Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2016–18

December 2016

© 2016 Victoria Legal Aid. Reproduction without express written permission is prohibited. Written requests should be directed to Victoria Legal Aid, Corporate Affairs, 350 Queen Street, Melbourne Vic 3000.

Disclaimer. The material in this publication is intended as a general guide only. The information contained should not be relied upon as legal advice, and should be checked carefully before being relied upon in any context. Victoria Legal Aid expressly disclaims any liability howsoever caused to any person in respect of any legal advice given or any action taken in reliance on the contents of the publication.

Contents

[Foreword 1](#_Toc469407388)

[Background 2](#_Toc469407389)

[Aims 2](#_Toc469407390)

[Objectives 3](#_Toc469407391)

[Where we are at 3](#_Toc469407392)

[Our current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce profile 4](#_Toc469407393)

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 5](#_Toc469407394)

[Further information 8](#_Toc469407395)

Victoria Legal Aid delivers legal assistance services to people across Victoria. In doing so, we pay our respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our offices sit, our services are delivered, and our staff work. We recognise the strength and determination of Aboriginal people today in continuing their connection to country and culture.

# Foreword

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is pleased to present the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2016–18. This represents our continued commitment, initiated in our Reconciliation Action Plan 2015–18, to strengthening employment opportunities and workplace support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in this Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy.

The aim of this Employment Strategy is to provide some key, measurable actions that will work towards not only making Victoria Legal Aid an organisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to work at, but to improve our workplace in terms of reconciliation and diversity and also improve on our service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A key partner to employment is learning, and it is essential we approach the objectives in the spirit of continual improvement. Victoria Legal Aid becoming an inclusive workplace that supports people of all backgrounds and experiences, not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is the responsibility of all members of VLA, no matter what your role.

To this end, it is important that everyone in this Employment Strategy can see themselves in its actions. What will you be able to do to contribute to achieving the objects of safety, support and attraction? We hope the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy will not only guide your team, office or programs actions, but inspire you to think more boldly about how we continue to support our current workforce of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and build an inclusive workplace for all staff.

**Bevan Warner**Managing Director  
Victoria Legal Aid

**Meena Singh**Associate Director, Aboriginal Services  
Victoria Legal Aid

# Background

Victoria Legal Aid’s *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2016–18* (Employment Strategy) has been developed to support the delivery of our first *Reconciliation Action Plan 2015–18*.

The Reconciliation Action Plan renews our commitment to working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services who provide legal services, community legal education and advocate for systemic changes that will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In addition, the measures outlined in this Employment Strategy aim to address the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce while also offering all our staff the opportunity to gain a greater cultural understanding.

The Reconciliation Action Plan pursues the following four key areas:

1. Improving access to Victoria Legal Aid services (particularly civil and family law services) by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
2. Building cultural awareness and competency of Victoria Legal Aid staff
3. Improving pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment at Victoria Legal Aid
4. Strategic advocacy/casework on legal issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This Employment Strategy will focus on key areas two and three above.

# Aims

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 0.7 per cent of the Victorian population[[1]](#footnote-1). Through this Employment Strategy we aim to exceed this and grow our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representation to a minimum of 2.5 per cent of our total workforce.

The Employment Strategy aims to contribute to ‘closing the gap’[[2]](#footnote-2) and achieving a more culturally diverse and responsive workforce by:

* Providing a safe and supportive workplace where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel they can achieve their potential and demonstrate their talent in their chosen work role.
* Engendering a greater cultural awareness and empathy amongst our non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, through working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members, not only viewing them as recipients of our services.
* Providing service delivery that better reflects the demographics of those people interacting with the legal system.
* Supporting the economic self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through employment.

As we grow our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representation, future employment strategies and initiatives will focus on retention and opportunities for professional and career development.

# Objectives

These aims will be achieved by the delivery of the following objectives:

1. **Safety** – provide a safe and culturally respectful workplace by improving staff education and understanding around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their culture and heritage, through fostering a welcoming and culturally safe employment environment.
2. **Support** – develop and implement strong, supportive policies, procedures and practices which support and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to fulfil their role at Victoria Legal Aid.
3. **Attraction** – improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities by providing leadership on recruitment initiatives and practices to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to roles at Victoria Legal Aid.

# Where we are at

Following the launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan, we have already taken steps to drive our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. With the creation and recruitment of the role of Associate Director, Aboriginal Services, we have a senior leadership team member who will provide internal expertise and cross organisation collaboration, as well as support the strengthening of our external relationships.

We are currently recruiting three Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers (referred to as Aboriginal Field Officers in the Reconciliation Action Plan) which will be placed across three locations including Melbourne Civil Law Program, Morwell/Bairnsdale and Mildura. This two-year pilot program will support the delivery of legal assistance services in family and civil law to the Aboriginal community.

The four roles demonstrate the expertise and leadership Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to service delivery, and also helps us strengthen our knowledge and understanding of attracting and safely supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

# Our current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce profile

As at December 2016, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff make up 1.07 per cent of our workforce based on a productive headcount of 749 employees[[3]](#footnote-3).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees

| **Gender** | **Headcount** |
| --- | --- |
| Male | 4 |
| Female | 4 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Employment type** | **Headcount** |
| Ongoing | 5 |
| Maximum term | 3 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Job family** | **Headcount** |
| Lawyer | 5 |
| Other | 3 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Classification** | **Headcount** |
| VLA2 | 1 |
| VLA3 | 6 |
| VLA6 | 1 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Headcount** |
| CBD | 4 |
| Bendigo | 1 |
| Broadmeadows | 1 |
| Geelong | 1 |
| Ringwood | 1 |

**Part-time take up:** 3

**Average tenure (years):** 3.5

**Average age:** 39 years

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy

1. Safety Provide a safe and culturally aware workplace by improving staff education and understanding around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their culture and heritage, through fostering a welcoming and culturally safe employment environment.

| **Action** | **Who** | **Timeline** | **Measure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Survey staff on the extent to which our staff understand what Victoria Legal Aid wants to achieve through its Reconciliation Action Plan (item 9.4 Engagement Survey) and the extent to which Victoria Legal Aid encourages honest and robust discussions about identifying and removing the barriers to achieving diversity (item 9.7 Engagement Survey). | Associate Director, People and Culture | May 2018 | A 20% increase in favourable staff response to the Engagement Survey items 9.4 and 9.7. |
| 1. Survey staff on the attitudes and behaviours towards reconciliation through the Reconciliation Australia Workplace RAP Barometer Survey. | Associate Director, Aboriginal Services | Annually | A favourable increase (measure to be confirmed) in staff attitudes and behaviours towards reconciliation. |
| 1. Improve Aboriginal cultural competency in the workplace. *(Reconciliation Action Plan 2.2)* | Legal Learning and Development Manager, Legal Practice | Yearly | Four Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training sessions provided as part of the Legal Practice Essentials training for lawyers annually. |

1. Support Develop and implement strong, supportive policies, procedures and practices which support and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to fulfil their role at Victoria Legal Aid.

| **Action** | **Who** | **Timeline** | **Measure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Review and identify possible improvements to Victoria Legal Aid employment policies and procedures including access to compassionate leave for bereavement *(Reconciliation Action Plan 2.6)* | Employee Relations Manager, People and Culture and Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | January 2017 | A review is conducted and recommendations are reflected in Enterprise Agreement 2016–20. |
| 1. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to engage with their culture and community through NAIDOC week events and similar cultural events *(Reconciliation Action Plan 2.5)* | Associate Director, Aboriginal Services and Associate Director, People and Culture | Yearly | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and their managers are aware of policies relating to attending NAIDOC week events or similar cultural events.  A minimum of 50% (2017) and 85% (2018) Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employees participate in NAIDOC events and similar cultural events. |
| 1. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to engage with their culture and community through NAIDOC week events and similar cultural events *(Reconciliation Action Plan 2.5)* | Employee Relations Manager, People and Culture | June 2017 | HR policies and procedures reviewed to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC week events or other similar cultural events. |

1. Attraction Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities by providing leadership on recruitment initiatives and practices to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to roles at Victoria Legal Aid.

| **Action** | **Who** | **Timeline** | **Measure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Increase Victoria Legal Aid’s Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander workforce. *(Reconciliation Action Plan 3.1, 3.2, 3.5)* | Associate Director, People and Culture | On or before December 2018 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff represent a minimum of 2.5% of Victoria Legal Aid’s productive workforce |
| 1. Improve pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students, graduates and lawyers. *(Reconciliation Action Plan 3.1 and 3.2)* | Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | December 2017 | Graduate Scholarship Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law graduates implemented.  Recruit two law graduates to our Graduate Scholarship Program. |
| 1. Improve pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students, graduates and lawyers. *(Reconciliation Action Plan 3.1 and 3.2)* | Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | Yearly | Recruit at least two law students to our Aboriginal Clerkship Program.  Recruit two Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander lawyers on our New Lawyers Program.  Referrals from Aboriginal engagement units (including Tarwirri) and law schools to our clerkship, graduate and new lawyer programs. |
| 1. Develop and implement attraction employment strategies specifically targeting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. *(Reconciliation Action Plan 3.5)* | Associate Director, Aboriginal Services | July 2017 | Three Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer positions are recruited, inducted and supported in their roles. |
| 1. Develop and implement attraction employment strategies specifically targeting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Reconciliation Action Plan 3.5) | Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | Ongoing | Employment opportunities are advertised in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media including Koori Mail, Our Mob, University Indigenous law centres and/or law faculties. |
| 1. Develop and implement attraction employment strategies specifically targeting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Reconciliation Action Plan 3.5) | Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | February 2017 | Victoria Legal Aid website updated to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities. |
| 1. Develop and implement attraction employment strategies specifically targeting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Reconciliation Action Plan 3.5) | Resourcing and Remuneration Manager, People and Culture | Ongoing | All recruitment selection panels for identified positions include an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander representation. |

# Further information

Leah Borsboom – Resourcing and Remuneration Manager

Phone: (03) 9269 0537

Email: [Leah.Borsboom@vla.vic.gov.au](mailto:Leah.Borsboom@vla.vic.gov.au)

Meena Singh – Associate Director, Aboriginal Services

Phone: (03) 9269 0360

Email: [Meena.Singh@vla.vic.gov.au](mailto:Meena.Singh@vla.vic.gov.au)

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Productive headcount includes employees that are on paid or unpaid short term leave and excludes employees on paid or unpaid maternity leave and employees on unpaid leave where the likelihood is that these positions will be backfilled. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)