



# Secretary

Department of Health

50 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne Victoria 3000  
Telephone: 1300 650 172  
GPO Box 4057  
Melbourne Victoria 3001  
[www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)  
DX 210081

BAC-CO-47388

Kate Bryant  
Coroners Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
**Via e-mail:** [cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](mailto:cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

Dear Ms Bryant

## **COR 2021 003810 – Finding into death with inquest**

Thank you for your letter dated 19 June 2024 attaching Coroner Simon McGregor's finding in relation to the death of XY, who died on 18 July 2021. My sincere condolences go to XY's family and community.

Coroner McGregor has made 17 recommendations, of which several engage the Department of Health (the department) either on a direct or indirect basis. I have addressed these recommendations below. Before doing so, I will provide a short update on the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which has continued into 2024 and whose recommendations will be considered by the Victorian Government in due course.

### **Yoorrook Justice Commission (the Commission)**

Since delivering its second interim report in September 2023, the Commission has continued hearing evidence during 2024. In June 2024, Minister Stitt, Minister Thomas and departmental representatives appeared before the Commission to give evidence on health issues critical to First Peoples. This evidence acknowledged issues caused by the ongoing impacts of Victoria's colonial legacy, including structural racism in the health system, the need to explore self-determination opportunities, State accountability and the lack of cultural safety in health services. The Commission's final report and recommendations are due to be released in June 2025, and the Victorian Government, including the department, will continue to work closely with First Peoples throughout this important process.

### **Recommendations engaging the department**

#### **Recommendations 7, 9 and 11**

Recommendations 7, 9 and 11 are directed toward the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to undertake certain measures in consultation with the department in the context of mental health supports for young First Peoples. The content of these recommendations addresses the same subject matter as the evidence gathered by the Commission and are likely to inform the Commission's recommendations. I understand that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing agrees in-principle with the recommendations noted above

and will consider the recommendations within the context of the ongoing work of the Commission. The department is committed to consulting with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and other Government agencies in relation to the important issues of mental health supports and cultural safety for young First Peoples.

### **Recommendation 10**

*That the Department of Health, DFFH and Bendigo Health coordinate culturally appropriate drug and alcohol support for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who present with drug/alcohol misuse, including by adequately funding and liaising with appropriate ACCOs such as BDAC and/or suitable family/community supports.*

The department is implementing an alternative to the coroner's recommendation.

In the 2022-23 financial year, the Victorian Government provided \$15.27 million in funding to 33 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and mainstream Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) service providers across the State to provide AOD services to First Peoples. This funding is provided on an ongoing basis to enable providers to deliver AOD services in a manner tailored to meet community needs. These include culturally responsive AOD services across regional and metropolitan Melbourne, including adult and youth residential rehabilitation and healing services and the Victoria's health-led response to public intoxication.

The department will soon be developing a statewide AOD strategy in partnership with the sector and First Peoples. The Victorian AOD strategy will deliver a shared vision and pathway forward for strengthening and sustaining Victoria's AOD system, increasing access and preventing AOD related harms through a health-led response to substance use. Ensuring access to culturally responsive and culturally safe services for First Peoples will be a key priority of the 10-year statewide strategy.

The department is also implementing all 38 Actions of the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and Action Plan (2023-25), which support access, choice and cultural safety in AOD services for First Peoples. This work will be progressed in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and includes:

- undertaking a review of AOD care mechanisms and models of care;
- preparation of targeted AOD sector advice to ensure consistent and culturally safe AOD care mechanisms and models of care in mainstream AOD organisations;
- designing a service model of a culturally safe residential detoxification and rehabilitation facility for First Peoples; and
- understanding future investment needs through First Peoples-specific AOD service demand assessment and planning.

The department is committed to working with, and learning from, First Peoples including understanding how we can build a more holistic approach to mental health and AOD care and embed First Peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing across sectors and service

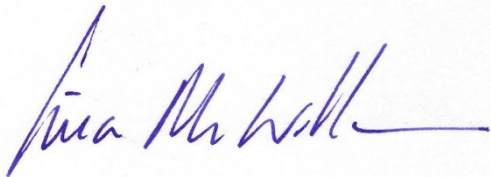
systems. I note that the 2021-22 State Budget committed \$116 million over four years to implement the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommendations for improving First Peoples social and emotional wellbeing, and that the Victorian Government has committed \$32.3 million in recurrent annual funding to key initiatives.

As part of this work, the department is supporting VACCHO who have established the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Centre of Excellence (the Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence). The Balit Durn Durn Centre will foster innovation and improvement in social and emotional wellbeing practice, policy and research, including strengthening the cultural safety of mental health and the AOD service system, as well as developing community-determined approaches to suicide prevention and response.

In addition to the actions described above, the department will also consider recommendations on this issue made by the Commission, which are likely to encompass statewide healthcare services.

I thank you again for providing the findings and recommendations to the department, and recognise the important work required to ensure that young First Peoples are able to access culturally safe services.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Euan M Wallace". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Professor Euan M Wallace AM**  
Secretary

28/08/2024