



# Victorian Public Tenants Association Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

*March 2023 - August 2024*





## About the Artwork



Gordo B (Wemba Wemba) 'All Roads Lead Home', 2022.

Gordo writes: This represents me, my Mob and family. The journey lines are in white leading in different directions. The dots between the journey lines represent my Country. The colours represent the Country itself. All roads lead home, no matter what direction I go across Country, I always end up back with my family, my Mob. All journeys lead home. This is my Future Dreaming.'



*This artwork was created through The Torch, a not for profit organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders in Victoria.*

## Acknowledgment of Country

The Victorian Public Tenants Association would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout the continent of Australia. We acknowledge that our office is located on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Eastern Kulin Nation, and we recognise the privilege it is to walk these lands alongside them today. We recognise that there is considerable work to be done within the space of reconciliation, and we strive to increase our awareness and knowledge of the true history of Australia, and further grow relationships between the VPTA and Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Statement from the CEO of Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia welcomes the Victorian Public Tenants Association to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

The Victorian Public Tenants Association joins a network of more than 1,100 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables the Victorian Public Tenants Association to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations to the Victorian Public Tenants Association, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

Karen Mundine  
Chief Executive Officer  
Reconciliation Australia



## Our Business

Founded in 2000, the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) began as a grassroots movement to advocate for those living in public housing in Victoria. Today, thanks to the tireless efforts of many tenants who volunteered their time to grow the organisation, the VPTA is Victoria's peak body for public housing, those who live in it, and those on the waitlist.

With over 110,000 Victorians currently on the waitlist to receive social housing, the VPTA actively advocates, lobbies and campaigns to improve and expand the public housing system across the state. In addition to this, we operate a phone service where our Tenant Advocates provide information, advice, referrals and advocacy to public housing renters and those who would like to receive accommodation in public housing. Each year we make and receive around 8,000 calls through our free advice line. Demand for this type of assistance is increasing each year, and the VPTA aims to expand in order to continue to meet this demand.

We believe all social housing renters deserve a representative voice, regardless of their specific tenure type. Currently, we employ fewer than 10 staff across our organisation, with operations covering tenant advocacy, research, policy development and analysis, community engagement, campaigns and communications. Our office is located on Wurundjeri Country in Fitzroy, Naarm. The VPTA currently employs two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.

Australia wide, up to a third of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in social housing, making them a key demographic of our client base. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are overrepresented amongst those experiencing homelessness, and those accessing housing support. In Victoria, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent approximately 10% of people on the wait list (the 'Victorian Housing Register' or VHR), meaning that they are waiting to receive accommodation in social housing. A lack of access to culturally appropriate, affordable and safe housing options is a significant barrier for many to secure tenure.

Other significant barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders include racial discrimination, cultural pressures, and a lack of understanding of intergenerational trauma by mainstream Australia. Addressing racism through structural changes, acknowledging areas for policy reform, and government investment into public housing will be key in supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients into secure housing tenures. We know the homelessness experience faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is inherently linked to the process of colonisation and subsequent displacement and dispossession. The repercussions of this today have meant continued economic exclusion for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, resulting in high rates of poverty and homelessness.

In addition to homelessness, living in overcrowded households is also a significant problem for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be sensitive to their needs, and culturally and geographically appropriate. We are committed to improving housing outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through improving the service that we provide. Aboriginal people in Victoria have collaborated via community controlled organisations to introduce the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort*, which has been endorsed by the Victorian Government. We seek to be guided by this document in our work, and strengthen our relationship with the Framework Steering Committee.



## Our Reconciliation Action Plan

At the VPTA, we advocate for every Victorian to have a home. To achieve this, we know that reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is critical. Our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) demonstrates our first step towards acknowledging reconciliation as an integral part of our strategic outlook, and an important step in improving the housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Engaging in our RAP process has enhanced cultural awareness in our workplace, and we aim to use this to improve our business opportunities, relations, and governance structure, and enhance cultural respect throughout our work and the broader community. As an organisation, we will strive to increase cross-cultural competence, and raise awareness amongst our stakeholders to promote the ongoing process of reconciliation. Our RAP has helped us to develop strategic, well-defined steps towards reconciliation that we are able to measure, evaluate, and learn from. This framework will be used to develop our organisation with clearly defined goals we are committed to holding ourselves accountable for. Over the next 18 months, our RAP journey will be responsive to feedback, as we strive for continuous improvement in this space. Each member of our staff will be engaged with throughout this process, as we aim to gain diverse contributions from our diverse workforce.

We aim to improve our cultural competency as an organisation, to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are treated with respect and dignity and receive culturally appropriate support. We are committed to creating a culturally safe workplace for staff, clients, and all of the organisations we are proud to liaise with. We are committed to improving our relationships with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, to build better streams of communication, facilitate knowledge sharing, and provide opportunities for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander clients and organisations to have a voice within the work that we do. We will build respect within our organisation by educating staff and actively engaging in anti-discrimination and anti-racism policies and practices. We will create opportunities for improved, culturally aware service delivery, and identify ways in which the public housing system can support sustained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies. Our organisation is committed to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation internally through the creation of identified positions for Tenant Advocates.

Through the establishment of our RAP Working Group, we are committed to ensuring the strategic delivery of our RAP and that it is seamlessly folded into our broader strategic outlook. Developing our RAPs will be an ongoing, strategic process in which we will continue to engage with Reconciliation Australia to build our future RAPs. The responsibilities of the RAP Champion at the VPTA will be shared by Nina Xie, the Finance and Operations Officer, and Matilda Hooper, the Community Engagement Lead.



## Our reconciliation journey to date

The VPTA recognises that our Strategic Plan and overall workplace culture must engage in better practice towards reconciliation, cultural awareness, and respect towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to making improvements in these areas and aim to contribute positively to outcomes in housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2021, the VPTA registered to submit its first Reconciliation Action Plan. All VPTA staff engaged in cultural awareness training and received accreditation through the Centre for Cultural Competence Australia after engaging in an online course. All staff then completed a two-day cultural awareness training workshop.

In 2022, the VPTA created identified positions for two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tenant Advocates. This aims to ensure all social housing renters can access approachable, culturally safe tenancy advice and support which is independent from their landlord, and ensure our advocacy fully represents the voice of all Victoria's social housing residents.



## Our vision for reconciliation

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have inherent rights, and that as an organisation we have a responsibility to uphold those rights. Our vision for reconciliation is that every Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person has a home, and that the social housing system as a whole is culturally safe, inclusive, and welcoming. As an organisation, we will recognise the inherent value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, knowledge, and ways of being. We will work to create an inclusive workplace, that recognises the intricate and complex barriers to housing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face. We will use our platform to celebrate the resilience, empowerment, and strengths of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Our guiding principles

Our Reflect RAP is our commitment to developing our service in alignment with Reconciliation Australia's guiding principles of race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity, and historical acceptance. As the peak body for public housing in Victoria, we will approach our reconciliation process with our own set of unique principles to guide us in this process, in conjunction with Reconciliation Australia's existing guidelines. Our guiding principles are as follows:

- We champion best practice approaches such as the Housing First model to facilitate safe, secure housing options, with an overarching goal of ending homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- We will promote empowerment and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- We will facilitate the sharing of cross-cultural knowledge both internally and across our stakeholders.
- We will promote best practice service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that is culturally safe, and sensitive to their specific needs.
- We will increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to engage in the policies and practices that impact them.

## Our partnerships

The VPTA has been proud to work with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across Victoria.

- We partnered with Aboriginal Housing Victoria to engage in the development of the Victorian Aboriginal and Homelessness Framework.
- We work with the Victorian Legal Service to support our and their clients in contact with the criminal legal system.
- We support Djirra, an organisation that provides culturally safe family violence prevention.
- We have worked with the Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation as members of the VISHN (Victorian Indigenous Statewide Homelessness) Network.



## Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stakeholders and organisations.	Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence and communicate to staff.	May, 2023	Senior Tenant Advocate
	Maintain and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that we are already engaged with, including Aboriginal Housing Victoria.	August, 2024	Community Engagement Officer
	Develop and implement an engagement plan to reach out and build working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	December, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	August, 2023	Community Engagement Officer

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff and on social media platforms.	April 2023, 2024	RAP Champion
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May - 3 June 2023, 2024	RWG Chair
	Encourage and support employees to participate in at least one external NRW event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May - 3 June 2023, 2024	RAP Champion



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Formally communicate the VPTA vision for reconciliation, and the goals and strategies for our RAP with staff members.	May, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation and RAP achievements publicly via social media platforms.	May, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Celebrate the introduction of our first RAP with a launch event and invite appropriate stakeholders.	April, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Develop a plan of communication to raise awareness of our RAP with external stakeholders.	May, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	July, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Publish RAP on our website and encourage staff to read and engage with the plan.	April, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Encourage staff to develop their own approach to reconciliation through their personal and professional roles.	August, 2024	RAP Champion
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	March, 2024	Tenant Advocate



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Continue to educate staff members about the impacts of racism.	August, 2024	RAP Champion
	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	August, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	February, 2024	Finance and Operations Officer



## Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation.	April, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	May, 2023	RWG Chair
	Develop cultural awareness handbook to be distributed to all staff that acts as a quick reference guide for questions which may arise when working with renters and housing applicants who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.	May, 2023	Junior Tenant Advocate
	Create a calendar of key dates of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and circulate with staff.	April, 2023	RAP Champion
	Ensure dates of cultural significance are reflected in the social media calendar and acknowledged externally across platforms.	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Facilitate ongoing cultural awareness training for staff and include in new staff inductions.	August, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Explore diverse methods to increase staff engagement in cultural awareness training through both online and face to face platforms.	August, 2024	Chief Executive Officer

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.	November, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Develop a resource of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and language groups across Victoria to distribute to staff so that Country can be appropriately acknowledged by Community Engagement staff when visiting different areas of the State.	November, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Continue to display an Acknowledgment of Country within our office. Include Acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placenames within our communications.	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Continue to display art within our office by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Ensure that the artist and their art are appropriately and formally acknowledged.	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Facilitate opportunities for staff to meet and acknowledge Traditional Owners on Country across Victoria.	August, 2024	Community Engagement Officer
	Develop resources about Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome to Country and ensure staff can access this information.	May, 2023	Tenant Advocate
	Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	July, 2023	Tenant Advocate




Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. Promote community events across social media platforms.	June 2023, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area and promote externally on social media.	June 2023, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Celebrate NAIDOC Week internally by commemorating the week and providing opportunities to acknowledge the theme of NAIDOC Week each year.	July 2023, 2024	RAP Champion
	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. Encourage all staff to attend.	July 2023, 2024	RWG Chair
	Encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend NAIDOC Week events in their own communities if they wish to.	July 2023, 2024	RAP Champion

## Opportunities


Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
8. Improve employment outcomes by increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	May, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer
	Include statement encouraging applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on recruitment advertisements.	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	November, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	August, 2023	Chief Executive Officer

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
9. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Investigate areas in which we can invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business, including office supplies, artwork, and employment.	September , 2023	Tenant Advocate
	Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses we can engage with.	June, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer
	Investigate Supply Nation membership.	June, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer
	Develop a strategy to increase procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.	August, 2023	Finance and Operations Officer and Chief Executive Officer.
	Develop a commercial relationship with at least one new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business.	March, 2024	Finance and Operations Officer and Chief Executive Officer
	Provide our colleagues in the community sector with referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses where opportunity presents itself and where appropriate.	August, 2024	Chief Executive Officer






Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
10. Provide culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander renters.	Investigate potential opportunities for how the VPTA could improve services to best meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	September, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Develop a strategy to implement any identified improvements to service delivery to best meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	November, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations we may be able to refer our clients to and circulate to staff.	July, 2023	Community Engagement Lead
	Encourage staff to utilise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation referrals for clients where possible.	July, 2023	Senior Tenant Advocate
	Create ways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants to be involved in our community engagement initiatives.	March, 2023	Community Engagement Officer
	Build on our relationships with Aboriginal Housing organisations in Victoria to engage with and support them in their business.	August, 2024	Community Engagement Officer



## Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
11. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Form a RWG to govern RAP implementation.	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG.	June, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	June, 2023	RWG Chair
	Meet regularly to drive and monitor RAP implementation.	August, 2024	RWG Chair

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
12. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Define resources needs for RAP implementation.	May, 2023	RWG Chair/Finance and Operations Officer
	Maintain a senior a leader to champion our RAP internally (our RAP Champion).	April, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	March, 2023	RAP Champion
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	May, 2023	RWG Chair



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
13. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learning, both internally and externally.	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire with Reconciliation Australia.	30 September, 2023	Chief Executive Officer
	Provide an opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of staff in building the RAP.	June, 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	1 August 2023 and 1 August 2024	Chief Executive Officer.
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contract details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.	1 June 2023 and 1 June 2024	Chief Executive Officer
	Create progress reports to communicate the implementation of the RAP with management and other staff members.	August 2023, February 2024, August 2024	RWG Chair

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible
14. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	May, 2024	Chief Executive Officer



## Contact

To contact us about this Reconciliation Action Plan, please reach out to Katelyn Butterss,  
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