' input was key "to the development and maintenance of rapport and group cohesion".

Black et al. (2019) presented an evaluation of a Cultural Healing Program (CHP), where program participants were Aboriginal survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and of cultural abuse. Cultural abuse refers to where survivors were "forcibly removed from their families as children and in the process disconnected from their communities, culture and land" (Black et al. 2019, p. 1059). In this program, input from and consultation with Aboriginal participants and the wider community were the foundation of all decisions relating to program design and implementation. For example, workshops with Aboriginal program designers were held to agree on elements shaping the program and to address potential barriers that may be encountered in the program context.

The approach Black et al. (2019) took to evaluate the program itself is a testimony of embedding input from Aboriginal participants in the final stages of a program. By inserting direct quotes of program participants throughout the evaluation, the Aboriginal voices were privileged and communicated with the readership truthfully. Including and emphasising the exact words of participants and facilitators in the evaluation prevents the risk of misinterpretation and the reporting of inaccurate findings, while amplifying the voices of those that may have previously been historically silenced. Lastly, Black et al. (2019) stressed the point of listening to and enacting participant and facilitator input as a tool to ensure the program activities were perceived as relevant by all participants. In an environment where resources such as time and staffing are often limited, establishing mechanisms to

ensure program activities are relevant and of interest for program participants was a priority.

Overall, community consultation tended to be present through the early and pre-stages of the programs including their design and before implementation, rather than throughout all program stages. Obtaining community input to inform program logics was a strength of many of these evaluations. Where it was lacking suggested links to paternalistic ideologies, where interventions are done *to* marginalised and minoritized groups, rather than *with* them. This review revealed examples of programs in Melbourne that resisted this lingering dynamic by demonstrating the positive effects of continuous consultation and input from Aboriginal program participants and the wider community (Black et al., 2019; Trounson et al., 2019). These evaluations exemplified the link between community-driven initiatives and programs and the perceived benefits for communities and individuals within those programs.

Aboriginal Leadership and Involvement

Aboriginal involvement and leadership are understood as going beyond consultation with many people to increasing engagement and directly involving them as leaders and key stakeholders (AITSIS, 2016). Rather than providing feedback and ideas, the Aboriginal community is actively involved and empowered to shape programs according to their priorities, shifting decision-making powers to Aboriginal community and program participants. This enables the program to be designed, implemented, and evaluated in alignment with the community and participants' preferences. Importantly, Aboriginal involvement and leadership promotes cultural safety as local cultural community protocols can be respected and embedded in all program stages. Properly involving local Aboriginal communities creates opportunities for involved groups and organisations to outline program responsibilities, agree on adherence to local cultural and community protocols and to formalise aspects of intellectual property, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and Indigenous knowledge informing the program and produced through the program.

The reviewed evaluations demonstrated varying levels of Aboriginal leadership and involvement throughout the program stages. In some evaluations, program participants are seen as program recipients, with no sphere of leadership or only limited opportunities to be involved in program design, implementation or evaluation. This was evident in Walsh et al. (2016), where participants were chosen or offered a place in the program, as opposed to voicing their interest in the program. Within the reviewed papers, Aboriginal involvement was also present by involving Aboriginal people as informants at the evaluation stage (Bailie et al., 2013). While this is important for receptive evaluation, there was little to no evidence of the impact this feedback had or how it was implemented. If adjustments according to feedback are not incorporated it becomes tokenistic.

At the program initiation stage, Aboriginal leadership and involvement was evident through the appointment of a national or Victorian Aboriginal organisation to roll out the program (e.g., Black et al., 2019; Browne et al., 2013; MacDonald, 2016; Moodie et al., 2014). In many of these cases, Aboriginal staff would lead the program design and implementation, serving as direct Aboriginal involvement through the appointment and hiring of select Aboriginal individuals. Within MacDonald et al. (2016), a state-wide strategy was developed through extensive community consultation and input from Victorian Aboriginal communities. Assuming the government strategy embedded the priorities and interests of the consulted communities, the strategy was a tool to raise the aspirations and voices from Aboriginal

community into the government and other spaces of power and influence, bringing about community-informed practices and programs.

Transferring responsibility and resources to ACCOs for programs enabled Aboriginal leadership and involvement across the program, promoting Aboriginal decision-making, autonomy, and self-determined approaches to program design, implementation, and evaluation. However, ACCOs still experienced restraints in the forms of limited resources, pre-defined program objectives, and inflexible reporting requirements. Consequently, ACCOs are often left to manage a program environment characterised by overburdened teams and employees having to navigate complex organisational challenges. A tangible example is appointing a staff member as program champion to oversee program stages (e.g., Moodie et al., 2014). In a work setting known for high rates of staff turnover, assigning a project champion may promote Aboriginal leadership and involvement, however, poses the risk to fully rely on a single person, rather than shared responsibilities. Relying on a single Aboriginal person for this role can also absolve others of needing to be culturally responsive. The findings suggest sharing program responsibilities among a few staff to promote collaborative work and prevent overburdening of individual staff (Silburn et al., 2018; Sullivan, 2018).

Accountability

Accountability within a relationship involves one individual or agency being held to answer for performance expected by a significant "other" (Romzek & Dubnick, 2018). Within Indigenous affairs, the issue of accountability, usually referring to being financially accountable to government or the wider public, is often seen as being potentially inconsistent with Indigenous self-determination (Martin & Finlayson, 1996). These accountability processes have been identified to create complex funding and reporting requirement, creating substantial barriers for Aboriginal organisations to provide services (Silburn et al., 2016), while flexibility and adaptability are not valued. These are models of vertical accountability, whereby the community organisation is accountable to their funder or government. Within this context, it is suggested that instead, accountability is circular and reciprocal. As "although organisations must account to their funders, the organisations represent their citizens and the funder is their appointed government, and so the funder must also be accountable to its base" (Sullivan, 2015, p.5). Circular accountability ensures that all parties are accountable to each other based on their roles and responsibilities to achieve a shared goal.

Within this review, accountability refers to circular accountability models, which includes being accountable to program participants and local communities, as well as to funding bodies. This type of accountability supports self-determination as the needs, values, and rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are valued (Sullivan, 2015). This is evident when program participants are seen as partners, rather than passive recipients of a program, who the program facilitators are accountable to. It is also present through transparent, timely, and honest two-way dialogue between all people and groups involved in the program. Accountability exists when intentions and actions are stated clearly in advance, agreed and then acted upon. Vertical accountability was also reviewed, although the evaluations did not communicate many details regarding funding and reporting requirements of the programs and services.

In this review, the concept and practice of accountability was not given high priority within the evaluations, and its omission could suggest that it was either not prioritised by the reviewer

or the program administrators. When working with local communities, it is common to create a written agreement between parties, outlining frameworks and expectations of each group. Within the reviewed evaluations that worked with organisations such as VACCHO or VACCA, it is likely that these were present but not included within the evaluation. This also highlights what is prioritised within academic publishing, as these details may not be considered important to the desired communication of knowledge. However, understanding how organisations and communities are engaged with in the context of programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is imperative for culturally appropriate accountability.

Within Bailie et al. (2015), vertical accountability was evident through their top-down approach, with focuses on funding and funders. As a national chronic illness package, this was pertinent to their type of program, and the evaluation focused on measurable outcomes to justify its funding and resources. The paper by Genat et al. (2016) evaluated an Aboriginal nutrition program, which worked with the VACCHO nutrition team in the facilitation of a state-wide nutrition and physical activity strategy. The two VACCHO nutrition team positions were funded by the Victorian Department of Health, suggesting that the program was accountable to the government, however, there was no mention of accountability to community.

Advocacy

Advocacy in the context of this review is understood as a practice enabling program participants and the wider community to self-advocate regarding program decisions affecting their experience and lives beyond the program context. Advocacy practice seeks to bring about change on behalf of the wider community. Advocacy involves supporting individuals and communities to have their voice heard, respected, and acted upon regarding decisions affecting their lives directly or indirectly. This is not limited to a person's individual circumstances but can be enacted on a community, regional, and state level. Often, advocacy targets social or political spaces, seeking to ensure all voices are represented effectively. Examples of advocacy regarding programs include designing the program in response to and in collaboration with community aspirations, interests, and priorities. Another example of advocacy in this context are the aspired program outcomes. Those hold potential to equip participants with skills and capabilities to advocate for their community and/or themselves once the program ends, including them in processes shaping social and political life.

Within this review, advocacy was not heavily focused on or explicitly evident in the reviewed evaluations. Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can advocate for these groups when done in consultation and partnership. Research and evaluations focused on programs and services for Aboriginal people can advocate for increased funding and resourcing for more similar programs. The published evaluations achieved this to varying extents by emphasising strengths of each program.

Policy Review Findings

For the current policy review, a selection of international and state policies was considered and related to relevant policies and plans from local councils in the Northern, Western, and Southern Metro regions of Melbourne. Of particular focus was if and how these policies related to concepts of Indigenous self-determination, with the purpose of identifying areas of opportunity to better embed the principles of self-determination in future. See

Appendix C for a directory of all reviewed policies.

Snapshot of International, State, and Local Policies

International

On an international level, self-determination is clearly outlined as a right for all Indigenous people within key United Nations documents. Notably, these documents have also been endorsed by the Australian government. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) outlines the right a person has to personal realisation and dignity, a right which cannot be destroyed by the State. Here, the United Nations also acknowledges the right all Indigenous peoples have to self-determination, meaning that they are free to determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. In exercising their right to self-determination, the United Nations outlines that Indigenous peoples have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions. This description clearly speaks to ensuring Indigenous control in the matters that affect Indigenous people.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; United Nations, 2007) is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous peoples. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the Indigenous peoples across the world, elaborating on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to Indigenous peoples. Of particular importance, Indigenous peoples, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, were involved in the development of the UNDRIP, embedding self-determination through its creation. Within its articles, UNDRIP outlines a requirement to obtain Aboriginal people's free, prior, and informed consent about matters affecting them.

Finally, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) are an urgent call to action for all countries to support global peace and prosperity. While the Sustainable Development Goals do not have particular mention of Indigenous peoples, they include the goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This relates to the inclusion of Aboriginal partnership and control in local policies and frameworks that affect them.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peach Justice, and Strong Institutions

Victorian Government

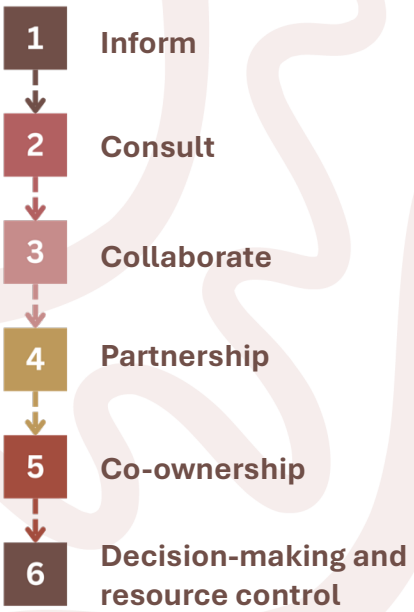
All reviewed State policies speak to Victorian Aboriginal communities and people; however, self-determination principles are embedded to varying degrees. While the Traditional Owner Settlement Act from 2010 (The State of Victoria, 2020) has no mention of self-determination, other more recent policies have meaningful

discussion and incorporation of Aboriginal self-determination principles. This may represent changes over time in the Victorian Government's understanding of Aboriginal wellbeing and stance regarding partnership and reconciliation. For example, the Korin Korin Balit-Djak 2017-2027 (The State of Victoria, 2017a) is built upon Aboriginal definitions of self-determination and has accountability to local Aboriginal people through regular evaluation and Aboriginal oversight. The plan was developed following community consultation with Aboriginal Victorians, detailing how the Victorian Government Department of Health will work with Aboriginal communities, community organisations, other government departments and mainstream service providers to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Several other state policies refer to the United Nations definition of self-determination and/or acknowledge Aboriginal self-determination as a human right enshrined in the UNDRIP (e.g. The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020; The State of Victoria Department of Land, Water and Planning, 2019). Nevertheless, of concern is the Child Safe Standards which does not reference self-determination despite setting a specific requirement for a greater focus on the safety of Aboriginal children and young people (Commission for Children and Young People, 2023).

The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026 (The State of Victoria, 2020) provides a vision of how local Councils can demonstrate recognition and enable Aboriginal self-determination. Here, the strategy outlines that self-determination requires reform and cultural shifts in all levels of government. The strategy acknowledges the responsibility Victorian Government and local councils have for many of the systems and structures that govern Aboriginal peoples' lives, outlining actions and accountability for the Victorian Government, local council, and Aboriginal Victorians regarding progression in self-determination. This document provides a great resource for Aboriginal Victorians and local councils in developing local policy and action that aligns with State Government's understanding of Aboriginal self-determination.

Other notable practices within state policies include the community definition of self-determination that was collected for the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023, outlining that "Aboriginal self-determination encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own cultural values and way of life" (The State of Victoria, 2018, p. 22). The cultural determinants of health that are outlined and embedded within the Korin Korin Balit-Djak 2017-2027 (The State of Victoria Department of Health and Human Services, 2017a).

When reviewing Victorian Government policy, realised Aboriginal participation, partnership, and control in policy development is seen to



result policies that continue to progress Aboriginal self-determination.

Local Government Areas

The selection of the below councils was justified by the partnerships of the community organisation partners of the current report. The partners, Wandarra Aboriginal Corportation, Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation, and Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association, are in the local government areas of Hume, Wyndham, and Frankston respectively. The community partners are established Aboriginal groups and have collaborated with their local Councils previously.

Northern Metro Region, Hume Council

Within the reviewed policies for Hume, all have some included reference to the local Aboriginal communities who would be impacted by such policies. While more discussion is needed, this is a notable success of the Hume LGA. The most limited examples are within the Hume Procurement Policy 2021 (Hume City Council, 2021b) and Rural Strategy 2022 (Hume City Council, 2022b), where both make reference to the Council's responsibility to cultural competency training and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites respectively. Other policies that speak to support and inclusion of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but do not mention self-determination, include policies and plans regarding multiculturality (Hume City Council, 2019), the Hume budget (Hume City Council, n.d.-b), Humes vision for 2040 (Hume City Council, n.d.-f), community engagement activities (Hume City Council, 2022a), and playgroup support (Hume City Council, 2021a). The Hume SEED Inclusive Employer Framework (Hume City Council, n.d.-f) acknowledges how the historical disadvantage and discrimination that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people encounter can prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights. The framework supports the targeted recruitment of Indigenous people as one aspect of countering this challenge, linking employment to the health and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Increasing employment opportunities is an important component of supporting autonomy of Aboriginal people in Victoria, however it is important to note that recruitment must also coincide with ensuring work environments are welcoming, inclusive, and culturally safe for Aboriginal employees.

Cultural safety is highlighted as being particularly important within Hume's Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy (Hume City Council, 2022c). Within this policy cultural safety is recognised as more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than cultural awareness and sensitivity. Cultural safety is recognised as creating a space in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have opportunity to connect with culture and be comfortable being themselves and feel safe expressing their culture. This aligns with the UNDRIP rights (United Nations, 2007). Here it is notable how the policy pays particular attention to the safety of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

> *Cultural Safety of Aboriginal Children: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children are given the opportunity to be connected to culture and provided with a safe, nurturing and positive environment where they are comfortable being themselves, expressing their culture, their spirituality and belief system. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination, and more than cultural awareness and sensitivity. It includes identification of practices that may lead to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children feeling unsafe (Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, p. 11)*

There is some acknowledgement of intersectionality within the Hume Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 (Hume City Council, n.d.-d), identifying that disadvantage or discrimination may be compounded on the basis of Aboriginality. Similarly, this is acknowledged within the Connect and Thrive plan for Young People in Hume 2022-2026 (Hume City Council, n.d.), recommending Council to tailor services for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The plan also mentions the importance of partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific support services in assisting local young people. Interestingly, created for 2019-2029 to provide a vision for children and young people in Hume, the Hume 0-24 Framework (Hume City Council, n.d.-k)does not meaningfully speak to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local people. This could indicate a growing understanding of the value of tailored and culturally safe services for local Aboriginal people.

Self-determination is spoken to in varying degrees within the selected policies for Hume. While not mentioned within the above documents, a clear definition of self-determination is provided within other key documents. The Hume City Council Plan 2021-2025 (Hume City Council, 2023) acknowledges the importance of self-determination, providing a clear definition that aligns with State and international understandings, stating "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities, and have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." (Hume City Council, 2023, p. 4). One of the key pathways for the plan is to support self-determination and partnerships with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Here, the Council also recognises their responsibility in healing and building positive relationships between Council and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as educating the broader public about the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, cultures and history. Throughout the document, active language is used that defines the accountability of the Council.

> *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities, and have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (Hume City Council Plan 2021-2025, p. 4)*

First established in 2001, the Hume Social Justice Charter (Hume City Council, 2021c) appears to have a particular power in embedding self-determination with the practice of local Council, with the connection between self-determination and social justice referenced within the 2020-2022 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP; Hume City Council, n.d.-j). The Charter's social justice principles, with specified targeted action to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are embedded within services, plans, and programs of Hume (Hume City Council, 2021c). Within this document, reconciliation and the wellbeing of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is prioritised, while acknowledging that Council has an ethical duty and legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of their residents and to hold themselves accountable for human rights outcomes.

The Hume RAP 2020-2022 (Hume City Council, n.d.-j) does not speak to the concept of self-determination outside of reference to the Human Rights Charter. It is unclear who was involved within the review of the previous RAP that led to the current RAP, and therefore it is

unclear how local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have been translated into the priorities of the plan. Within the monitoring process, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are invited to contribute advice, however more work could be done to enable local Indigenous people to have say in the delivery and design of the RAP through deliberate community consultation and partnership. Nevertheless, the RAP is successful in determining clear measurable objectives, with timelines and comprehensive responsibility. Within the plan itself, the Council outlines objectives to strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in part by increasing their participation in decision making. This includes meeting with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement, and ensuring these principles are included in revisions of the Council's Community Engagement Framework. This process could be further expanded upon and prioritised to better give Indigenous people say in the local policies and services that impact their day-to-day life.

The Community Infrastructure Plan (Hume City Council, n.d.-c) responds to the Hume RAP in outlining the development of an Aboriginal Meeting Place, alongside an intention to further explore opportunities to provide spaces and services through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can connect and practice their culture. While the accountability to these actions is not clearly outlined, the development of a local Aboriginal Gathering Space is ranked as a high priority by the Council. In addition, while all other priority projects have been recommended service types to be delivered within those facilities, the plan outlines that the services at the Aboriginal Gathering Place will be determined by the local Aboriginal RAP Working Group. Together this demonstrates the strength that can result through collaboration and communication across Council departments, resulting in the prioritisation of a previously identified Aboriginal community need and opportunities for self-determination.

Western Metro Region, Wyndham Council

Overall, the reviewed local government policies of Wyndham have little reference to self-determination and policies often do not refer to the local Aboriginal community at all. This is concerning as policies regarding community engagement (Wyndham City Council, 2022b), support for families (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-i), public transport (Wyndham City Council, 2020), advocacy (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-d), economic development (Wyndham City Council, 2022a), and community strategies for supporting health and wellbeing across the lifespan (Wydham City Council, n.d.-b) are missing a demonstrated consideration of Aboriginal people and the inclusion of Aboriginal self-determination, which is known to be crucial in supporting Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

There are references to accessibility in some of the policies that were analysed, however outside of the Wyndham RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-a; Wyndham City Council, n.d.-f), these references often occur without mention of Aboriginal people or self-determination. There are also outlined requirements of the consideration of Aboriginal businesses within the Wyndham procurement policy (Wyndham City Council, 2022c); while this supports the economic participation of Aboriginal businesses, the policy does not speak to the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in decision-making or local affairs presenting an opportunity for future development. The Partnership Framework 2019 (Wyndham City Council, 2019) presents the development of the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre as an example of successful partnership between Council and local Aboriginal people, however the framework does not include a discussion of how self-

determination played a meaningful role within the project. When discussing successful partnerships, the Partnership Framework 2019 also fails to mention self-determination as a possible avenue to supporting partnerships.

Wyndham's Statement of Commitment (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-h) does not mention self-determination, although it does acknowledge the importance of access to land, places, sites and culturally safe spaces, and outlines the revitalisation of language and cultural practices as being fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The statement also gives support for "The active participation of Aboriginal people in decision making regarding both broad community and specific Aboriginal issues" (Wyndham City Council, 2019, p. 7), alongside mention of partnerships and acting on priorities identified by Aboriginal people. In doing so, the Statement provides a great, albeit missed, opportunity to explore the application of self-determination principles within council work. This captures a common theme within the council's policy documents, that the concept of self-determination if often missing and that its definition in theory and practice is often misunderstood. While this is an example of the council taking steps to progress self-determination, due to an absence of its discussion within policy documents, the concept maynot be clearly communicated to those using the policies to inform their work.

Wyndham City Acknowledges: ...Access to land, places, sites and culturally-safe spaces, as well as revitalisation of language and cultural practices is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people (Wyndham Statement of Commitment, p.5)

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-c) incorporates the cultural determinants of health, including self-determination. The plan acknowledges the importance of a strength-based perspective and the relationship between strong connection to Country and good health. How the plan incorporates these factors is not made clear. Some frameworks, such as the Wyndham City Learning Community Strategy 2018-2023 (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-g) and Social and Economic Inclusion Framework 2020-2023 (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-e), mention self-determination when referring to their support of the 2017-2019 RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-a). This demonstrates some understanding of the right to self-determination; further work is needed applying self-determination principles within the plans themselves.

The 2017-2019 RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-a) expresses concepts of Aboriginal self-determination. While not mentioning it directly, the second principle of the RAP captures self-determination, outlining the rightful place that Aboriginal communities have to exercise power in their own matters and determine a future in which their children flourish. Within the RAP, the Council recognises its role in supporting self-determination and outlines clear deliverables relating to governance for Aboriginal self-determination and civic participation. These actions have clear timelines and responsible roles, thereby supporting accountability, although deliverables are somewhat ambiguous and may be difficult to measure. Here, the Wyndham Council outlines the rightful place Aboriginal people have to exercise power in their own matters and determine a future in which their children flourish, aligning with self-determination principles.

This RAP is underpinned by the following principles to guide Council business:

- *RESPECT for the diversity of Aboriginal communities and living cultural heritage*
- *A RIGHTFUL PLACE for Aboriginal communities to exercise power in their*

own matters and determine a future which their children flourish

- *JUSTICE that addresses wrongs of the past and delivers EQUITY so that Aboriginal communities have access to achieve the same outcomes as all Wyndham City residents*
- *AGREEMENT to work in PARTNERSHIP with Aboriginal communities on the priorities that local Aboriginal people determine over the next two years*

(Wyndham, City RAP 2017-2019, p.6)

The 2023-2025 RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-f) has recently been endorsed following a period of development and community feedback. Before it was endorsed by the council, the updated RAP was drafted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and feedback and suggestions were sought from Registered Aboriginal Parties and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. Although self-determination is not defined in the plan, the council clearly outlines its support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to self-determination. The RAP also references the Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026 (The State of Victoria, 2020) which recommend actions that progress Aboriginal self-determination, noting frameworks for shared decision-making processes and actions that influence the principles of the RAP. As such, the 2023-2025 RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-f) appears to be a successful example of the council using State resources to successfully progress self-determination within the design of local policy.

The previous and current RAP do incorporate lines of accountability, outlining the RAP Management group members who are given responsibility for fulfilling action items, including those directly referencing self-determination. The absence of a RAP between 2019 and 2023 may have had impact on the progress towards Aboriginal self-determination within Wyndham. Progressing towards the opening of Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre was at the heart of the 2017-2019 RAP (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-a), and its establishment in 2019 is an example of successful partnership between the Council, the Koling wada-ngal (Walking together) board and the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners. The Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre intends to showcase the Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation vision of 'An Aboriginal Home in Aboriginal Hands', a culturally safe place for strengthening community and cultural development and connections and facilitating improved coordination and engagement of services and programs for Aboriginal people in the west of Melbourne.

Southern Metro Region, Frankston Council

Of the reviewed Frankston policies, the majority spoke little to the local Aboriginal community outside of an Acknowledgement of Country. While an Acknowledgement of Country is an important way of showing awareness of, and respect to, the Traditional Custodians of the land the council sits on (Dreyfus & Hellwig, 2023), the gesture here may seem performative or not fully conceptualised, given the lack of engagement with local Aboriginal communities that is demonstrated in the policies and plans themselves. A similar contradiction is demonstrated within the Positive Ageing Action Plan 2021-2025 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-k); while there is acknowledgement of the 10-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in Victoria, the plan does not discuss how this could be addressed by the local council.

The review has identified a missed opportunity for intersectional considerations of community members, notably not discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the

Frankston City Disability Action Plan 2021-2025 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-e) or the Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-e). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are six times more likely to be living with a disability, than the non-Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), and the NDIA has acknowledged that culturally appropriate engagement and delivery is a necessary component of the support required by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disabilities (Ferdinand et al., 2019). The Disability Royal Commision found that self-determination must be the first principle for engagement, design and delivery of disability services and supports for First Nations people with disability (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with a Disability, 2021). Similarly, the recent Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) National Summit has highlighted the unique challenges that are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, highlighting the importance of understanding intersectional discrimination (Australia Human Rights Commission, 2023). This provides examples of local policies in which Aboriginal self-determination principles could be meaningfully embedded.

Notably, many of the selected plans and policies do not appear to have specific inclusion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community consultation within their development. This conflicts with the principle of Aboriginal self-determination, through which Aboriginal people have a say in the matters that affect their lives (Wilson, 1997). It seems that a failure to incorporate this value has resulted in a series of plans that do not involve the local Aboriginal community in consultation, implementation, or review, and as such cannot effectively serve the local Indigenous community. Partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations are mentioned within the Municipal Early Years Plan 2021-2025 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-j) and the Community Vision 2040 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-c). While this is important, authentic partnerships with the local Aboriginal community must extend beyond sharing information about cultural heritage, to include the transfer of power, support Aboriginal self-determination, and accountability. In addition, for the Community Vision 2040 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-c), the lack of inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is in conflict with the reconciliation goals of council. Together, this highlights a trend in the partial application of self-determination concepts across and within Frankston policies and plans that prevent the long-term progression of the self-determination of local Aboriginal people.

While the Community Vision 2040 (Frankston City Council, n.d.-c) is intended to inform long-term goals into the council's strategic planning and decision making, there is no discussion of Aboriginal self-determination. The vision does support partnership with Traditional Owners and other plans to increase the visibility of local Indigenous histories and knowledge. While important, there is a need to extend beyond incorporating Indigenous knowledge into existing infrastructure and systems; Authentic partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must include accountability, reciprocity, and opportunities for self-governance. Supporting Aboriginal self-determination would be expected to support the stated priorities outlined by the council (e.g. Theme 1: Healthy Families and Communities, p. 8). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander locals have more of a role to play within the community than in being restricted to sharing heritage and history information.

Plans relating to Health and Wellbeing (Frankston City Council, n.d.-h) and Child

Safety (Frankston City Council, 2022a) do have some acknowledgement of the importance of self-determination in the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, without clear lines of accountability or collaboration with local Aboriginal people, it is unclear how these plans themselves intend to progress self-determination other than by acknowledging its importance.

The Frankston RAP (Frankston City Council, n.d.-i) provides a good example of collaboration between council and local Aboriginal people. The RAP responds to key issues identified by the community through consultation and the RAP Working Group included Recognised Aboriginal Party, local Elders, and local Aboriginal Organisations. The plan includes a monitoring process of specific outcomes determined to support the focus areas of having open relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and supporting the networking of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander locals. These outcomes have mostly clear measurable deliverables, with clear timelines and lines of accountability to specific council staff. Ongoing monitoring of the current RAP will be supported by the Reconciliation Advisory Committee, meeting four times a year to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the RAP, providing advice and guidance where required. This Committee includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, supporting the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are guiding the reconciliation process and monitoring the implementation of the RAP. It appears that thoughtful effort has been put into the reporting schedule for the RAP to ensure accountability and transparency.

Summary of Review: Insights and Opportunities

Self-determination

There is not a clear definition of self-determination used within LGAs policies, although there is reference to partnerships between local Aboriginal people and local Council, suggesting some participation of local Aboriginal people within decision making processes. The current and previous RAPs also make reference to the right that Aboriginal people have in exercising power within the decisions that affect them. Clear definition is provided relatively consistently at a state level, referring to internationally recognised discourse of Indigenous self-determination presented in the UNDRIP. This difference indicates an inconsistent understanding and application of Aboriginal self-determination between state and local governmental levels.

Of the selected local policies across the three regions, there is little acknowledgement of Aboriginal self-determination. The lack of reference to local Aboriginal people and self-determination conflicts with the municipalities support of self-determination in other relevant local documents, state policy, and internationally recognised rights. Self-determination cannot be enacted without demonstrating clear partnership with Aboriginal people and communities, who are currently not recognised in many of the documents (outside of an Acknowledgement of Country), or without clear deliverables, measures, and accountability. There is also an absence of a clear definition of self-determination used

within these polices, making its progression difficult to identify or report.

Looking at state and international levels, the contrast in discourse of Aboriginal self-determination within local policies and frameworks becomes clear. The inconsistent consideration of Aboriginal communities at a local level shows a missed opportunity for local government to translate state and internationally recognised rights to Aboriginal self-determination into local community projects and ways of life. Not acknowledging self-determination provides inconsistent messaging and action from local government and perpetuates colonial denial of Aboriginal agency and ontologies. A closer investigation of why this inconsistency is occurring would be highly valuable and would empower partnerships between the Councils and local Aboriginal people. Promoting Aboriginal self-determination as a right that underpins all policy and legislation provides an opportunity for local government to work towards reconciliation.

Aboriginal Consultation, Leadership, and Ownership

The UNDRIP indicates the importance of Aboriginal input and control on a policy level, recognising Indigenous peoples' right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves (United Nations, 2007). As such, Indigenous people have the right to 'determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development' and the 'right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them' (United Nations 2007: article 23). Nevertheless, consultation with local Indigenous people has not often occurred in the design of many of the selected LGA policies and plans. A lack of consultation has been shown to have profound impacts in terms of cultural appropriateness and sensitivity of policy and programs that affect Aboriginal communities (Vicary et al., 2006). In the current review, a lack of consultation is often seen alongside a lack of consideration of local Aboriginal people and their priorities.

Within the Continuum towards Aboriginal self-determination, the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework presents Aboriginal control over resources and decision making as a final element of self-determination (The State of Victoria, 2018). Here, it is outlined that government should continue to strive towards transferring decision-making control to Aboriginal peoples and community on the matters that affect their lives. Nevertheless, the current policies and frameworks tend to promote a rethinking and reshuffling of power within the current institution of the councils and their teams, rather than transferring power to Aboriginal community members, organisations and collectives. As such, the current policies are limited in their ability to progress towards self-determination, as leadership and ownership of policies sit with government bodies, who ultimately have the power in deciding the outcome of the policies. In enabling Aboriginal people to have autonomy over the decisions and actions that affect them, policies could have better potential to embed self-determination. Opportunities for a transfer of power come with affording control of plans and policies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to those communities.

Accountability and Evaluation

Many of the policies of the three LGAs are missing accountability to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. While the wellbeing of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is explicitly discussed, there is often ambiguous accountability as to who is responsible for ensuring wellbeing is supported. This is sometimes the result of ambiguous measures and outcomes, a lack of transparency, or through unclear lines of responsibility. Good lines of accountability are demonstrated through local RAPs, where having local Aboriginal people involved in evaluating progress and enactment of actions provideexamples of LGAs supporting self-determination. This embedded accountability could be expanded across different policies at a local level.

Frameworks outline varying procedures of evaluation that include local Aboriginal people. It was noticed that local and state policies with clear reference to self-determination often had built in evaluation procedures in collaboration with local Aboriginal organisations or communities. It seems a clear conceptualisation of and commitment to self-determination sees policies act on principles of partnership and accountability. Without clear consideration of self-determination, Aboriginal people have not been meaningfully involved in the decision making that affects them.

On-ground Projects

As part of the current work, on-ground projects were initiated in collaboration with the partner organisations. On-ground projects are understood as activities informed by the Aboriginal community in a metropolitan Region and further designed and implemented by the project partners within their local communities. All on-ground projects are based around a central finding within the community survey and conversations with all three project partners. These on-ground projects included initiating steps to create employment opportunities at partnering organisations with the intent of expanding services, and the creation of resources to disseminate project findings and recommendations back to Aboriginal community members, local and state Government and other audiences, as decided by the partnering organisations.

These on-ground projects are seen as advocacy activities for and with the partnering organisations, seeking to strengthen existing programs and services of the organisations and support progress toward their future goals.

Staff Positions to Strengthen ACCOs

The presence of Aboriginal staff as program coordinators and facilitators was seen as a key enabler for accessing services and programs, according to the survey respondents. This finding was further strengthened by conversations between researchers and the three project partner organisations. In response to these findings, the project team organized workshops with the project partners. In those workshops, the survey summaries of each metropolitan region were used as conversation starters, as they outlined clearly what kind of programs and activities the local community would like to see in their region. This was followed by conversations around skills and resources would be needed to organize and run those programs.

Relevant positions included staff to join the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team to support an existing children's play group, an operations officer to advance collaboration with the ACCO

and local council, a strategic advisor to develop policy documents and long-term strategic plan, and a community engagement officer.

It is understood that creating employment pathways for Aboriginal community members means more Aboriginal staff will design and implement programs and run services for Aboriginal people. The employment of Aboriginal people as program facilitators, community engagement officers and operational roles is also likely to increase the sense of feeling culturally safe among the wider Aboriginal community, as indicated in the survey responses. Further, initiating the employment of more Aboriginal staff enables community-driven design and implementation of programs. As the literature review has shown, those bottom-up program approaches are better positioned to increase the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, as opposed to top-down approaches to program delivery.

By doing so, the new roles are an example of listening to ideas and aspirations from local community and of translating those ideas into noticeable change on the community.

Project reflections and learnings

Towards the conclusion of the project, the non-Indigenous staff were prompted by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to reflect on their experiences and learnings of working within an Aboriginal-led project. Many resources already exist regarding respectful, ethical, and culturally safe research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. By bringing together their reflections and learnings, the non-Indigenous researchers see the resources as a potential supplementary resource for other non-Indigenous researchers and staff working in similar projects. The document comprised a resource list that assisted the non-Indigenous researchers to reflect on their practice and questions and prompts they grappled with throughout the project (see Appendix D).

Dissemination of project findings and recommendations

Advocacy Profiles

Through consultation with the three partner organisations in the Northern, Western, and Southern Metropolitan Regions, advocacy papers were developed with the goal to strengthen each organisation's resources to advocate for themselves. Findings from the literature and policy review highlighted gaps between what governments were aiming for by creating RAPs, and how the local Aboriginal communities were being serviced. It is understood that limited resourcing means that grant applications and advocating for community can be a major challenge for local Aboriginal organisations. Advocacy profiles were intended to capture aspects of the local Aboriginal community, current state of policy in each area and pair this with how each organisation can help meet RAP objectives through additional resourcing. This was intended to be a practical way for each organisation to show the work that they have done and use it to apply for further funding and strengthen their presence and work with their community.

Video

Another on-ground project was the creation of a video to communicate the project findings and recommendations, in collaboration with the partner organisations. Co-owned by the Aboriginal partner organisations, the video may be used for advocacy purposes. The video also captured community understandings of Aboriginal self-determination and its importance for Aboriginal communities across Metropolitan Melbourne. A representative from each partner organisation appeared in the video, providing insight into their organisation and relevance for Aboriginal people in their local areas. Lastly, the video communicated what was missing within their local regions regarding services and programs and needed support. The video puts forward practical

recommendations for local and state Government and for other people and organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Community Resources

The project team was invited by one of the partner organisations to attend a community gathering event and display a poster that communicated the project findings and recommendations. The poster included quotes from the Aboriginal survey participants, elevating their voices beyond the survey and the project report. The quotes became conversation starters with local council staff who were also attending the community gathering. This was seen as an opportunity to advocate for and with the partner organisation in a way and in a setting determined by them.

Educational flyers were also created, which shared the community survey findings, the literature review findings and the project team's reflections regarding working with Aboriginal organisations. The design of the resources was led by a First Nations owned marketing and creative agency and the content was developed by the project team. The created resources aimed to be more accessible versions of the research report to reach a wider audience, offering practical advice to service providers and those working with Aboriginal organisations. The partnering organisations may choose to use these resources to communicate the project findings back to the community members who gave their time by participating in the community survey. The project team understands reporting back to community members and community organisations as essential to uphold ethical practice in research with Aboriginal communities.

III: The Way Forward

Discussion

The various components of this project explored the current landscape of programs targeting Aboriginal people and communities living in and around metropolitan Melbourne. The community consultations, including community surveys and conversations with Aboriginal project partners working in local ACCOs, enabled a mapping of the current state of program delivery for and with Aboriginal people. The systematic literature review critically explored published evaluations of programs in metropolitan Melbourne. The analysis of identified evaluations was guided by the survey responses and priorities voices during conversations with community partners. The third project component reviewed local and state government policies, frameworks, and plans, seeking to establish an overview of current understandings of Aboriginal self-determination relating to program and service delivery.

As presented, the findings of these three project components suggest limited provision of culturally safe and culturally strengthening programs and services. With only 10 program evaluations meeting the inclusion criteria of the literature review, the accountability and transparency of program deliverers was uncertain. A lack of program evaluations focusing on programs and services for Aboriginal people in Melbourne may be due to lack of funding or resourcing, or low priorities in this area. A lack of accountability towards Aboriginal communities and transparency in policy development and evaluation was also identified in the policy review. Consequently, a disconnect manifests between program providers and local government on the one hand, and Aboriginal community members and potential program participants on the other.

This disconnect is noticeable in the survey responses and is understood as contributing to Aboriginal community members feeling culturally unsafe and unwelcome within the local and wider community.

The systematic literature review was driven by the initial research question: What are the common themes concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with targeted services and programs, regarding self-determination in Melbourne? It was found that self-determination was rarely addressed or engaged with within the reviewed evaluations, and when it was, it was focused more on the individual's capacity for decision-making within the program, rather than as a collective human right. Omission of self-determination could suggest that groups or individuals do not often perceive themselves as being responsible for self-determination. Instead, that the onus is placed on governments or Aboriginal communities to self-determine. Its omission in evaluations could also be explained by self-determination not being a priority or deemed appropriate to address within those papers. While those in positions of power likely do have more responsibility and power to make practical decisions regarding self-determination, the research papers that acknowledged the importance of self-determination framed the research in the broader political and historical context that it exists within, rather than in isolation (Black et al., 2019). It can also allow for increased culturally sensitive practice and contribute to improved strengths-based discourse.

Themes that were analysed in relation to self-determination included community consultation and input, advocacy, Aboriginal involvement and leadership, and accountability. These were addressed inconsistently within the reviewed evaluations, highlighting differing proprieties among groups and programs. Evaluations with stronger and

more embedded community consultation, Aboriginal leadership, and circular accountability, had stronger research methodologies and stronger outcomes regarding participant involvement and feedback (see Black et al., 2019; Trounson et al., 2019). The implications of being not Aboriginal led or having input from local communities means that programs are often less culturally safe or sensitive, creating blind spots to allow for racism and other barriers to accessing services (see Bailie et al., 2015).

Despite the findings, the project discovered best practice examples of program design, delivery and evaluation and collaborative policy development. The partnership with three local ACCOs based in metropolitan Melbourne also assisted in identifying what approaches work best, according to local Aboriginal voices. The best practice examples from the literature review share distinct features. These include responding to priorities voiced by the local Aboriginal community, extensive co-design of program activities by drawing on local knowledge and strengths, flexibility in program delivery to accommodate participants, and following local cultural protocols. As the literature review shows, those programs led to better and sustainable outcomes for participants (Black et al., 2019; Trounson et al., 2019). This was also reflected in the policy review of the current project, in which consultation with local Aboriginal community members, clear evaluation and accountability measures, and progressing Aboriginal participation and control within the matters that affected them were often seen within policies that spoke respectfully of Aboriginal community members, thoughtfully considered cultural safety and appropriateness, and appeared to respond to community needs.

The current policy review also led to the identification of collaborative policy development between governments and Aboriginal communities. Examples of incorporating Indigenous ways of being and doing and evaluating policies under Aboriginal oversight were noticed, providing as templates for ongoing opportunities for development and further embedding of self-determination. Government documents stating responsibilities and showing clear timelines are seen as promoting transparency and accountability. Government documents resulting from listening to and embedding local priorities are understood as drivers for more culturally safe communities and practices.

The current review noted an inconsistency in how Aboriginal self-determination was addressed through international, state, and local policies. Chiefly, there appears to be a lack of acknowledgement of the local Aboriginal community within many of the local government policies of Wyndham and Frankston, and an overall lack of discussion of self-determination across all LGAs. This is a concerning finding given the impact that policy has on the lives of community members and the unique experiences of Aboriginal people that must be addressed to support reconciliation and wellbeing. As such, a variety of opportunities for growth with LGA policy has been identified. These areas overlap and intertwine, collectively supporting and being supported by progressing self-determination.

Supporting the progress toward self-determination through local Government policy must be a wholistic and considered approach, and Aboriginal control must be embedded at all stages, from consultation to development, implementation, and monitoring. Particularly within more recently established policies and frameworks, the review found that councils were expressing recognition and respect for Traditional Owners and other local Aboriginal community members. Progressing towards alignment with international and state understandings of self-determination will see

councils develop better relationships with Aboriginal locals through authentic partnership, accountability, and transferring power. Good will and engagement were demonstrated through local council RAPs; continuing to expand this approach throughout the entire LGA policies and processes, while continuing council education and authentic partnership with local Aboriginal people, is expected to see a meaningful improvement toward to progressing self-determination.

The concept of Aboriginal self-determination is multifaceted and understood differently across local contexts. While some similarities in understanding were identified in this project, the reviewed government documents show that more two-way conversations between governments and Aboriginal communities need to take place to establish mutual understandings and expectations around self-determination for it to be meaningfully and effectively embedded in policy and practice.

Limitations

The scope of this project was limited by available and suitable resources to explore programs and services for Aboriginal people in metropolitan Melbourne. Most available resources are based on quantitative data, such as the census, and allow for little analysis going beyond numeric information. Disseminating the survey was a way to navigate through this data scarcity, with a focus on open ended questions allowing for survey participants to articulate their answers freely. However, the survey itself had its limitations and the project acknowledges that not all Aboriginal community members could participate in the survey due to various reasons.

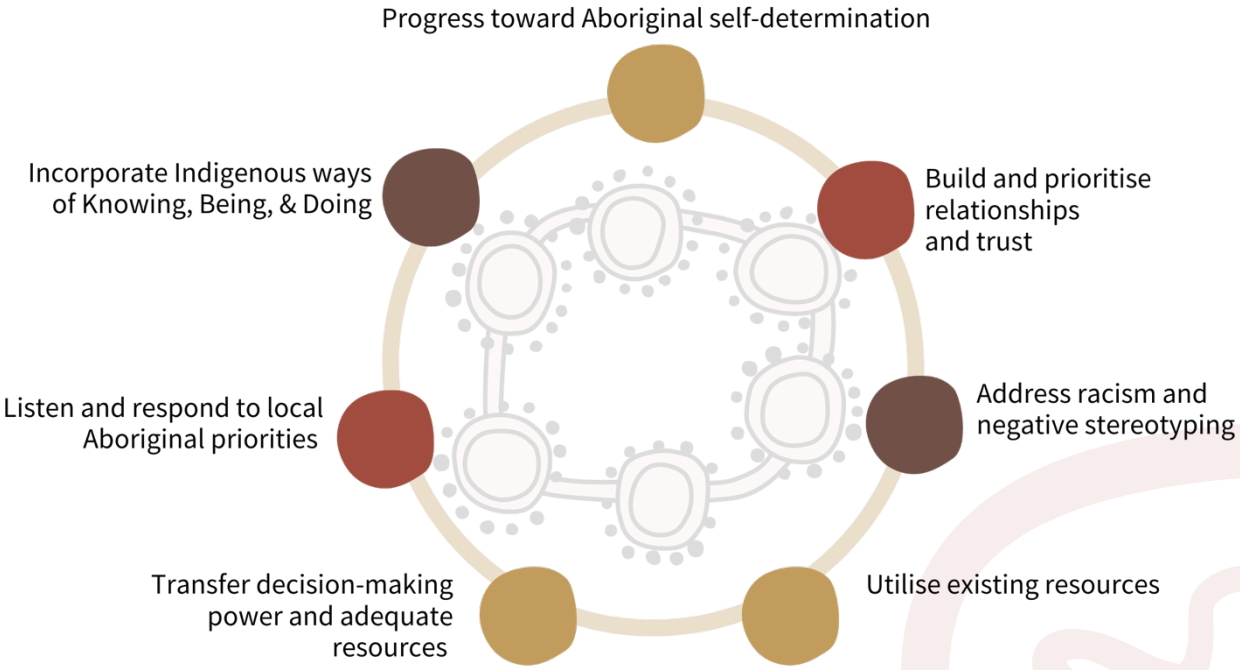
As justified in this report, the project focused on three of Melbourne's six metropolitan regions. Thus, the project does not claim to paint a picture accurately of all of metropolitan Melbourne. However, it is argued for this focus leads to an in-depth, localized reflection of the current contexts experienced by Aboriginal people living in those three regions.

Another limitation of this project was the extent to which project partners could be involved in all parts of the project. For example, the systematic literature review and policy review were predominantly undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers. To enable collaborative review practices, the research team provided regular updates and opportunities for feedback to the Aboriginal project partners, leading to conversations that shaped the review process and analysis of findings.

The project also acknowledges that the Aboriginal project partners hold various commitments and responsibilities to their families, communities and workplaces. This project was another commitment for the Aboriginal project partners, on top of their existing full-time jobs and other responsibilities. This limited how much time they could commit to the project, and the level of collaboration.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the community consultations, literature review and policy review. By addressing multiple sectors and community and government levels, the recommendations suggest collaborative and intersectoral approaches to support and advance Aboriginal people and communities in metropolitan Melbourne, with a focus on self-determined program and service provision and culturally safe spaces. Recommendations have been proposed across three domains: specific LGA region recommendations, broader local council policy recommendations, and recommendations for future research. Suggested actions related to the recommendations have been included to provide ways that groups may enact and apply these recommendations. These may not be relevant in all contexts.



1. Recommendations for Hume Region: Hume City Council

Based on community consultation undertaken by surveying the local Aboriginal communities within the Northern region, as regular consultations with stakeholders at Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, the following recommendations have been suggested. These recommendations reflect the ongoing role that Wandarra and its members have in the community, being embedded in the local Broadmeadows are for a long time.

Recommendation	Suggested actions and applications of recommendations
A. Work with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to co-design and establish a culturally safe Gathering Place where one is lacking.	• Partner with local ACCOs (such as Wandarra) to establish a Gathering Place that meets the local needs of all groups in the area, particularly the smaller organisations that may have less resources and can become disempowered. • Where consultation occurs regarding the feasibility of a Gathering Place and other key issues impacting the local Aboriginal community, have open and continual

	communication with the Aboriginal groups that have been consulted regarding the results and outcomes, i.e. see Whittlesea Aboriginal Gathering Place.

2. Recommendations for Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Recommendation	Suggested actions and applications of recommendations
A. Improve trust and relationships with local Aboriginal groups and communities by	Based on feedback with local Aboriginal groups, there remains distrust between communities and local councils. It was suggested that these relationships be strengthened by: • Negotiating and agreeing on roles, accountabilities, and responsibilities through signed MOUs from all parties. • When consultation with Aboriginal groups occurs, ensure that communication is maintained, and updates are provided regarding the results of consultations and broader outcomes of work.

3. Recommendations for local council policy and practice

The following are general recommendations to progress the embedding of self-determination across LGA policies and plans, as informed by the policy review of the current project. The recommendations draw from the literature regarding Aboriginal self-determination, as well as positive examples demonstrated by various LGAs. Overall, the recommendations seek to redistribute power through a transfer of control, support authentic partnerships between councils and Aboriginal communities, and approach embedded self-determination as a council-wide project:

3.1 Utilise Existing State Resources

Recommendation	Suggested action and application of recommendation
A. In partnership with local Aboriginal people, conduct a systematic audit of existing policies and update to ensure Aboriginal self-determination is considered and incorporated throughout.	Conduct council-wide audits regarding how self-determination is embedded within existing policies: • Policy team to create project plan for self-determination audit that includes accountability of audit to specific roles and tasks, outlines evaluation processes, and provides timeline for project • In partnership with local Aboriginal people or ACCHOs, create evaluative measures and/or checklist for the assessment of embedding self-determination in policies and practices. This should consider local understandings of self-determination. • As existing policies are reviewed and updated, evaluate by predetermined measures and update accordingly. Consider the prioritisation of certain policies; this may be determined through knowledge of council staff, identification by Aboriginal partners, or by those outlined in the current report.

	• Within project plan, determine future date for review of self-determination measures for local policy (e.g. in 2-years' time.)
B. Commit to and apply the action logic of the **Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023** (The State of Victoria, 2018, p. 11) in its affairs to progress change, address inequity, and deliver stronger outcomes for and with Aboriginal Victorians.	Incorporate action logic of **Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023** (VAAF; The State of Victoria, 2018, p. 11) into key documents that outline strategic direction of local council: • When creating new policies or reviewing, identify where the policy sits within logic framework and this assessment within policy document. • Outline how policy could further progress upon logic and what is needed in order to achieve this progress. Establish accountability for responsibility in taking steps to action this progress and include within position descriptions of relevant roles • When creating and reviewing policies, include an evaluation of the policy across VAAF self-determination enablers. I.e. How does this policy prioritise culture? How does it address trauma and support healing? How does it address racism and promote safety? How does it transfer power and resources to communities? • See the Self-Determination Reform Framework for further information and applications
C. Commit to actions across all pillars of the **Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026** (The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020, pp. 17-18) which have been developed in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians as a practical guide towards Aboriginal self-determination.	Using the **Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategic Framework** (The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020, pp. 17-18), develop a self-determination action plan that responds to all pillars and pathways: • Begin by determining the group to be involved in development of action plan, including local Aboriginal community members and Council staff, and establishing system of governance (e.g. reporting structures, task accountability) • Use locally established definitions and understandings of self-determination to guide the project • Follow framework as outlined in State of Victoria document to help Council meet their commitments and progress towards self-determination

3.2 Incorporate Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing

Recommendation	Suggested action and application of recommendation
A. Incorporate Country-based approaches to uphold self-determination and sustainable engagement, meaning	Incorporate Country-based approaches into workplace practices: • Have Aboriginal-led professional development organisation run training sessions with council staff who engage with Aboriginal community and stakeholders (E.g. Education training delivered

	Aboriginal people determine engagement informed by Country boundaries, rather than local Council boundaries (e.g. see **Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026** (The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020)).	by Koorie Heritage Trust). After attending the professional development, council staff to develop an internal guide regarding the application of new skills and knowledge within the workplace. • Include Country names when referring to locations within Council policy, internal documents, and community facing work (e.g. Council website, community announcements). • Include visual representations of Country boundaries in images of maps of the local area. • Collect and consider the needs of different Traditional Owner groups within Council area to enable the ability to respond to local needs and wants.
B.	Begin, continue, and expand recognition and application of cultural determinants of health, acknowledging the cultural factors that shape, support and protect traditional cultural practice, kinship, connection to land and Country, art, song and ceremony, dance, healing, spirituality, empowerment, ancestry, belonging and self-determination (e.g. see Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 (Wyndham City Council, n.d.-c)).	Incorporate cultural determinants of health within relevant policies and Council approaches: • Complete organisation wide education regarding cultural determinants of health to establish consensus of understanding that can be applied to all work throughout Council. • In development of policies and plans relating to health of community, include consideration and discussion of how policy interacts with cultural determinants of health (See Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy, Lowitja Health 2020) • Work with local Aboriginal people to develop the community's own health and wellbeing indicators to be applied within work of organisation (see example Yawaru Wellbeing Project)
C.	Ensure the inclusion of Healing and the Social Emotional Wellbeing Framework within local policy to support culturally responsive approaches and services (e.g. see Balit Murrup 2017-2027 (The State of Victoria Department of Health and Human Services, 2017b)).	Include Healing and Social and Emotional Wellbeing within Council's understandings of health and within health-related policy and services: • Revise policies relating to community health with regards to their impact on Healing and Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing, speaking to how these principles are being addressed • Refer to the Healing and to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing at the beginning of policy development to determine focus and goals of policy.

3.3 Progress Toward Aboriginal Self-Determination

Recommendation		Suggested action and application of recommendation
A.	Incorporate circular accountability where services and programs that are funded to target Aboriginal people are not	Support accountability through the incorporation of circular accountability within services and programs:

	only accountable to funding bodies, but to the communities they service.	• Include understanding of circular accountability and what it means in practice within funding applications and funding agreements. I.e. *How is this program/service supporting Aboriginal participants, what are the benefits for the broader Aboriginal community?* • Develop an internal guide for engaging with community in a way that best supports accountability to community where additional burden is not being placed on Aboriginal groups and individuals. • When consulting with local Aboriginal groups, ensure that results and outcomes are being communicated in a timely matter, to uphold trust and accountability.
B.	Ensure local policies and plans have accountability to local Aboriginal people through including clear evaluation measures and frameworks informed by Aboriginal communities	Within policies and plans, outline actions that are clear regarding timeframe, deliverable, and lines of accountability to specific roles: • Co-design these actions with local Aboriginal people that would be impacted by policy, with a focus on establishing meaningful evaluative markers that action has been achieved • Update relevant staff position descriptions to explicitly include new actions as created for council policies
C.	Develop a Self-determination Local Action Plan with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Organisations, and local Aboriginal community.	See **Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026** (The State of Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020)
D.	Find opportunities for Aboriginal agency and partnership regarding local matters, with the intent of transferring decision-making to local Aboriginal communities and people within those contexts.	Wherever possible, partner with local Aboriginal communities and work to transfer decision making and power to these communities in matters that affect them: • Develop relationships with local Aboriginal organisations to demonstrate commitment, intentions, and accountability • At very beginning of policy development, determine local Aboriginal organisations that would provide partnership and direction in the development of the project • Include compensation for time within project budget
E.	Where programs targeted at Aboriginal people cannot be Aboriginal led and owned, embed community consultation and input at all stages of development, design, implementation, and evaluation.	Seek community consultation prior to development of policy, rather than feedback after development, and involve community in policy development, revision, and evaluation

F.	Adjust reporting requirements for funding for local Aboriginal organisations, as current reporting and payment structures are inaccessible for smaller organisations, becoming overburdensome and restrictive.	Follow more appropriate reporting requirements in work with local Aboriginal organisations: • Consider alternative ways to report on project/program updates, e.g., instead of written update reports, consider voice recording or videos as alternative options • Set up free online grant information session/ grant writing workshop when a new grant is announced, to support fundraising capacity among orgs • Make resources available for smaller ACCOs to set up well for funding application and reporting processes (e.g., Strategic plan, vision, mission and value statements, cultural pillars, advocacy profiles etc.)

4. Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation		Suggested actions and applications of recommendations
A.	Further evaluations of programs and services targeted at Aboriginal people are needed, specifically in urban areas such as Melbourne.	Establish overview of existing programs and services targeted at Aboriginal people and evaluate those programs and services. Aboriginal-led evaluation: Where possible, employ Aboriginal project officers to design and undertake evaluations. Alternatively, consider setting up steering committee to guide evaluation by non-Aboriginal project officers.
B.	Strengthen academic literature and discourse through increased studies focusing on the strength-based approaches, straying away from deficit-based language and approaches.	Include the use of strengths-based approaches as requirement during ethics approval at universities. Research proposal that is consistent with strength-based methodology. In academic peer-reviewed literature, ensure strengths-based methodology is emphasised throughout the publication.
C.	Increase clarity in research regarding accountability and consultation processes pertaining to relevant Aboriginal communities.	Thorough risk and benefits assessment that pays particular attention to the impact on Aboriginal people and communities.
D.	Explore the significance of culturally safe meeting places for Aboriginal community (e.g. Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre).	Prioritise research that explores the significance of culturally safe meeting places for Aboriginal community, with the intent of better supporting community wellbeing through knowledge regarding accessibility, environment, qualities etc.
E.	Further research and explore local Aboriginal community contexts (e.g., Examine what	Given the importance of cultural safety and diverse experiences of it within Aboriginal communities within metropolitan Melbourne, better understanding its meanings within these contexts through

cultural safety means in local communities; what contributes to these groups to feel welcomed to a space)	further surveys, culturally appropriate qualitative interviews and yarns.

Conclusion

This report presents the current landscape of programs targeting Aboriginal people residing in and around metropolitan Melbourne. As discussed, this area is currently under explored, with limited information around these programs available. Very few evaluations of programs are available, with most of them being undertaken without input from Aboriginal program participants nor Aboriginal evaluators.

Further, the project identified an absence of local Aboriginal voices in design and evaluation of government policies and strategies. The concept of self-determination is present in certain state government resources yet has not made its way consistently into local Government spaces. As communicated through the community survey and in-depth conversations with Aboriginal project partners with long-established connections with Aboriginal community members across metropolitan Melbourne, this gap needs to close urgently, and intentions stated in policy need urgent translation into noticeable change on the community level.

This project established a starting point to further the mutual understanding between Aboriginal community and local and state Government regarding self-determined program and service provision in metropolitan Melbourne. A key finding is the importance of Aboriginal community being in charge of designing and delivering programs for and with their local community. Local councils and state Governments play a key role and have responsibility in creating supportive environments and resources enabling Aboriginal collectives to have agency over this program delivery, according to priorities defined by them.

The policy review highlighted hopeful examples of collaborative policy design promoting transparency and accountability. Referring to those examples as conversation starters, the project urges local councils to invest resources meaningfully and set up sustainable practices supporting ongoing relationships with Aboriginal communities in and around metropolitan Melbourne. For these relationships to be respectful, local councils benefit from deepening their understanding around the local circumstances in which Aboriginal communities live and local ACCOs operate. The project emphasizes the need for further resources to engage with ACCOs locally, in their contexts. This is best led by Aboriginal professionals themselves. The on-ground projects resulting from this project aim to support and advance those local dialogues and practices and seek to further support and advance Aboriginal communities, ACCOs and collectives in and around metropolitan Melbourne.

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Appendix A: Adapted QAT

	Yes/No/ Partially/ Unclear
1. Did the program/service/research respond to a need or priority determined by the community?	
2. Was community consultation and engagement appropriately inclusive?	
3. Did the program/service/research have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research leadership?	
4. Did the program/service/research have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance?	
5. Were local community protocols respected and followed?	
6. Did the researchers negotiate agreements in regard to rights of access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' existing intellectual and cultural property?	
7. Did the researchers negotiate agreements to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ownership of intellectual and cultural property created through the research?	
8. Did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have control over the collection and management of research materials?	
9. Was the research guided by an Indigenous research paradigm?	
10. Does the program/service/research take a strengths-based approach, acknowledging and moving beyond practices that have harmed Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples in the past?	
11. Did the researchers plan and translate the findings into sustainable changes in policy and/or practice?	
12. Did the program/service/research benefit the participants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals?	
13. Did the program/service/research demonstrate capacity strengthening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals?	
14. Did everyone involved in the research have opportunities to learn from each other?	

Appendix B: Table of Literature Review Themes

Author (year)	Self-determination	Community consultation and input	Aboriginal involvement and leadership	Advocacy	Accountability
Armstrong et al. (2020)	Not referenced.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project reference group were established to develop course, including reviewing cultural adaptation and acceptability of materials.	Program delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid instructors.	Program was implemented in communities where suicide prevention was considered to be a high priority by the community	Not described/ prioritised within the program.
Bailie et al. (2015)	Not referenced.	Program sites were established through consultation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums were held in each participating State/Territory.	Program participants seen as program recipients.	Programs did not advocate for local communities but rather were implemented on a national level	Predominantly vertical accountability to funder/ government. Circular accountability does not appear to be a priority.
Browne et al. (2013)	Not referenced.	No community consultation or input at design stage, participant input was included during the	Program initiated and coordinated by VACCHO, project coordination team were two people with one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal, Aboriginal and non-	Program seeks to increase the capacities of Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW), role of AWHs is seen as pivotal in promoting and maintaining	Little accountability evident, although the program was not providing a service, rather

		implementation phase.	Aboriginal health workers paired in the program.	health of Aboriginal people and communities as AHWs provide culturally appropriate health care.	facilitating partnerships.
Black et al. (2019)	Communicated as a right of Indigenous peoples and the importance of adopting culturally sensitive practice and a human rights approach to research.	Aboriginal input across program design, process and evaluation phase	Program was designed, developed and delivered by VACCA, 3 of 4 facilitators were Aboriginal, Elders promoted cultural strengthening	Privileges participants voice in all program stages, advocates for embedding Aboriginal knowledges, cultural connection and cultural healing in all program stages, addresses participant's priorities (e.g., acknowledging historic and ongoing systemic injustices)	While not explicitly acknowledged, the collaborative process suggests accountability to those that are in the program.
Genat et al. (2016)	Not referenced.	Input from VACCHOs, Aboriginal community members and Elders in creating Victorian Government Strategy then leading to program	Aboriginal involvement/leadership in all program stages (e.g., involvement of community leaders, Aboriginal program facilitators	Collaborative processes and community partnership and leadership development as key program objectives enabled community advocacy	The framework was developed from key Aboriginal Victorian and national ethics statements, with the value that such frameworks should provide accountability to local leaders. Accountability was present through partnership with VACCHO.
MacDonald et al. (2016)	Not referenced.	Extensive consultation with Victorian Aboriginal community to create	Program led by the VACCHO Nutrition and Physical Activity Project Team, Aboriginal 'project	Advocacy understood as bringing views of local organisation into formal organisational policy landscape	External accountability demands were cited as a contextual factor

		statewide policy guideline then leading to program	champions' to run programs in local ACCHO		impacting the program.
Moodie et al. (2014)	Mentioned in relation to empowering individuals to achieve personal financial goals.	Short community consultation period before program implementation	First Nations Foundation (FNF) worked with three Indigenous community organisations, Aboriginal facilitators at local organisation to deliver program	Program design and delivery flexible to meet local priorities but program itself does not advocate for specific community priorities	Accountability was evident through empowerment theories, where individuals are accountable for themselves, rather than the program being accountable to community.
Stajic et al. (2019)	Not referenced	No mention of community consultation or input	Program delivered by senior researchers with at least one researcher being Aboriginal, no leadership of local participants	Program itself does not advocate community priorities but is enabler for future advocacy activities through participation in research	Not mentioned.
Trounson et al. (2019)	Self-determination for individuals to self-direct session goals and create personal agency.	Community consultation and input across all program stages through collaboration enabled through continuing two-way communication between program participants and facilitators	Aboriginal leadership/involvement in all program stages	Program initiated by community advocating for more opportunities to meet, celebrate culture and approach learning and education in informal setting	Not mentioned, although the collaborative process suggests accountability to those that are in the program.

Walsh et al. (2016)	Not referenced.	No mention of community consultation or input	No Aboriginal leadership/involvement, program participants seen as program recipients	Program itself does not advocate community/participant priorities but is enabler for future advocacy activities through leadership development	Competing systemic accountabilities identified as a barrier to student voice and expression.

Appendix C: Reviewed Policies

Summary of Reviewed Policies

Level	Count
International	3
Victorian Government	18
Local Government Areas	
Hume	19
Wyndham	15
Frankston	12

List of Reviewed Policies

Level	Name
International	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
Victorian Government	Child Safe Standards
	Self-Determination Reform Framework
	Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022
	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023
	Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026
	Advancing the Victorian Treaty Process Annual Report 2021-2022
	Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010
	Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026
	Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing, and Safety Strategic Plan 2017-2027
	Balit Murrup: Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework
	Aboriginal Governance and Accountability Framework 2017
	Koolin Balit: Aboriginal Health Strategy
	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement
	Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020
	Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025

	Wirkara Kulpa Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy 2022-2032
	Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
	Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
Local Government Areas	
Hume	Hume SEED Inclusive Employer Framework
	Hume City Council Plan 2021-2025
	Hume Social Justice Charter
	Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-2022
	Hume Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
	Hume Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025
	Connect and Thrive: A Plan for Young People in Hume 2022-2026
	Hume 0-24 Framework
	Community Infrastructure Plan
	Multicultural Framework
	Budget 2023-2024
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Policy
	Hume Horizons 2040
	Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
	Community Engagement Policy
	Procurement Policy
	Rural Strategy
	Playgroup Support Policy
	Annual Report 2021-2022
Wyndham	Community Engagement Policy 2021-2025
	Family Friendly Charter 2018
	Geographic Naming Policy 2023
	Partnership Framework
	Procurement Policy
	Wyndham City Council Reconciliation Action Plan December 2017 – December 2019
	Wyndham City Council Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-2025 (approved draft)
	Public Transport Policy

	Statement of Commitment
	Advocacy Strategy 2018 – Securing Wyndham's Future
	Economic Development Strategy 2022-26
	Learning Community Strategy 2018-2023
	Living Your Best Life in Wyndham: A Lifecourse Framework
	Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
	Social and Economic Inclusion Framework
Frankston	Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan September 2022-December 2023
	Frankston City Disability Action Plan 2021-2025
	Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025
	Municipal Early Years Plan 2021-2025
	Positive Ageing Action Plan 2021-2025
	Frankston Youth Action Plan 2022-2026
	Frankston City Council Active Leisure Strategy 2021-2029
	Community Vision 2040
	Council Plan and Budget 2021-2025
	2021-2031 Financial Plan
	Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Appendix D: Project Reflections and Learnings

Towards the conclusion of the project, the non-Indigenous staff were prompted to reflect on their experiences and learnings of working within an Aboriginal-led project. While many resources already exist regarding respectful, ethical, and culturally safe research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, the current reflections may serve as a supplementary resource for other non-Indigenous researchers and staff who participate in similar projects.

When reflecting on their experiences, following themes emerged for the non-Indigenous staff alongside questions to prompt the reflection of future researchers and staff.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST: *How can I build relationships with Aboriginal community and Aboriginal community organisations?*

Through the project we found that it takes time and effort to build trusting relationships when working with community. Relationship building was supported when we were able to demonstrate our commitment and accountability to community, enacting reciprocity as opposed to making demands and assumptions about the partnership.

The project really benefited from its extension, as this allowed the researchers to continue to develop their relationship with the Aboriginal community organisations and better understand and respond to their experiences and direction.

In addition to time, we found that relationships were strengthened by paying close attention to understand the boundaries and preferences of the people you are working with – e.g. the values of their work, communication preferences, and advice and direction.

Working at grassroots levels with community and Aboriginal organisations can place additional time and resourcing burdens on members who are often volunteering their time on top of pre-existing full-time work. It was important to consider how much was being asked within these relationships, to be flexible and respectful of those boundaries. It was important that the time that was put in by community was met with project updates and the agreed outcomes to build and maintain trust.

CONSIDERING CONTEXT: *How can I educate myself?*

We found our ability to work in this space was greatly supported by our previous education on Aboriginal histories, Aboriginal ontologies, cultural safety, the continuing impacts of colonisation, and decolonisation practices, and an ongoing engagement with current affairs as they relate to the Aboriginal community. Other strategies included staying up to date with local events and sharing resources between colleagues to support each other's educational and self-development. This enabled us to begin the project with an understanding of the historical and political context the project was taking place within and anticipate challenges. (E.g. change of state government leadership and impact on Metropolitan Partnerships operations, the Voice campaign and impact on community).

It is important to consider the *cultural load* that is often placed on Aboriginal people to educate the non-Indigenous community. This can be addressed by independent and team education on history, cultural safety, and local community. In our experience this kind of education was not always straightforward due to systems that inhibit this kind of information sharing. However, it is important to take the time to pursue and not place additional burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for education.

OWNERSHIP AND IMPACT: ***Who is benefitting from this work?***

As project progressed, it was important to continue checking in with the team, reflect on the impacts of the procedure and outcome of the project, and continue to evaluate the benefits and risk to community. Research has historically benefitted the researcher over the population involved, often with little regard to the wellbeing and dignity of participants, and as such it can take conscious time and effort to ensure a research project is not following the same well-worn path. Being flexible and critical of assumed research and workplace procedure can assist in finding more culturally relevant and safe ways of working, and ultimately support the core intentions of the project.

DIRECTION, CONSULTATION, AND REVIEW: ***How will I ensure the project is Aboriginal led?***

The current project was led by Aboriginal staff, who outlined its goals and direction. We maintained this direction by having regular meetings and discussions about the project and its progress and frequently requesting and incorporating feedback. We found it important to confirm a clear understanding of the project's intentions and feedback, to best adjust work and reduce an additional burden on Aboriginal lead staff.

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups or organisations, the project was supported by outlining clear expectations and ownership of anything created during the project through an MOU that is negotiated, agreed upon, and signed by both parties.

The project also highlighted the importance of continually seek feedback and direction from Aboriginal leads and Aboriginal community organisations. We found that doing so acknowledged and utilised their expertise and kept the project moving in a direction that would be of greatest benefit to community.

RESPECT: ***How can I ensure respect is maintained with Aboriginal individuals and groups?***

Throughout the project it became clear that respect was underpinning and overarching value that is essential to this work. In conversations with Aboriginal organisations we heard of previous experiences working with government and other bodies that made the Aboriginal people involved feel disrespected. Examples included not having their work and expertise valued, not being updated following consultation, and having one-way relationships that were not built on reciprocation. In response, there was a call for ongoing communication, listening, authentic engagement with Aboriginal community.

Future projects may demonstrate respect by: following the direction and expertise of Aboriginal lead staff; valuing the work and great significance of Aboriginal community organisations; respecting communities right to self-determination and embedding community voice within work; being flexible and adaptable; being respectful in communication; and paying close attention to requests to reduce misunderstandings

SELF-REFLECTION: ***What am I bringing to this project? How might my identity form a part of this project?***

We found it important to try to understand how our own social identities, experiences, and values might play a role in the work that we do. Through this, we hoped to identify assumptions and anticipate biases that may lead us away from the above values and help us to identify areas of further reflection and education. As non-Indigenous people, we are likely to have a gap in our knowledge and experiences that unless addressed, may impact the project through incorrect assumptions, lack of shared understanding, or risking cultural safety.

A useful method of self-reflection was debriefing with peers. Having a supportive and safe space where we could share thoughts and feelings allowed us to talk through our experiences within the project and share challenges that we had encountered. It also allowed us to learn from each other as non-Indigenous researchers, share resources, and learnings from earlier work.

When planning or evaluating work with Aboriginal organisations, considering the following questions can support you in remaining accountable to community:

- **Building relationships and trust:** How can I build relationships with local Aboriginal communities and organisations? Who is benefitting from these relationships?
- **Considering context:** How can I educate myself on matters relating to the local community? How am I positioned within this space?
- **Ownership and impact:** How does this work impact local Aboriginal community? How do I ensure the ownership stays with Aboriginal communities?
- **Direction, consultation, and review:** How will I ensure the project remains Aboriginal led? How will I ensure the project does not over-burden Aboriginal people involved?
- **Respect:** Does my understanding and practice of respect align with that of the local community? How can I ensure respect is maintained with Aboriginal individuals and groups?
- **Personal and professional positioning:** How does my identity shape my practice? How might my attitudes, values, and beliefs perpetuate colonial systems and attitudes?

Based on key takeaways from the work specifically focused on Aboriginal programs and services, the following prompts and reflective questions were also developed to assist in critically reflection and collaborative practice:

Transfer decision-making power to promote self-determined program environments

- Is self-determination understood as a right held by all Indigenous people?
- How are decisions being made?
- Who benefits from these decisions?
- Who might be harmed and how can this harm be reduced/eliminated?

Enable Aboriginal leadership and involvement across all program stages

- What opportunities exist for Aboriginal people to lead the project?
- How is cultural load managed?

Commit to meaningful, ongoing community consultation and input

- Do consultation approaches reach all community members involved?
- Do current practices support active listening and enacting what has been heard?
- Is consultation ongoing?

Make space for self and community advocacy in all program aspects

- What are participants advocating for?
- What are the broader implications of this program?
- Who is affected by those implications, and how?

Be clear about accountability

- How is accountability towards participants, their community and funding bodies navigated?