The Women's Aboriginal Workforce Plan

2026 – 2030

the women's
the royal women's hospital

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Women's acknowledges the Wurundjeri Peoples of the Kulin Nation, as the Traditional Owners of the land where we are privileged to work and provide care. We extend that respect to the Traditional Owners of neighbouring lands where we operate programs and provide services.

We pay our deepest respect to Elders, Ancestors and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and that colonisation continues to impact the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our commitment

We prioritise the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are dedicated to providing culturally safe and responsive care. We work with purpose and strive to be a culturally safe place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, families, staff and volunteers feel supported, respected and empowered.

Recognition statement

The Women's acknowledges and appreciates all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed their time, knowledge and experiences to develop this plan.

In this document, the term Aboriginal is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also use the terms Indigenous, First Nations, and First Peoples interchangeably. The Women's acknowledges that people and communities connect with these terms differently.

Our artwork

In partnership with Yirra Miya, we developed four icons to visually represent the priorities of the Aboriginal Workforce Plan 2026-2030.

Each icon represents a distinct strategic priority, while collectively conveying the interconnected nature of our vision, values and community principles. Grounded in Aboriginal perspectives, the icons symbolise connection, growth, empowerment and shared success, reinforcing our commitment to creating a workforce where Aboriginal people can thrive and lead.

About the artist

Our artist, Lauren Henry is a proud Wodi Wodi and Walbunja person from the Yuin Nation living on Country in the South Coast of NSW. Lauren is the Cultural Creative Lead at Yirra Miya. She uses artworks as a medium to tell stories and to connect with those around them to dig deeper into their learnings of First Nations culture.

Foreword

Teagan Malcolm

Kamilaroi
Aboriginal Workforce Consultant

The 2026–2030 Aboriginal Workforce Plan reaffirms the Women's deep and ongoing commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. As the Women's Aboriginal Workforce Consultant, it has been an honour to work alongside our Aboriginal workforce, non-Indigenous colleagues, and community partners to develop this plan.

This plan takes a streamlined, whole-of-organisation approach, bringing together cultural learning and workforce development to create lasting and meaningful change across the Women's.

Self-determined in its design, this plan reflects what our Aboriginal workforce and broader community told us matters most: a culturally safe, accountable workplace where First Nations staff can thrive, lead, and succeed. Through extensive consultation, careful listening, and collaborative development, four clear priorities emerged: leadership, anti-racism, peer connection, and career pathways. Over the next four years, this plan aims to embed impactful and sustainable change across each of these key areas.

I am proud of the work that has brought us to this point and even more inspired by what lies ahead. Thank you to every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member who generously shared their voices, experiences, and aspirations. Your leadership continues to shape the Women's, and it is a privilege to walk alongside you on this journey.

Executive statements

Sherri Huckstep

Chief Experience Officer

As the executive lead for Equity, Inclusion and Belonging at the Women's, the Aboriginal Workforce Plan is central in our commitment to creating a workplace where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel culturally safe, respected and able to thrive.

This plan reflects our holistic approach to improving the experience of our Aboriginal workforce. It responds directly to what staff have told us through consultation and the People Matter Survey—the importance of psychological safety, respect for cultural and professional knowledge, stronger pathways for progression, and environments where people can be themselves at work.

These priorities are fundamental and connect strongly to the work we are doing within the Exceptional Experiences program, the safety culture project, our Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy and Framework and our intersectional approach embedded in our Gender Equality Action Plan. When staff feel safe, supported and valued, it strengthens connection, engagement and wellbeing. In turn, this has a direct impact on the care we provide, enabling more culturally responsive services and stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities.

The plan sets a clear expectation that cultural safety and anti-racism are core responsibilities across the organisation. It requires us to strengthen the systems, practices and behaviours that shape workforce experience—from recruitment and development through to leadership and wellbeing.

Importantly, this work reinforces the importance of Aboriginal governance, leadership and voice in shaping decisions. The future of the Women's must continue in partnership with Aboriginal staff and community. Our role is to listen, to act, and to create the conditions where Aboriginal leadership can grow and influence across all levels of the organisation.

This plan represents a significant step in our journey. It moves us beyond commitment towards a more consistent and accountable experience of inclusion, cultural safety and belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the Women's.

Laura Bignell,

Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer
& Executive Sponsor of Reconciliation

On behalf of the Women's Executive team, I proudly endorse the Aboriginal Workforce Plan as a bold, meaningful, and necessary commitment to equity, inclusion, and cultural respect across our organisation. This plan represents more than a strategic initiative—it is a visible and values-driven commitment to recognise, celebrate, and elevate the contributions, knowledge, and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

At its core, this plan acknowledges the enduring strength, resilience, and wisdom of First Nations communities. It provides a clear and purposeful pathway to address systemic inequities, enhance representation across all levels of the workforce, and create culturally safe environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can thrive—professionally, culturally, and personally.

This plan aligns with our broader commitment to delivering culturally responsive care and services. By investing in the Aboriginal workforce, we are enriching our organisation with diverse perspectives, strengthening trust with First Nations communities, and improving outcomes for the people we serve.

We are committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the implementation of this plan—with humility, respect, and openness to learning. We acknowledge that this is ongoing work, and we are resolute in our responsibility to listen, act, and continually improve.

We call on all leaders to actively champion this plan—to model culturally safe behaviours, prioritise accountability for outcomes, and embed these commitments into everyday decisions and practices. Leadership must ensure that this plan is not an aspiration alone, but a lived reality across every team, service, and community we serve. Together, let us lead with purpose, courage, and integrity to create a workforce that truly reflects, respects, and honours the First Peoples of this land.

Community endorsement

Sam Paxton,

Chief Executive Officer,
Weenthunga Health Network

As an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, Weenthunga Health Network strongly commends the Royal Women's Hospital on its 2026–2030 Women's Aboriginal Workforce Plan. Weenthunga, meaning "hear/understand" in Woi-wurrung, is a gathering place and collective voice for First Nations health, wellbeing and healing professionals. This plan is closely aligned with the systemic change Weenthunga is working toward: a First Nations health workforce that is well, sustained and leading in roles.

Importantly, this plan has been shaped by the voices and intersectional lived and living experiences of First Nations staff. The plan responds directly to what Mob, including Weenthunga Members, need to feel culturally safe, properly supported and able to thrive at work.

We welcome the plan's clear focus on Aboriginal governance and leadership, cultural capability and anti-racism, peer relationships and support networks, and career opportunities and progression. These priorities are essential to creating workplaces where First Nations staff can bring our full selves to work, have our cultural and professional knowledge respected, and make strong contributions to improved outcomes for community.

We also recognise the Women's ongoing relationship with Weenthunga through our djilba biik and nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Spaces. This partnership matters. Together, we have supported the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations staff and students and demonstrated how collective wisdom, cultural strength and shared responsibility can hold community working within the tertiary health sector.

Imperative to the success of the plan will be critical allyship, genuine resourcing, continued investment, and the dismantling of systemic inequities. Human rights violations and racism have no place in society or our health services. For First Nations staff, there can be no psychological safety at work when cultural safety is absent.

We encourage the Women's to continue truth-telling, sharing power, listening deeply, learning, acting with courage and upholding relational accountability to First Nations staff and community.

Weenthunga is honoured to endorse the 2026–2030 Women's Aboriginal Workforce Plan. We look forward to continuing to walk alongside the Women's as the plan moves into implementation, and to seeing its commitments translated into meaningful, measurable and sustained impact.

The First Nations health workforce is essential to transforming the delivery of care across The Women's and the broader health sector. We bring the strength of our Ancestors, Elders and Communities, and a depth of knowledge informed by the world's oldest continuous medical paradigms. This knowledge is not complementary to the health system - it is fundamental to its future success.

Aboriginal workforce vision

At the Women's, our vision is to be a rewarding place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work, thrive, and lead. A workplace where cultural identity is respected, and community is valued. We commit to prioritising continuous and meaningful development for our staff, our organisation, and our relationship with community. We recognise that when the Aboriginal workforce is empowered, our whole organisation grows stronger; culturally, professionally, and in our ability to provide care for all.

The Women's values

The Women's values align our people to a common purpose. They help to build productive working relationships and support us to achieve our vision.

Courage:

We have the courage to listen, act and change.

Discovery:

We bring curiosity to our work every day.

Passion:

We are passionate about the work we do together.

Respect:

Our relationships are built upon respect.

Our community principles

Aboriginal staff hold important roles within their wider community. Our Aboriginal workforce community principles recognise this connection and our broader responsibility as an organisation to care for and invest in First Nations people, communities and economies.

The manna gum stands as a powerful symbol of this, and of the conditions we are committed to creating at the Women's: a culturally safe and anti-racist workplace, a growing and thriving Aboriginal workforce, and strong relationships with community.

Each part of the tree represents a core principle and serves as a reminder to centre culture and community in all that we do, ensuring our practices, decisions, and environments honour First Nations people.

Reciprocity,
our leaves and seeds

The ongoing cycle of giving back. We honour this responsibility by sharing knowledge and resources. We strengthen community connections and actively support First Nations services, organisations and the next generation of Aboriginal healthcare professionals.

Growth,
our trunk and branches

The steady expansion of opportunities. We are committed to growing the Aboriginal workforce through meaningful career development, leadership pathways, and new opportunities. We intentionally create space for Aboriginal staff to realise their potential and drive organisational change.

Strength,
our roots and soil

The safe foundation. We foster a psychologically safe, anti-racist environment in which Aboriginal staff feel socially, emotionally, and culturally supported. The Women's builds a workplace where Aboriginal identities are respected, protected, and celebrated.

Relationships with peak Aboriginal bodies and Community Controlled Organisations

The Women's maintains ongoing relationships with a wide range of Aboriginal peak bodies and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Many of these relationships support our clinical services and are therefore not detailed in this plan. The partnerships outlined here play a direct role in strengthening cultural capability and the Aboriginal workforce experience at the Women's.

The Women's works closely with the Koorie Heritage Trust to deliver formal cultural learning across the organisation. This longstanding partnership reflects our commitment to building strong local relationships and ensuring that cultural learning is guided by Aboriginal leadership and knowledge.

Aboriginal staff are encouraged and supported to connect with peak bodies relevant to their professional fields. Through the Women's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships, annual funding is available to attend conferences and events hosted by organisations such as the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM), the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) and the Lowitja Institute. These opportunities support professional networks, leadership development and ongoing learning.

The Women's also has a strong reciprocal relationship with Weenthunga Health Network, which provides culturally safe wellbeing and personal development support to Aboriginal staff at the Women's through its djilba biik services. The Women's supports Weenthunga's nyarrn-gakgo mangkie space by providing work experience opportunities and contributing to their events where possible.

Throughout the life of this plan, the Women's will continue to strengthen and formalise these relationships to ensure our work remains guided by Aboriginal leadership, is aligned with community priorities, and is connected to strong practice at local, state and national levels.

Our history

Colonisation brought profound disruption, dispossession and violence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These injustices continue to shape the experiences of Aboriginal people in Victoria today, including those who come to the Women's to access healthcare or pursue their careers.

Since opening in 1856, the Royal Women's Hospital has cared for generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, babies and families. Many sought healthcare during periods marked by systemic discrimination and government policies that limited autonomy and separated families. The Women's has acknowledged its role in this history. In 2008, the hospital issued a formal apology to members of the Stolen Generations for its involvement in practices that contributed to family removal. This apology was a significant act of truth-telling and a recognition that our responsibility to improve remains ongoing.

The Aboriginal workforce has historically been under-recognised and under-represented. The Women's earliest available Aboriginal workforce data, recorded in 2008, shows representation at just 0.26%. Since that time, deliberate and sustained efforts have increased Aboriginal representation across the organisation and strengthened recognition of the vital role Aboriginal staff play in shaping the Women's. Today, the Aboriginal workforce at the Women's continues this legacy, driving innovation across the organisation.

The Women's reconciliation, cultural capability and workforce strategy journey

The documents below capture key moments in this history, illustrating how our approach has evolved in response to learning, feedback and changing expectations. Together, they provide important context for this Aboriginal Workforce Plan and demonstrate a progression towards stronger cultural safety, accountability and Aboriginal leadership across the organisation.

- Aboriginal Employment Plan 2012 – 2015
- Aboriginal Employment Plan 2016 - 2019
- Aboriginal Employment Plan 2019 – 2021
- Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan 2020 – 2021
- Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2022 – 2024
- Cultural Learning Strategy 2023 – 2026
- Aboriginal Workforce Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development Strategy 2024 – 2026
- Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2025 – 2027
- Aboriginal Workforce Plan 2026 - 2030

Snapshot of our progress

Over the past few years, the Women's has delivered several key projects that have improved the experience of Aboriginal staff and increased representation across the organisation. These achievements provide a solid foundation for the next stage of our work.

Highlights include:

Aboriginal Workforce Forum:

Our existing staff feedback committee has been strengthened into a quarterly forum. This is embedded within the organisation's Aboriginal governance structure and provides Aboriginal staff with updates and opportunities to contribute to and consult on upcoming programs and projects.

Cultural and Ceremonial Leave:

Introduced four days of paid leave, supported by clear and comprehensive guidelines for staff and managers.

The Gathering Place:

A dedicated breakout space for Aboriginal employees, improving wellbeing, privacy and access to cultural supervision. In 2026 the space will undergo minor changes to increase privacy, comfort and provide staff with access to lockers.

Mandatory Cultural Awareness training:

Aboriginal cultural awareness eLearning was approved as mandatory for all staff.

Surpassing 1% Representation:

Increased Aboriginal workforce representation to over 1% in 2025, surpassing state population statistics for the first time in the Women's history.

Strengthened Pathways:

Expanded early career opportunities through designated RUSON/M roles, an Aboriginal graduate nursing and midwifery stream and a work experience partnership with the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS).

Guaranteed Interviews:

Ensured all eligible Aboriginal applicants for graduate nursing, midwifery and RUSON/M roles received an opportunity to interview.

Improved Recruitment Practices:

Implemented the special measures guide, embedded equitable recruitment into manager training and resources, updated recruitment templates and invested in events and marketing materials.

Aboriginal Representation in Recruitment:

Aboriginal representation on selection panels for all designated positions, available for any Aboriginal candidate.

Expanded Cultural Supervision:

All Aboriginal staff can access 1:1 Social and Emotional Wellbeing yarns with Weenthunga, in addition to the Women's existing Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Professional Development Investment:

Improved access to scholarship funds, encouraged leadership development and supported staff to attend Aboriginal- led conferences.

Cultural Connection and Community:

Delivered wellbeing workshops and social events for Aboriginal staff, recognised key dates across the organisation and continued attendance at the Victorian NAIDOC Gala Ball.

Aboriginal workforce at the Women's

Current context

The First Nations workforce at the Women's brings together people with diverse identities and experiences. While culture is central in this context, we also recognise that factors such as gender, sexuality and disability intersect with each person's identity. These intersections shape how our staff experience the workplace, and we are committed to supporting each Aboriginal employee as a whole person.

- As of May 2026, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees, including full-time, part-time and casual staff, represent **1.16%** of the Women's workforce by headcount.
- Aboriginal staff also contribute **1.11%** of total hours worked per week across all full-time and part-time employees.
- Aboriginal staff are represented across all major occupational groups. The majority, **67.7%**, are employed in nursing and midwifery roles.
- Health professional roles account for **12.9%** of the Aboriginal workforce.
- Corporate and support services, and medical roles each represent **9.7%**.
- Staff working in Aboriginal health services, Badjurr-Bulok Wilam and Baggarrook, make up **22.6%** of the Aboriginal workforce.

The Aboriginal workforce at the Women's is comparatively young, with an average age of 28 years, compared to the organisation-wide average of 41 years. This highlights the importance of targeted development opportunities, leadership pathways and wellbeing supports to strengthen retention and support long-term career growth.

Badjurr-Bulok Wilam

Badjurr-Bulok Wilam, meaning 'Home of many women' in Woiwurrung, is the Women's Aboriginal Health Unit. Alongside generalised systems navigation and patient advocacy, the Badjurr-Bulok Wilam team is required to hold specialised knowledge and skills in healthcare and social areas such as abortion and contraception, child protection, family violence, public fertility care, maternity, oncology and reproductive loss. The Badjurr-Bulok Wilam team come from diverse backgrounds with qualifications and/or experience in community health, health promotion, housing, Aboriginal health, family violence and social work.

Baggarrook

Baggarrook, meaning 'woman' in Woiwurrung, is a caseload midwifery team that provides dedicated care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Baggarrook is a team of six midwives, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working two-way to provide comprehensive antenatal, labour and delivery, and post-natal care. Midwives working in Baggarrook are required to maintain their professional, clinical, social and cultural capabilities. All Baggarrook midwives have comprehensive midwifery experience, while some may have completed a Transition to Specialty Practice program (TTSP) or are Clinical Midwife Specialist (CMS). Additionally, our Future Baggarrook Midwives program provides Aboriginal staff the opportunity to access additional professional development and hands-on exposure to the service.

Aboriginal leadership

Aboriginal staff demonstrate leadership through their contributions to community and their influence across teams, programs and organisational change. Through dedicated forums and consultation processes, the Women's embeds opportunity for all Aboriginal staff to lead, share insight and shape decision-making.

Within an organisation, leadership is defined by role and reporting line. When measuring Aboriginal staff leadership roles, we count individuals in people management positions and/or those who report directly to director-level managers or higher. This definition recognises both people leaders and subject matter experts.

Based on this definition, as of May 2026, the Women's currently has one Aboriginal staff member in a leadership role, representing approximately 3% of the Aboriginal workforce.

Developing the Aboriginal Workforce Plan

People Matter Survey

2023-2024

During early development we reviewed the 2023 and 2024 People Matter Survey Aboriginal workforce results which highlighted several changes in staff experience:

- Feelings of inclusion had decreased.
- A higher percentage of staff had experienced or witnessed barriers to success at work.
- Safety at work, including psychological safety, had declined.
- Staff reporting high to severe stress increased from 20% to 31%.
- In 2024, 38% of staff felt satisfied with their opportunities to progress, lower than the previous year.
- Most staff, 69%, said their learning needs were being supported, an improvement on the 2023 results.

These results formed an evidence base that guided early conversations with staff and played an important role in developing the key priorities of the Aboriginal Workforce Plan.

2025

In 2025, the Victorian Public Sector Commission delivered a shorter People Matter Survey with a specific focus on gender equality. In that year, the Women's did not receive the minimum 10 responses from Aboriginal staff required to produce a dedicated Aboriginal workforce report.

2026

In contrast, engagement in the 2026 People Matter Survey increased significantly. The Women's recorded its highest level of Aboriginal workforce participation to date, with 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff identifying in the survey. This represented a 59% response rate from the Aboriginal workforce at the time, which was 5 percentage points higher than the overall organisational response rate (54%).
A review between the 2024 and 2026 data showed Aboriginal staff:

- Feelings of inclusion increased between 2024 and 2026, 76% of staff felt they could be themselves at work, and 47% of staff reported feeling culturally safe.
- In 2026, 82% of staff reported experiencing negative behaviours at work. In 2026 Aboriginal staff were twice as likely to experience negative behaviours compared to non-Indigenous staff.
- Safe to speak up improved by 23% in 2026, and 65% of staff reported having access to the wellbeing supports they need.
- Staff reporting burnout decreased by 30% in 2026, and 76% of respondents reported good work-life balance.
- Learning and development, innovation and manager support all improved in 2026.
- All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff said they achieve something important through their work, and 82%, said they are proud to work in the public sector.

These results will carry through into the delivery of this plan and its actions. With year-on-year positive change being one of our success measures.

Aboriginal workforce co-design

The development of the AWP was led by the Women's Aboriginal Workforce Consultant. Robust co-design, one-on-one interviews, hands-on workshops, focus groups and feedback forums ensured that Aboriginal voices were clearly reflected throughout. Through consultation with staff, we heard:

- Working with community is important and rewarding.
- Staff felt that Aboriginal health and their professional expertise were not respected.
- A social network and places where staff can be themselves is nourishing.
- They're experiencing regular instances of racism and feeling psychologically unsafe.
- Aboriginal staff have a strong drive for improvement and innovation.
- The organisational hierarchy is negative; there's no clear strategy to make progress.
- Learning and development opportunities are plentiful and valued.
- Internal career progression opportunities are limited.

Endorsement of the Aboriginal Workforce Plan was sought from both internal and external stakeholders, including the Women's Aboriginal Advisory Committee, the Senior Executive Committee and the People and Consumer Engagement board sub-committee.

Peer alignment

A broad review of employment plans, cultural safety plans, cultural learning frameworks and anti-racism strategies from across the Victorian health system was completed to identify common challenges and shared priorities. Aboriginal-led workforce and health research further guided our thinking. Alongside desktop research panels, events and conferences provided valuable insights into emerging practice, innovation and sector-wide learning. These spaces created opportunities to listen directly to Aboriginal leaders, practitioners and organisations.

Together, this has resulted in an Aboriginal Workforce Plan that is well-informed, connected to the wider health sector, and responsive to both current and emerging workforce priorities.

An intersectional approach

While the primary aim of this plan is to improve the workplace experience for Aboriginal staff, some actions take an intersectional approach. As we strengthen systems and practices for Aboriginal employees, we can also apply this learning to support staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ staff, and staff with disabilities. These actions allow us the space to consider how workplace improvements, and organisation-wide learning and development can benefit multiple communities across the Women's.

Strategic alignment

Victorian Department of Health, Aboriginal Cultural Safety fixed grant requirements

From 2024–25, the Victorian Government requires all health services receiving an Aboriginal Cultural Safety Grant to develop and implement an Aboriginal Employment Plan. At the Women's, we intentionally use the term workforce instead. This reflects the full employee experience, encompassing recruitment, development, wellbeing, leadership, culture and belonging. This language keeps this work aligned with how the broader workforce experience is understood and discussed across the organisation.

The Victorian Government is committed to Aboriginal self-determination, which means incorporating Aboriginal voices and priorities into the annual health service cultural safety reporting.

Victorian Department of Health, statement of priorities

The Women's Aboriginal Workforce Plan aligns with the following 2025-26 Ministerial priorities:

For the overall health system:

- A growing, skilled, and engaged workforce supported to develop professionally. This is achieved through improved workforce planning, an increased supply of priority roles, world leading employee experience, and a strategic focus on future roles, capabilities, professional development, and promoting a safe workplace.
- A health system that is grounded in respect and safety, particularly cultural safety, and awareness, achieved through mandatory cultural safety training, anti-racism plans and actions, and employment plans that drive greater representation of First Nations people across all levels of a health service.

For our health service:

- Deliver high-quality cultural safety training to all executives and staff using independent, expert, community-controlled organisations or a registered Aboriginal business.

The Women's Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy and Framework

The Women's Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (EIB) Policy, supported by its Framework, applies to all staff, students, volunteers, contractors and non-employees, and is supported by clearly defined roles and responsibilities across the organisation.

Guided by principles such as valuing diversity, listening to historically marginalised voices, preventing discrimination, embedding intersectionality, co-design and reflective practice, the policy positions equity and cultural safety as core business responsibilities rather than standalone initiatives. It also aligns with relevant Victorian and Commonwealth human rights, anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation.

The Women's EIB Policy and Framework, establishes the organisational commitment, governance and enabling conditions necessary for the Aboriginal Workforce Plan to succeed. While the Aboriginal Workforce Plan sets targeted actions and outcomes, the EIB policy ensures those actions are embedded within a broader, whole-of-organisation commitment to cultural safety, anti-racism and systemic equity.

The Women's Strategic Plan 2026-2030

The Women's Aboriginal Workforce Plan complements the Women's Strategic Plan 2026-2030, aligned to the strategic pillar of People. This goal of the People pillar is to *Create a culture of belonging, where our people learn, thrive and contribute to the future of healthcare;* initiatives to strengthen this pillar includes:

- Implementing our Aboriginal Workforce Plan 2026–2030, with a vision for the Women's to be a rewarding place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work, thrive, and lead.

Domains of the Aboriginal Workforce Plan

The three Aboriginal Workforce Plan domains; recruitment; personal and professional development; and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, define the plan's overall scope. This terminology aligns with language used across the health sector and within the Women's, including in our current Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (2025-2027).

While the priorities of the Aboriginal workforce may evolve over time, these domains provide a stable structure that supports consistency and long-term focus. Each action in the Aboriginal Workforce Plan is assigned a domain to clarify its area of impact

The Social and Emotional Wellbeing model adapted for workforce retention and wellbeing

At the Women's, we've adapted the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) model as a method for supporting and retaining our Aboriginal workforce. This model provides a holistic, Aboriginal-led understanding of wellbeing. The framework describes seven interconnected areas that need to be kept in balance: body, mind and emotions, family and kinship, community, culture, Country and spirit.

Aboriginal staff work alongside their cultural responsibilities, family and community commitments, and the ongoing impacts of racism and colonisation. In the Women's AWP, the SEWB framework guides how we think about Aboriginal workforce wellbeing.

In practice, this means investing in services and initiatives that address all seven SEWB areas. This includes creating culturally safe environments, strengthening peer and community connections, recognising cultural and family responsibilities, supporting emotional wellbeing, and providing spaces where Aboriginal staff can connect with culture, spirit and Country.

Retaining Aboriginal staff is about more than career opportunities. It is about creating a workplace where Aboriginal people feel safe, valued and connected. The SEWB framework provides a strong cultural foundation for how the Women's creates initiatives, prioritises investment and remains accountable for the wellbeing of its Aboriginal workforce.

Transforming Indigenous Health and Wellbeing, Social & Emotional Wellbeing Wheel, adapted from Gee et al, 2014

Mia
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Cultural Learning Strategy

The Women's Cultural Learning Strategy is made up of actions under priority area two, cultural capability and anti-racism. These actions are supported by the Women's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix and pillars of learning.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix

All staff at the Women's are expected to undertake continuous cultural learning. This is supported through the Women's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix (CCM), a supplementary document that provides a clear, consistent framework for defining cultural capabilities across the organisation. It helps establish a shared understanding of current capabilities and minimum standards. Capabilities are categorised into four levels: unaware, aware, responsive, and transformative. Each level's knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and impacts are described in detail.

The CCM guides the design of our development programs, ensuring they address a broad range of learning needs, from foundational to advanced levels of capability. It also establishes a strong foundation for wider organisational application, helping embed cultural capability across our systems, processes, and long-term workforce development.

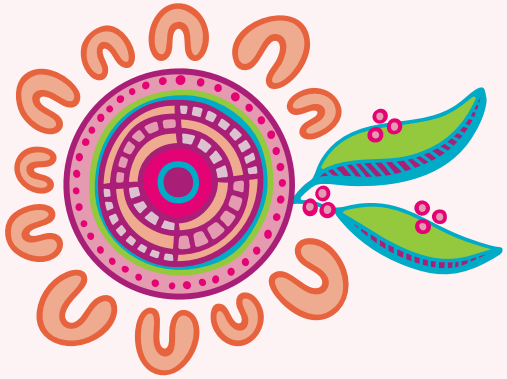
Pillars of learning

Since 2023, the Women's has structured cultural learning and development across four pillars, formal, informal, immersion and asking the question.

Pillar	Formal learning	Informal learning	Immersion	Asking the question
Overview	Formal learning is structured, measurable training rooted in best practice and designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. The Women's current formal learning program is delivered by the Koorie Heritage Trust (KHT). Formal learning allows us to measure completion rates, collect direct feedback and evaluate individual programs and their impact.	The benefit of informal learning is that it encourages lateral thinking and creativity, and for the learner it can be fun and spontaneous. We encourage informal learning by embedding native foods into events, building and maintaining the Women's First Nations library collection, and creating moments of curiosity.	Immersion recognises that deeper growth cannot be achieved in a classroom. The Women's encourages staff, where appropriate, to participate in culture and ceremony alongside First Nations colleagues and community members. Previous immersion initiatives have included, smoking ceremonies, walking tours and tickets to external events.	To ensure we can provide the services needed to meet our patients' cultural and healthcare needs, we must ask every patient whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. At the Women's, the question asked is, "Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?" or "Do you, or your baby, identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?".
Owner	People Experience Communications			Badjurr-Bulok Wilam

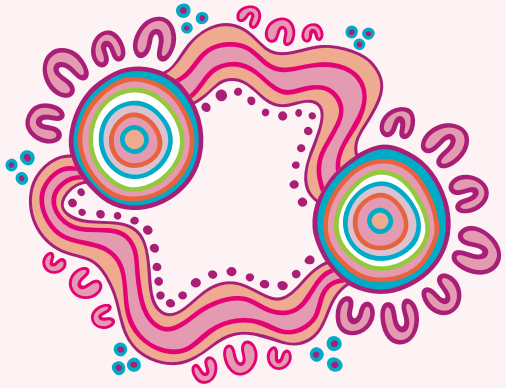
Priorities of the Aboriginal Workforce Plan

Four key priorities came directly from what Aboriginal staff identified as most important. They were developed and refined through surveys, interviews, workshops and focus groups. These priorities ensure that the actions within the Aboriginal Workforce Plan reflect the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal staff. These priorities are listed below in order of importance as ranked by the Aboriginal workforce. Actions within the plan are grouped under these priority areas.



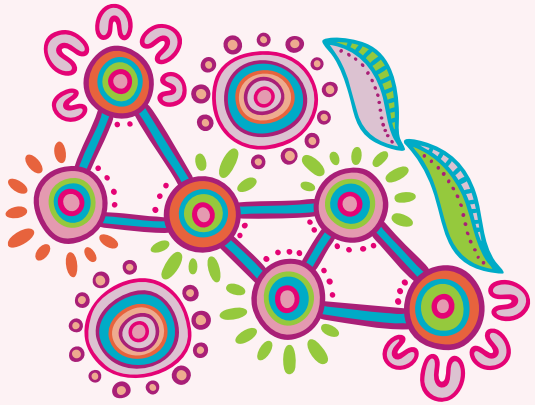
Aboriginal governance and leadership

This icon shows a multilayered meeting circle, its ripples representing how small actions create big impact. The meeting place is surrounded by people of varying sizes, demonstrating that leadership comes in many different forms. Manna gum leaves represent growth and a commitment to centring Aboriginal voices and strengthening Aboriginal leadership.



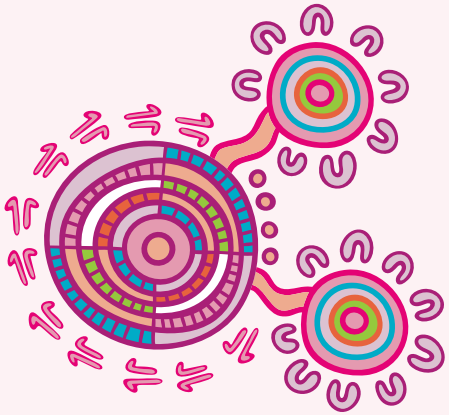
Cultural capability and anti-racism

This icon shows two connected watering holes; this represents obtaining and sharing knowledge. Ripples are used to demonstrate the meaningful and long-lasting impact of education. The connection of the waterways represents that, like water, knowledge flows from one place to another. People surrounding the streams are sharing their stories or actively learning.



Peer relationships and support networks

This icon shows multiple meeting places, connected by journey lines, to visually represent a support network. This support network represents the Women's and its commitment to creating a safe and supportive place for First Nations people through intertwining culture, identity, community, and knowledge. Surrounding these meeting places are people and knowledge sticks. Manna gum leaves represent the growth of these support networks and peer relationships.



Career opportunities and progression

This icon explores the Women's commitment to creating equitable and accessible opportunities for First Nations people. The larger meeting place represents a safe space where staff, patients, and community can feel valued. Surrounding this are kangaroo tracks representing each step forward as one that is intentional. Connected to this meeting place are two smaller community circles, these represent the importance of strong values and building genuine connections.

Classifying the actions

To make the actions in this plan clear, each one is assigned a classification. This helps everyone understand the stage of the work and what we aim to do.

- **Continue** is used when the work is already underway and working well.
- **Implement** indicates that the idea has been explored and is now ready to be put into action or formalised.
- **Redevelop** means the idea is implemented, but we need to improve or update it for greater success.
- **Explore** is used when the idea has potential, but we need more information, consultation or approval before moving forward.

Using these terms makes the AWP easier to read and demonstrates exactly how each action will progress.

Action plan

Priority area 1: Aboriginal governance and leadership

This priority focuses on strengthening Aboriginal decision-making and leadership across the Women's. It aims to increase Aboriginal leadership roles, support Aboriginal-led governance structures, and ensure Aboriginal staff have a strong voice in shaping policies, programs and workplace culture.

Metrics

- By 2030, at least 10% of the RWH Aboriginal workforce is represented in leadership-level roles, including people leaders and positions reporting directly to a director-level manager or higher.
- Aboriginal staff feedback remains embedded and accountable within the organisation's governance structure.
- All designated entry-level roles have clear and feasible progression pathways to director-level positions.

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Continue	**1.1** Offer prioritised places for Aboriginal staff at all levels in mentoring and leadership programs.	Personal and Professional Development	Learning and Development Consultant	People Experience Consultant	Ongoing
	1.2 Conduct quarterly Aboriginal workforce forums to maintain the Aboriginal workforce voice within the organisation's Aboriginal governance structure.	All	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Badjurr-Bulok Wilam Team Leader	Ongoing
Explore	**1.3** A Baggarrook team leader to support the team clinically, culturally and operationally.	All	Director Maternity Services	Caseload Midwifery Manager	2027
	1.4 A designated leadership position, to prioritise Aboriginal health strategy and governance.	All	Director Social Model of Health	Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer	2028
	1.5 An Aboriginal Research Coordinator role to further support community engagement and the implementation of marra ngarrgoo, marra goorri, the Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord.	All	Research Manager	Research Director	2029

Priority area 2:
Cultural capability and anti-racism

Building cultural capability and preventing racism is everyone's responsibility at the Women's. This priority focuses on strengthening the skills, knowledge and confidence of all staff so they can work with First Nations people in a responsible and accountable way. Learning and development progress is guided by our Cultural Capability Matrix, which outlines the Women's four cultural capability stages. By strengthening cultural capability across the organisation, we create a safer environment for Aboriginal staff, patients and the community.

Metrics

- Maintain an Aboriginal Cultural Awareness eLearning completion rate of greater than 80%.
- Year-on-year improvement in People Matter Survey scores for inclusion and safety to speak up.
- Year-on-year reduction in People Matter Survey scores for discrimination.

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Continue	**2.1** Celebrate and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander significant dates.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Chief Communication Officer	Communications Manager Special Projects	Ongoing
	2.2 Monitor and report on mandatory Aboriginal Cultural Awareness (ACA) training.	Personal and Professional Development	Learning and Development Consultant	Workforce Data & Reporting Officer	Ongoing
	2.3 Deliver quarterly formal training with Koorie Heritage Trust.	Personal and Professional Development	People Experience Consultant	Learning and Development Consultant	Ongoing
	2.4 Embed formal cultural training into leadership development programs.	Personal and Professional Development	People Experience Consultant	Learning and Development Consultant	Ongoing
	2.5 Embed formal cultural training into the graduate nursing professional development calendar.	Personal and Professional Development	Lead Educator Graduate Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	Ongoing

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Implement	**2.6** Socialise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix.	Personal and Professional Development	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Director People & Patient Experience	2027
	2.7 Embed formal cultural training into the graduate midwifery professional development calendar.	Personal and Professional Development	Lead Educator Graduate Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	2027
	2.8 Develop an organisation-wide Anti-Racism Framework.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Manager	Director People & Patient Experience	2027
Redevelop	**2.9** Develop a collection development guideline to expand the First Nations library.	Personal and Professional Development	Consumer Health Information Consultant	Consumer Health Information Coordinator	2027
	2.10 Improve awareness of the First Nations library.	Personal and Professional Development	Consumer Health Information Consultant	Consumer Health Information Coordinator	2027
Explore	**2.11** A membership with the Diversity Council of Australia.	Personal and Professional Development	Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Manager	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2026
	2.12 Embed learning opportunities to support meaningful, personal and confident Acknowledgements of Country.	Personal and Professional Development	Learning and Development Consultant	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027
	2.13 Embed funds into the Women's Ideas Tank to support local and targeted cultural capability initiatives.	Personal and Professional Development	Community Engagement Manager	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Explore	**2.14** Consider and select an effective racism reporting tool to bolster the Respectful Workplace Behaviours Guideline and Procedure.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Chief Experience Officer	Director People & Patient Experience	2028
	2.15 Develop a learning guide for staff, in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix.	Personal and Professional Development	People Experience Consultant	Learning and Development Consultant	2028
	2.16 Evaluate cultural capability in recruitment & selection processes, in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix.	Recruitment	Talent Acquisition Lead	People & Culture Operations Manager	2028
	2.17 Engage First Nations academics, advocates and content matter experts to embed truth-telling into Grand Rounds.	Personal and Professional Development	Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer	Director People & Patient Experience	2029
	2.18 Update the Aboriginal Cultural Awareness managers module to support wellbeing, career development, cultural responsibility, and colonial load conversations.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Learning and Development Consultant	People & Culture Business Partner	2029
	2.19 Embed cultural capability expectations into position descriptions, in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Matrix.	Recruitment	Senior People & Culture Business Partner	People & Culture Business Partner	2030

Priority area 3:
Peer relationships and support networks

Feeling connected to peers is an important part of feeling safe and supported at work. This priority focuses on building strong relationships, supportive networks and culturally safe spaces where Aboriginal staff can share experiences, seek advice and build community. It recognises that connection and support are vital to preventing lateral violence, enhancing wellbeing and long-term retention.

Metrics

- Consistent or increasing engagement of Aboriginal staff in social and wellbeing initiatives.
- Year-on-year improvement in People Matter Survey scores for wellbeing.
- Year-on-year improvement in People Matter Survey scores for inclusion.

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Continue	**3.1** Conduct quarterly Aboriginal peer network and wellbeing workshops.	All	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Ongoing
	3.2 Provide all Aboriginal staff access to 1:1 First Nations facilitated Social and Emotional Wellbeing sessions, in addition to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	People Experience Manager	Ongoing
	3.3 Annual participation at the Victorian NAIDOC Gala Ball.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Ongoing
Implement	**3.4** Publish the Aboriginal Workforce intranet page to share news, opportunities and resources to strengthen engagement and visibility.	All	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Internal Communications Manager	2026
	3.5 Embed Aboriginal workforce initiatives into Project Care.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	People Experience Manager	People Experience Coordinator	2027

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Implement	**3.6** A triannual storytelling campaign to highlight, celebrate and recognise the Aboriginal workforce.	Personal and Professional Development	Chief Communication Officer	Communications Manager Special Projects	2030
Redevelop	**3.7** Aboriginal workforce plan graphics and imagery are implemented in relevant email and document templates.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027
Explore	**3.8** Improve the Gathering Place based on staff feedback.	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Director People & Patient Experience	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027
	3.9 Connect Aboriginal employees with their relevant peak body as per the Coalition of Peaks.	Personal and Professional Development	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2028
	3.10 Create individualised welcome packs and manager resources for all new starters.	Recruitment	Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Manager	People & Culture Operations Manager	2029

Priority area 4:
Career opportunities and progression

This priority focuses on creating equitable and accessible opportunities for Aboriginal people to join, grow and succeed at the Women's. It includes reflecting our values in our recruitment practices and supporting Aboriginal staff to build skills and move into new roles. By strengthening these pathways, we help Aboriginal employees build strong, long-term careers across the organisation and the health sector.

Metrics

- Continue striving towards 3% workforce representation, in line with Department of Health recommendations.
- Philanthropic and Community Investment in the Aboriginal workforce is maintained or expanded.
- Year-on-year improvement in People Matter Survey scores for learning and development.

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Continue	**4.1** A strong work experience partnership with Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS) to encourage public health career pathways for young people.	Personal and Professional Development	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Badjurr-Bulok Wilam Team Leader	Ongoing
	4.2 Deliver inclusive recruitment training for managers.	Recruitment	Talent Acquisition Lead	Talent Acquisition Lead	Ongoing
	4.3 Regularly update the inclusive recruitment guide.	Recruitment	Talent Acquisition Lead	Talent Acquisition Lead	Ongoing
	4.4 Deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships to support professional development and career advancement.	Personal and Professional Development	Philanthropy & Corporate Partnerships Manager	People Experience Coordinator	Ongoing
	4.5 Offer designated Aboriginal RUSON/M positions to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce pipeline.	Recruitment	Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer	Workforce Manager	Ongoing

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Continue	**4.6** Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students for nursing and midwifery clinical placements.	Recruitment	Lead Educator Maternity Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	Ongoing
	4.7 Offer a dedicated recruitment stream for Aboriginal nursing and midwifery graduates.	Recruitment	Lead Educator Graduate Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	Ongoing
Implement	**4.8** Review of the Aboriginal Careers webpage annually to ensure content is relevant and current.	Recruitment	Talent Acquisition Lead	Internal Communications Manager	2026
	4.9 Develop a guideline to support the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduate and student, nurses and midwives.	Recruitment	Lead Educator Graduate Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	2027
Redevelop	**4.10** Restructure the Baggarrook Future Midwives Program.	Personal and Professional Development	Caseload Midwifery Manager	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027
Explore	**4.11** Identify opportunities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates applying for Social Model of Health roles.	Recruitment	Director Social Model of Health	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	2027
	4.12 Become a host organisation in the Aurora Internship Program.	Recruitment	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	Talent Acquisition Lead	2028
	4.13 Develop a student placement program within Social Model of Health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students studying social work.	Recruitment	Senior Manager Social Work	Director Social Model of Health	2029

	Action	Domain	Lead	Support	Due
Explore	**4.14** Develop a professional development and support framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on placement.	Personal and Professional Development	Lead Educator Maternity Services	Clinical Education Program Manager	2029
	4.15 Continuous community, professional development, mobility and role-diversity opportunities across the Parkville Local Health Service Network for Aboriginal staff.	Personal and Professional Development	Aboriginal Workforce Consultant	LHSN Partners	2030

Delivering the Aboriginal Workforce Plan

Our approach

Delivering this plan requires clear accountability and strong collaboration across the Women's. To support this, every action in the Aboriginal Workforce Plan is assigned both a lead and a support. Collaboration across services and specialties is strongly encouraged, bringing together diverse skills, knowledge and experiences. This approach supports more sustainable, organisation-wide change.

Implementation will be supported through biannual on-site workshops, bringing together action leads and supports to share progress, celebrate successes and work through challenges together. This approach creates space for open discussion, shared problem-solving and learning across the organisation.

The Aboriginal workforce, and Aboriginal Advisory Committee will remain connected throughout the life of this plan through quarterly status updates. By embedding collaboration, accountability and regular connection into delivery, the Women's reinforces its commitment to turning this plan into meaningful and lasting change.

Thank you

Thank you to all the First Nations creatives who helped bring this plan to life.

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