

# Aboriginal Cultural Capability Toolkit



# Aboriginal Victoria Today

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## Victorian Aboriginal Demographics

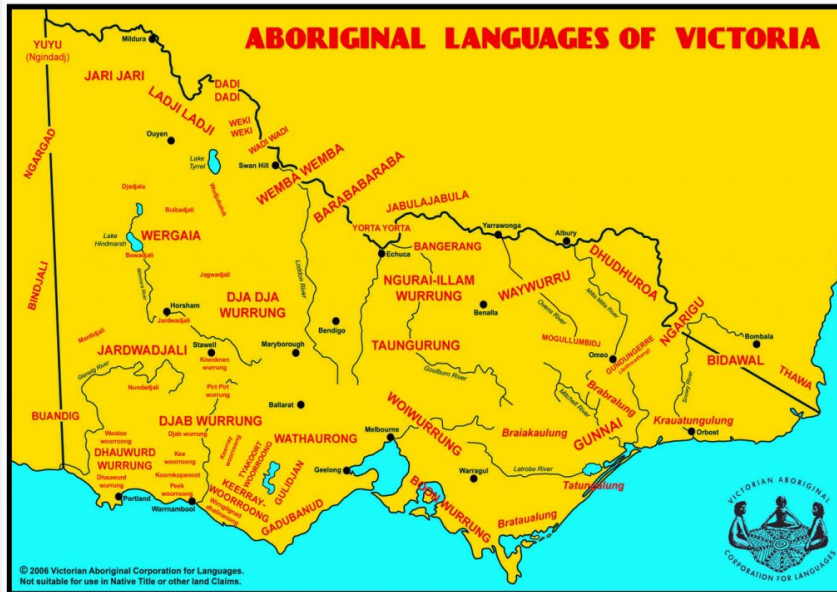
As of the 2016 Census, there were 47,788 Aboriginal people in Victoria, making up 0.8 per cent of the population. The median age for Aboriginal Victorians is 23, compared to 37 for other Victorians.<sup>1</sup>

Approximately 54 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians live in regional areas while 46 per cent live in metropolitan areas. Over 51% of the Victorian Aboriginal population live in one of fifteen local government areas. The Local Government Areas with the highest Aboriginal population are: Shepparton; Mildura; Geelong; Bendigo; Casey; East Gippsland; Darebin; Wyndham; Ballarat; Whittlesea; Latrobe; and Hume.<sup>2</sup>

## Victorian Aboriginal Languages

Before colonisation there were approximately 39 languages spoken across the area that is now Victoria. Language is a large part of Aboriginal culture and strengthens ties between Elders and young people and improves connection to culture and Country. The boundaries between Victorian Aboriginal language areas are not distinct and mixtures of vocabulary and grammar exist in some regions, therefore linguistic maps may show some variation about where one language ends and another begins.<sup>3</sup>

## Map of Victorian Aboriginal Languages



See more at [Aboriginal language map of Victoria](#).

The use of Aboriginal English is an aspect of contemporary Aboriginal culture. Users of Aboriginal English are making a statement about identity. Valuing and respecting someone's use of Aboriginal English indicates to them that you value them, their Aboriginality and their history.<sup>4</sup> Here are some examples of common words used in Victoria:<sup>5</sup>

| Aboriginal English | Standard Australian English    |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| mob                | group                          |
| sorry business     | ceremony associated with death |
| gammon             | kidding, joking, pretending    |
| deadly             | really good                    |



## Sorry Business – Bereavement and Funerals

Aboriginal people refer to the period of mourning when an Aboriginal person dies as ‘Sorry Business’. It is an important period for Aboriginal people and involves responsibilities and obligations to attend funerals and participate in other cultural events, activities or ceremonies.

In some Aboriginal communities, the extent of obligations to participate in Sorry Business related to bereavement is dictated by the status of the deceased person and a person’s kinship to them. It is very important to recognise that in many communities, there is an expectation that funerals involve the whole community and not just the immediate family and friends. Assumptions should not be made about the presumed ‘closeness’ or relationship of a person to the deceased in appreciating the necessity of their participation in Sorry Business. <sup>6</sup>

In a workplace, managers need to be aware that an Aboriginal worker will need to take time out to attend funerals, often to pay respects on behalf of their family or take extended periods of time off for Sorry Business when a family member has passed away.

## ‘Men’s business’ and ‘women’s business’

‘Men’s business’ and ‘women’s business’ remain very important and sensitive issues within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Some information should only be talked about or negotiated and consulted on by people of the relevant gender. Information relating to ‘women’s business’ should be stored in such a way that only women have access to it, and information that is ‘men’s business’ stored in such a way that only men have access to it.

As such, when conducting research or consultation, it is important to plan ahead as to whether you will need both male and female researchers, consultants or project workers, in the event that matters concerning men’s or women’s business may be raised. <sup>7</sup>

In a workplace a manager needs to be aware that, for example, a female Aboriginal employee may be less inclined to open up to a male manager than if it was a female manager and vice versa.

## Contemporary Aboriginal Culture is Thriving

Despite the enormous odds presented by colonisation, forced removal, discrimination and injustice, Aboriginal communities and cultures are thriving: strong kinship ties and social obligations continue; cultural centres, Aboriginal art, film, dance and theatre and activities celebrating Aboriginal cultures and significant events demonstrate the resilience of Aboriginal communities and cultures. <sup>8</sup>



## Questions for managers and workplaces:

Have you and your staff attended cultural awareness training?

Do you know where you can access information regarding who the Traditional Owners are and local Aboriginal history?

Do you understand the ongoing impact of past government policies and practices on Aboriginal people?

Do you understand that an Aboriginal employee working for you may have family obligations that may have an impact on work?

Does your workplace display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags?

Are you and your staff aware of and able to talk about the history of the flags?

Do you understand 'Sorry Business' and how it impacts an Aboriginal worker?

Do you understand how men's and women's business may have an impact on the relationship with Aboriginal employees working for you?



## Useful links and other information

Further information on [Aboriginal cultural heritage of Victoria](#).

Further information on [Aboriginal culture](#).

For further information on [Aboriginal languages](#).

The [Deadly Story website](#) has been produced by the Victorian Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (VACCA) and includes an interactive Country map that interviews with role models and Elders in the community; articles; event info and more.

The [Deadly Questions website](#) allows non-Aboriginal people to ask questions of and about Aboriginal people in an attempt to build understanding.

(1) Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016.

(2) Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011.

(3) [VACL Language Map of Victoria](#)

(4, 5, 6, 7) Working and Walking Together: Supporting Family Relationship Services to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Organisations.

(8) Source: VACCA Building Respectful Partnerships 2010.