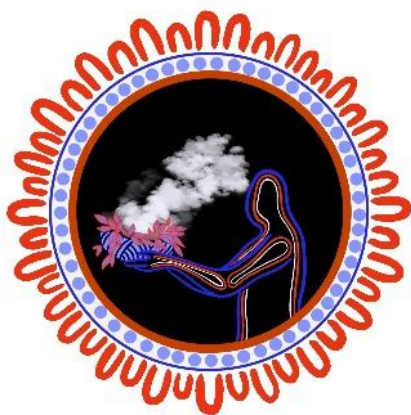




Yirramboi Murrup Unit



Coroners Court of Victoria

Evaluation Report

18 December 2025

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the diverse Countries, languages, and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Victoria and the broader continent. We pay our deepest respects to the Ancestors, Elders, and communities who continue to nurture culture, care for Country, and uphold the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness that have sustained their peoples for countless generations.

While we recognise some shared experiences across the nation, we honour and celebrate the rich diversity, uniqueness, and sovereignty of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Country and community. We affirm the importance of listening deeply to local voices and respecting the priorities, knowledge, and aspirations of communities across Victoria.

Acknowledgement and thank you to all involved

We sincerely acknowledge and thank all those who contributed so generously to this evaluation. We extend our deepest gratitude to people with lived experience of the coronial process, who bravely shared their stories, insights, and reflections. Your voices have provided vital understanding of the real impacts of the system, and your strength and generosity in sharing these experiences will help drive meaningful change.

We also warmly thank the dedicated people working across the sector including practitioners, advocates, and service providers for sharing their expertise, wisdom, and commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Your contributions have offered valuable perspectives on what is working, what needs to change, and how we can collectively do better.

In particular, we acknowledge and give thanks for the cultural knowledge, wisdom, and insights shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families throughout this evaluation. These cultural perspectives are critical to strengthening the work of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, ensuring that future approaches are grounded in respect, cultural safety, and genuine inclusion.

We recognise that centring voices, especially the voices of those with lived experience, families, and communities is essential to building systems that are more compassionate, culturally responsive, and effective. We are deeply appreciative of the trust placed in this process, and we remain committed to honouring and amplifying these voices to help guide positive change.

Acknowledgement and thank you to the Coroners Court of Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to undertake a qualitative evaluation of the Coroners Court of Victoria – Yirramboi Murrup Unit. We acknowledge the time, honesty, and knowledge generously shared by staff, stakeholders, and community members, and we honour the trust placed in us to listen to their experiences and translate their voices with integrity.

Acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
AJA5	Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5
AJC	Aboriginal Justice Caucus
CA&E	Coronial Admission and Enquiries
CCOV	Coroners Court of Victoria
IDS	Indigenous Data Sovereignty
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees
YMU	Yirramboi Murrup Unit - Coroners Aboriginal Engagement Unit
VIFM	Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine

Executive Summary

This evaluation provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of this important initiative, highlighting both measurable outcomes and the experiences of those directly involved. The process has centred the voices of people with lived experience, alongside the perspectives of stakeholders who work within the Coroners Court of Victoria (CCOV) and across related services and systems. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive understanding of what is working well, where improvements can be made, and how the Yirramboi Murrup Unit continues to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed and their families are supported in a meaningful and culturally responsive way throughout the coronial process.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit is a transformative model of Aboriginal-led support within the CCOV. This evaluation, grounded in the voices of families with lived experience and professional stakeholders, confirms that embedding cultural authority and self-determination within justice systems and institutions can fundamentally change how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families navigate coronial processes.

This evaluation provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of this important initiative, highlighting both measurable outcomes and the experiences of those directly involved. The process has centred the voices of people with lived experience, alongside the perspectives of stakeholders who work within the Coroners Court of Victoria (CCOV) and across related services and systems. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive understanding of what is working well, where improvements can be made, and how the Yirramboi Murrup Unit continues to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed and their families are supported in a meaningful and culturally responsive way throughout the coronial process.

Purpose and Approach

This independent evaluation assessed the effectiveness, cultural safety, and impact of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families during coronial investigations. The evaluation was overseen by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus chairpersons and implemented culturally grounded methodologies including yarning circles and interviews with seven people with lived experience and 26 professional stakeholders representing Aboriginal community organisations, the State Coroner, CCOV staff, and justice sector partners.

Key Findings

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit is essential, not supplementary

Families consistently described the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support as making participation in coronial processes possible rather than simply easier. This is a shift from documented experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in coronial systems as adversarial, culturally unsafe, and exclusionary.

Impact beyond individual cases

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's influence extends to institutional change within the CCOV. Through training of staff members, contributing to practice development, and providing

cultural narratives that inform systemic advocacy, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit has built lasting capability within the coronial system.

Cultural safety at personal and systemic levels

Families experienced cultural accessibility and support through smoking ceremonies, use of possum skin cloaks for viewings of people who have passed, appropriate language, and recognition of diverse protocols across diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's flexible cultural responsiveness demonstrates sophisticated practice that honours diversity whilst maintaining authentic cultural connection. Non-Indigenous family members also described experiences of respect and cultural learning, with some further reconnecting to their Aboriginal heritage through the process.

Community trust and embeddedness

It was reported that staff are known and trusted within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria before families enter crisis moments. This community embeddedness, combined with strong collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) and justice sector services, enables effective engagement. For families without existing relationships, trust develops rapidly through demonstrated competence and consistent follow-through.

Sustainability

The current two-person structure managing over 170 active cases (ranging from those requiring minimum engagement to other with high intensity over longer timeframes) creates sustainability challenges worth addressing proactively. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit is resources at a significantly higher level than non-aboriginal cases, reflecting the intensity of the cultural model of family support, the nature of this work presents unique demands. The work highlights considerations around cultural load, service continuity, and the capacity to sustain deep relational practice, as staff carry responsibility beyond individual families to entire communities' experiences within an institution historically responsible for harm. This reflects both exceptional commitment and capability, and the particular complexities of culturally responsive coronial support.

Structural constraints

Limited capacity for proactive community engagement means some families and organisations remain unaware of available supports. Professional stakeholders suggested that case support could allow more time for direct family work, though this was not identified as a priority by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit itself or by families.

Path Forward

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's demonstrated effectiveness provides compelling evidence for investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches within coronial systems. To build on current strengths, opportunities exist to maintain and strengthen sustainability through; continuing to prioritise staff support and wellbeing mechanisms as determined by Unit staff themselves, exploring evidence-based resource proposals, such as through Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5) funding opportunities, with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit leading any such proposals, and identifying and strengthening relationships with available

brokerage organisations to connect families with financial assistance for attending court where possible.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit requires sufficient autonomy to honour cultural obligations and community expectations, whilst being appropriately supported and resourced to do so sustainably.

Conclusion

This evaluation found the Yirramboi Murrup Unit successfully embeds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination within Victoria's coronial system, creating meaningful change for families, communities, and the institution itself. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has transformed what was once experienced as an adversarial, culturally unsafe process into one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can participate with dignity, cultural respect, and genuine support. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit is well-positioned to strengthen its transformative impact and provide valuable lessons for similar initiatives across jurisdictions.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in the voices of families and stakeholders who generously shared their experiences and insights. They reflect both celebration of what the Yirramboi Murrup Unit achieves and recognition of what is needed to sustain and strengthen this vital work into the future.

Yirramboi Murrup Unit Program

Overview of the Service

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit, formerly known as the Coroners Aboriginal Engagement Unit, is a dedicated, Aboriginal-only team within the Coroners Court of Victoria (CCOV). Established to provide culturally safe support, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit directly communicates with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families during the coronial process, ensuring that cultural needs, concepts and protocols are respected throughout.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit works closely with Coroners, various Court staff, including Coroners' registrars, court administration officers, and family liaison officers, to provide comprehensive support to families, interested parties, and other stakeholders involved in the coronial process.

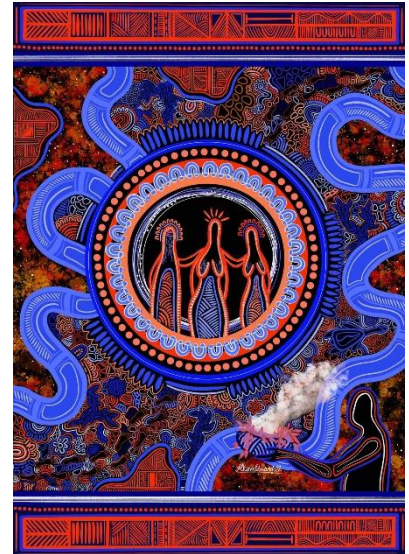
The Yirramboi Murrup Unit provides Coroners with dedicated cultural briefings prior to each inquest, offering guidance on the family's cultural background, appropriate wording, correct pronunciation, and any specific considerations that support culturally responsive engagement.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit also delivers tailored training and ongoing support to ensure Coroners are fully prepared to navigate the coronial process with cultural integrity, respect, and sensitivity for each family involved.

Goals and Objectives

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit is designed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families going through the coronial process. The role of the unit is to:

- *Provide culturally safe engagement:* Offer direct communication and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families navigating the coronial process, ensuring that cultural practices, beliefs, and protocols are upheld.
- *Ensure respect for cultural protocols:* Advocate for the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural concepts and protocols, particularly those related to Sorry Business, throughout the coronial investigation.
- *Support timely and clear communication:* Facilitate transparent and respectful communication between families and the Court, especially concerning identification, autopsy procedures, funeral planning, and the handling of personal effects.
- *Advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives:* Work within the coronial system to promote practices that honour cultural and community needs, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and respected.
- *Connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to support services:* Assist families in accessing culturally appropriate support services, including grief and trauma counselling, health services, and legal aid, in collaboration with ACCOs, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHO) and community networks.



- *Minimise re-traumatisation:* Provide trauma-informed, flexible, and respectful support to families, aiming to reduce emotional distress and promote healing during the coronial process.

Yirramboi Murrup Unit's model of care acknowledges the impact of past and ongoing injustices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in contact with systems like the coronial process and seeks to offer a culturally responsive alternative that promotes dignity, healing, and self-determination.

Introduction

This report outlines the results of an independent evaluation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit within its current scope and funding, providing a comprehensive analysis of its design, implementation, and outcomes. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the initiative's effectiveness, highlight areas for enhancement, and support informed decision-making for future development.

Background

The CCOV was established in 2009 following the enactment of the *Coroners ACT 2008*¹. The Court has three key functions:

- Independently investigating reportable deaths and fires
- Work to prevent avoidable deaths
- Promoting public health and the administration of justice.

Central to the CCOV's approach is a commitment to placing Victorian families at the heart of everything they do, from conducting respectful and compassionate services to ensuring information and documents are shared with sensitivity and care². The Court recognises that every death and fire reported for investigation is unique and requires individual attention at each stage of the coronial process³.

To support this approach, the CCOV is comprised of various specialised areas that enable thorough investigation throughout the coronial journey.

The CCOV has established Coroners Support Services to provide administrative and operational support to Coroners throughout the coronial process.

Within these services sits the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, a specialised team dedicated to ensuring culturally safe and responsive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families during coronial investigations. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's Aboriginal Engagement Officers work directly with families from the initial stages of an investigation through to its conclusion, providing:

- Culturally appropriate support and guidance tailored to each family's specific needs.
- Clear explanations of the coronial process and what families can expect at each stage.
- Direct attendance at court hearings and inquests to provide cultural support and advocacy.
- Connections to community resources and additional support services as needed.
- A culturally safe space for families to ask questions and express concerns throughout the investigation.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit operates with the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have unique cultural protocols, kinship structures, and needs during times of grief. By embedding cultural safety into the coronial process, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit

¹ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/coroners-act-2008/043>

² <https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us>

³ <https://coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-people/court>

ensures that families are treated with respect and dignity while maintaining strong connections to culture, community, and Country during an incredibly difficult time.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The primary aims of this evaluation are to assess and reflect on the current effectiveness, cultural safety and impact of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities within the coronial process, and to provide insights and recommendations that improve practices, build trust, and amplify community voices. This includes:

Identifying strengths and successes in the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's current approaches to engagement, responsiveness, and community trust-building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Exploring challenges and barriers that limit the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's ability to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities effectively

Explore opportunities for strengthening community engagement, communication, and healing processes

Generating respectful, practical, and achievable recommendations that will help enhance the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's capacity to provide culturally safe, trusted, and responsive services within the constraints of the existing CCOV budget

The insights gathered are grounded in the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and stakeholders who interact with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit and the coronial system.

Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation explored the impact and outcomes, cultural safety and responsiveness, community engagement and trust, service delivery and support for families and opportunities for improvement and growth. The intended audience for the evaluation is the CCOV, Yirramboi Murrup Unit and other stakeholders who are within the sector supporting strengthened support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who engage with the coronial process.

The evaluation aimed to address the following key questions:

Impact and Outcomes	• How effectively is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities during coronial processes? • What tangible outcomes has the Yirramboi Murrup Unit contributed to and/or for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities? • How has the presence of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit influenced broader CCOV practices and culture?
Cultural Safety and Responsiveness	• How culturally safe and inclusive is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families? • To what extent do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families feel culturally respected and understood throughout the coronial process? • What trauma-informed practices are in place, and how are they working?
Community Engagement and Trust	• How effectively is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria? • What level of trust exists between communities and the CCOV through the Yirramboi Murrup Unit? • Are community voices being meaningfully heard and acted upon?
Service Delivery and Support for Families	• What supports are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and how are these experienced? • Are there gaps in the support model during and after the coronial process? • How responsive is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to the needs of families? • What are the strengths of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through the coronial process? • Where are the gaps or opportunities for improvement? • How culturally safe and inclusive are the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's approaches to engagement and service delivery? • How are the needs, voices, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families being incorporated into practice? • What mechanisms can improve the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's responsiveness and impact?
Opportunities for Improvement and Growth	• What are the current challenges or barriers faced by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in delivering culturally safe and responsive services? • What practical improvements could be made to enhance the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's model (enhanced or expanded) including engagement, responsiveness, and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within the existing CCOV budget? • How can Cultural safety be further embedded within CCOV?

Methodology

Evaluation Design

The evaluation focused on the performance, effectiveness, and cultural responsiveness of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in relation to its role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities during coronial processes. The evaluation design was overseen by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) chairpersons to provide co-design support of the Evaluation Framework and ongoing support throughout the evaluation process. The evaluation specifically explored:

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's engagement and support practices: How the Yirramboi Murrup Unit interacts with, supports, and advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities before, during, and after coronial proceedings

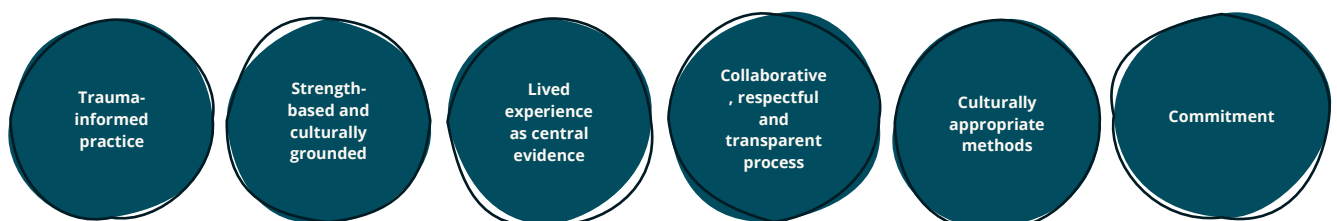
Cultural safety and trust-building efforts: The extent to which the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work embeds Cultural safety, respects Cultural protocols, and builds trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities

Responsiveness to community needs: How well the Yirramboi Murrup Unit identifies and responds to the diverse needs, preferences, and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within the coronial system

Stakeholder perceptions: Insights from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with lived experience and relevant stake about their experiences with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit

Approach

The evaluation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit was guided by an approach that is underpinned by cultural integrity, community voice, and ethical responsibility. It ensured that all processes reflect the values and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, while producing findings that are respectful, meaningful, and capable of driving positive change.



- *Trauma-Informed Practice* - the evaluation was conducted in a trauma-informed way, acknowledging the lived trauma many participants may carry, as a result of their

experiences with the coronial process and broader systems. All engagement and analysis were:

- sensitive to the potential for re-traumatisation
 - prioritise emotional and cultural safety
 - provide participants with choice, control, and support at all stages.
- *Strengths-Based and Culturally Grounded* - rather than focusing on deficits, the evaluation highlighted strengths within the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work, the resourcefulness and resilience of families and communities, and examples of culturally safe and effective practice. This approach:
 - honoured and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing
 - recognised and acknowledged cultural protocols, worldviews, and community leadership.
- *Lived Experience as Central Evidence* - the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities, and stakeholders formed the primary evidence base for this evaluation. The process:
 - privileged lived experience and community voice in determining what is working well and what needs to improve
 - ensured recommendations are grounded in the realities of those directly affected by the coronial process.
- *Collaborative, Respectful, and Transparent Process* - the evaluation was a shared process between the evaluators, Yirramboi Murrup Unit, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. It was:
 - co-designed with Yirramboi Murrup Unit and identified AJC members
 - designed to meaningfully involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in data collection, analysis, validation, and reporting
 - to ensure evaluation findings and recommendations are shared openly and respectfully with all stakeholders.
- *Culturally Responsive Methods* - the evaluation used culturally responsive, respectful methods for data collection, including:
 - Yarning circles and storytelling as primary methods to gather rich, meaningful insights
 - semi-structured interviews designed to be flexible, participant-led, and culturally responsive
 - approaches that are responsive to cultural protocols, community preferences, and participant needs.
- *Commitment* - the evaluation centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, upheld cultural responsiveness throughout the evaluation process, and produced findings that support healing, trust-building, and practical improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaging with the coronial process.

Data Collection Methods

The evaluation implemented a culturally grounded approach to gather rich, meaningful, and culturally safe data from diverse stakeholders. This approach centres the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have engaged with the coronial process, while also integrating insights from CCOV staff and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders connected to CCOV, along with other CCOV information to develop a holistic understanding of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's impact, strengths, and opportunities for growth.

Core data collection methods included yarning style interviews and yarning circles with families, members of the AJC, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJAC) Executive Officers, Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) and Coronial Admission and Enquiries (CA&E) and ACCOs/ACCHOs to explore perceptions of cultural safety, trust, engagement quality, and system responsiveness.

Additionally, internal perspectives were captured through interviews with the State Coroner, CCOV staff, Yirramboi Murrup Unit team members, and relevant staff from the VIFM, focusing on organisational strengths, challenges, and cultural and systemic enablers or barriers.

A desktop review was conducted to assess the alignment between policy, procedure, and practice, including a detailed analysis of foundational documents, protocols, previous evaluations, casework approaches, internal feedback reports, and engagement plans. Best practice examples and grey literature.

To further understand the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's influence over time, a pre/post comparison of family experiences was explored, drawing on interview data and, where available, existing documentation to identify perceived shifts in cultural safety, trust, and overall engagement since the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's implementation. All methods were underpinned by trauma-informed, flexible, and culturally responsive approaches.

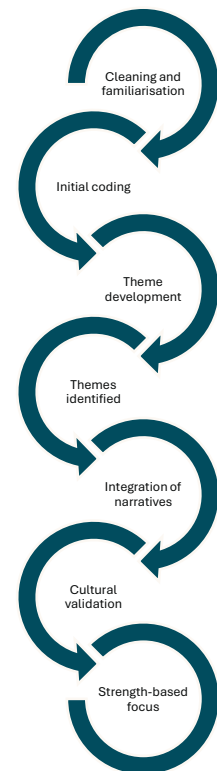
Guiding Principles



Data Analysis

A culturally responsive thematic analysis congruent with Braun and Clarke's (2023⁴) six-phased approach incorporating Indigenous standpoint theory⁵ and narrative theory was conducted using NVivo software. This approach blended Western analytical methods with Indigenous ways of knowing. Key themes were identified based on participant responses, with the analysis refined through senior Aboriginal consultant/s oversight to ensure accuracy and cultural integrity. The data analysis process included:

- *Cleaning and familiarisation*: Data and quotes were cleaned and immersion in the data with repeated readings to gain deeper understanding of the content.
- *Initial coding*: Transcripts were read and line-by-line coded with key words and phrases identified.
- *Theme development*: Further synthesis with comparison processes and refinement of themes, and repeated sentiments.
- *Themes defined*: Themes were clearly structured and defines with specific sub-themes and cross-cutting themes.
- *Integration of narratives*: Ensuring that the voices and stories of participants remained intact within the analytical framework. This included the identification of potential case studies for inclusion in reporting.
- *Cultural validation*: Analysis was overseen and approved by a Senior Aboriginal Consultant to ensure cultural appropriateness and accuracy.
- *Strength-based focus*: Emphasising community-identified strengths and solutions rather than deficits.



Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was conducted in alignment with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research ethics principles, placing the rights, safety, and wellbeing of participants at the centre of all activities. The design and implementation reflected a strong commitment to cultural integrity, healing, and accountability to the people and communities engaged.

⁴ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and being a knowing researcher. *International journal of transgender health*, 24(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>

⁵ Nakata, M. (2007). The Cultural interface. *The Australian journal of Indigenous education*, 36(S1), 7-14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1326011100004646>

Data Sovereignty

We were guided by Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS), ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have control over how their data is collected, used, and shared.

Respect for Cultural protocols and self-determination: Engagement honoured the cultural practices, beliefs, and protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The evaluation promoted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over any cultural knowledge, including how it was shared, interpreted, and reported. Participants were given choice and control over their level of involvement and retained the ability to withdraw or modify their input at any stage without consequence.

Trauma-informed and healing-focused approach: Recognising that many participants shared experiences related to grief, loss, and the coronial process, the evaluation employed a trauma-informed and healing-centred approach. Data collection methods, including yarning-based interviews and focus groups, were delivered in flexible, participant-led formats. Individuals determined the pace, setting, and style of engagement that felt safest for them. Throughout, the process prioritised not only information gathering, but also validation of lived experience, dignity, and cultural healing.

Informed consent and privacy: Clear, accessible information was provided prior to participation, outlining the purpose of the evaluation, how data would be used, and how privacy and confidentiality would be protected. Consent processes were culturally appropriate, offering both oral and written options. All data was de-identified prior to analysis, and personal information was securely stored in accordance with ethical standards.

Reciprocity and accountability: The evaluation team was committed to giving back to communities in meaningful ways. Findings will be shared with stakeholders in accessible and respectful formats, and draft results were validated with key Aboriginal representatives before finalisation. Recommendations were shaped by participants' voices and intended to drive positive, practical, and culturally safe change. The evaluation team-maintained accountability to both CCOV and the Aboriginal stakeholders engaged throughout.

Distress protocol and participant wellbeing: Given the sensitive nature of the coronial process, a comprehensive distress protocol was implemented.

The evaluation team's approach was guided by the principle of 'do no harm', with the overarching goal of ensuring that participation was a positive, respectful, and empowering experience for all involved.

Limitations of the Evaluation

While this evaluation provides meaningful and culturally informed insights into the work of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit and its role within the CCOV, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- *Small and selective participant group:* Seven people with lived experience of the coronial process took part. While their voices provide valuable insights, they represent only a small proportion of the families supported by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit. Participants were also selected from an internal database, which may have unintentionally prioritised those who were more available or had particular experiences.
- *Limited stakeholder engagement:* Key stakeholders such as CCOV staff, VIFM representatives, RAJAC Executive Officers, and ACCO/ACCHO partners were consulted. However, due to time, budget, and resource constraints, not all relevant voices were included.
- *Group dynamics:* In some focus groups, participants included staff from different levels (e.g., executive and administrative roles). This may have influenced dynamics and limited how freely some participants felt they could contribute.
- *Sensitive and trauma-related subject matter:* Because the evaluation explored experiences of grief, loss, and systemic injustice, some people may have chosen not to participate to protect their wellbeing. This may have limited the diversity of perspectives represented.
- *Perception-based findings:* Insights into how family experiences have changed since the Yirramboi Murrup Unit began were largely based on participant reflections. Limited historical documentation and the absence of baseline or comparative data meant it was not possible to make verified pre/post comparisons.
- *Context-specific learnings:* Findings reflect the specific design and operation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit within the Victorian coronial system. While they may offer useful lessons for other jurisdictions, they should be applied with care, recognising different cultural, systemic, and geographic contexts.
- *Boundaries of scope and resources:* The evaluation was shaped by what was achievable within the available CCOV budget and resources. Recommendations are framed to be practical and implementable in the current context.

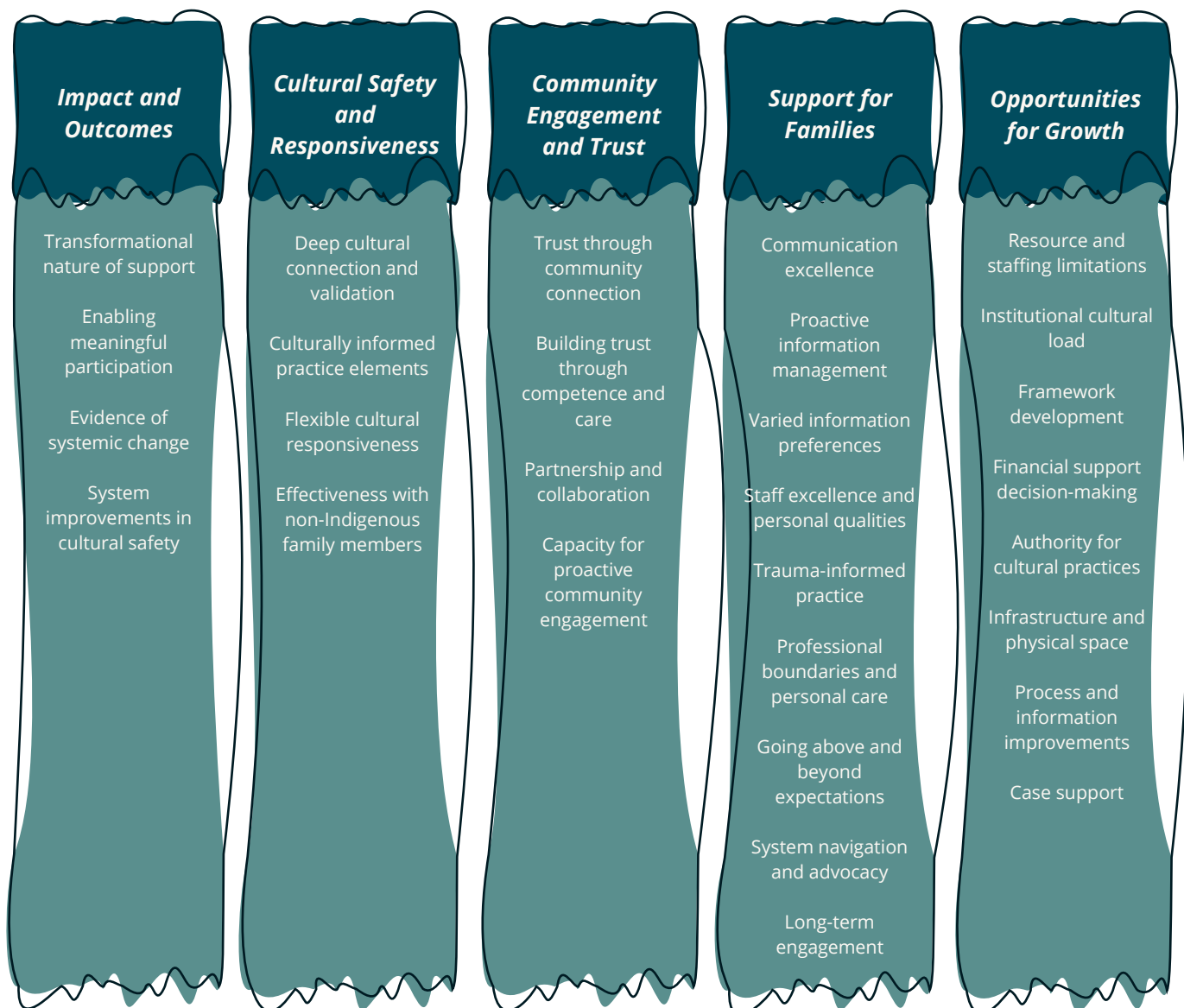
Despite these limitations, the evaluation provides important and credible insights grounded in lived experience, cultural knowledge, and system-level perspectives. The findings should be seen as indicative rather than exhaustive, offering a strong foundation for ongoing reflection, culturally safe practice, and future reform.

Findings

This evaluation examined the Yirramboi Murrup Unit employing a qualitative methodology comprising seven in-depth interviews with bereaved family members who had navigated the coronial process following the passing of a loved one and five yarning style focus groups (total N=26). Participants represented a broad range of professional stakeholder perspectives, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, the State Coroner, CCOV staff, peak body representatives, ACCO's, police liaisons and staff, and Yirramboi Murrup staff.

Lived experience participants had diverse experiences across multiple types of coronial investigations, including passings by suicide, domestic and family violence-related passings, medical passings, and deaths in custody. The time since participants' loss ranged from 10 months to over 2 years.

The image below provides an overview of findings; these are further explored below:



The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's reach has grown since its establishment, supporting over 500 families since its establishment:

- between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit supported 147 families
- between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024, this increased to 183 families, a 24% increase in families supported.
- as of 3 July 2025, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit was actively supporting 171 families with open cases.

These figures reflect a growing awareness of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's sustained ability to provide ongoing support throughout what is often a lengthy coronial process.

Impact and Outcomes



Nature of Support

The evaluation found universal agreement among both lived experience and professional stakeholders that Yirramboi Murrup Unit provides essential support beyond helpful assistance. Participants across both lived experience and professional stakeholders described the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's impact as *'transformational'*, meaningfully supporting families' ability to navigate the coronial system during times of profound grief and trauma.

Lived experience stakeholders consistently emphasised that without Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support, participating in coronial processes would have been overwhelming or simply *'impossible'*. As one lived experience stakeholder expressed, *"100% yes, without YMU it would have been terrible. I'm so thankful"*.

Another spoke to the practical necessity of Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support reflecting, *"I couldn't have even done my impact statement if it wasn't for them"*. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's role extends beyond individual tasks to sustaining families through the entire process, *"without that team and the people there, I'm not sure that we would have gotten through the space in one piece"*.

For professional stakeholders this is what they perceived within the coronial process and Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support, *"They have been so responsive, and communicative"*. When asked to reflect on the changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families navigating the

coronial process prior to Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support, one responded, *"We've lived a time without YMU and I think all of that challenge of navigating those systems in you know in the midst of grief and trauma is just, you know, so hard"*, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit has *"made such a difference with us and with these families"*.

Enabling Meaningful Participation

A significant finding was the way the Yirramboi Murrup Unit support families to participate meaningfully, in culturally appropriate ways, in processes they would otherwise have struggled to manage. This was not simply lightening the load of difficult experiences but about making essential participation possible through support and connection.

With Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support, families were able to attend viewings of their loved ones, prepare and deliver impact statements, participate in coronial hearings, and make informed decisions about their loved one's care during the investigation process. Each of these were of incredible importance for families to maintain connection with their loved one, have their voice heard and engage with processes that shaped their ability to cope.

The significance of this enabled participation was particularly evidence in families' reflections. One lived experience stakeholder spoke of the importance of maintaining connection to their loved one throughout the process: *"I don't think a parent should not be allowed to say goodbye and physically hug and kiss them... I could hold his hand. I could cry on him. I could squeeze him"*. Beyond the immediate moments of connection, Yirramboi Murrup Unit's coordination of key meetings provided families with a sense of progress and closure that might otherwise have remained elusive, *"The peace and the closure I got when [YMU staff member] organised this beautiful meeting... I left content"*.

Evidence of Change

Beyond individual family support, the evaluation uncovered evidence of broader systemic transformation within the CCOV itself, a dimension more visible to professional stakeholders than to lived experience stakeholders. CCOV staff described how Yirramboi Murrup Unit's presence has reshaped institutional culture and practice in ways that extend beyond any single case.

The depth of this shift was captured by one professional stakeholder who arrived at the court just as Yirramboi Murrup Unit was being established. They recalled, *"I came to the court. I think I started probably two or three weeks before the Unit was first staffed... This was a court that didn't have much in place at all around Aboriginal Culture"*. What began as a gap in cultural understanding has evolved into embedded institutional knowledge. *"The knowledge that now exists in the court as a result of this means that our other registrars and senior registrars and others are in a position of knowledge"*. Yirramboi Murrup Unit hasn't simply filled a service gap; it is building lasting capability within the coronial system itself.

This systemic impact extends beyond cultural change to evidence-based advocacy for policy reform. Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work has created a foundation of data and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives that was previously absent from coronial processes. A professional stakeholder reflected on what came before, noting that *"those coronial inquests had very minimal Aboriginal evidence being provided by Aboriginal people in an Aboriginal narrative"*. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's documentation and advocacy now provide essential reference points for systemic change. Another professional stakeholder pointed to concrete examples, explaining *"there was also a specific report around overdose and alcohol and drug use. And so, both of*

those pieces a key part of reference points for us around advocacy, around investment, around Aboriginal-led approaches”.

Improvements in Cultural Safety

Several lived experience participants who had experienced losses before Yirramboi Murrup Unit's establishment provided powerful testimony about the profound difference the Yirramboi Murrup Unit makes. These comparisons brought into sharp relief how previous experiences had been isolating, confusing, and lacking in dignity.

One lived experience stakeholder contrasted their current experience with a previous loss, recalling how *“when I lost my brother and my niece... We had to be behind a glass. So yeah, I guess there is a big difference now... there was no cultural things in place whatsoever”*. The physical separation and absence of any cultural considerations were seen as insensitive and painful by participants.

Another lived experience stakeholder reflected on losing their mother years earlier, describing how *“this was a very different feeling... It felt very connected... whereas mum's stuff was very different. It was just, you know, we'll get back to you”*. The contrast between feeling connected and being told *“we'll get back to you”* captures the transformation from bureaucratic distance to genuine engagement that Yirramboi Murrup Unit has enabled.

A lived experience stakeholder observed the specific significance of cultural representation. comparing their experience from approximately 30 years ago to the present, they noted *“this time around I think because of the time that's there or just seeing Aboriginal faces and being able to speak to an Aboriginal person”* made a fundamental difference. The simple presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, while seemingly basic, shifted how families could engage with the coronial system.

Cultural Safety and Responsiveness



Deep Cultural Connection and Validation

For all stakeholders, cultural safety meant profound validation of identity and belonging during extreme vulnerability. Cultural support extended beyond accommodation of cultural practices to recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being within a Western institution.

Lived experience participants and professional stakeholders expressed this understanding differently. Lived experience stakeholders described cultural safety through deeply personal,

emotional, and spiritual terms, focusing on immediate lived experience. One lived experience stakeholder reflected on the care they received, sharing that *“the love that came from that space, but just from them personally too, was, yeah, it was beyond what I could have ever imagined when losing a child”*. Another described the specific cultural practices that made their experience meaningful, recalling how *“just how cultural it was when we got to see him that he was wrapped and just setting him out on the table and having the possum skin available... it was beautiful”*. These accounts speak to cultural safety as something felt and experienced in moments of profound grief.

Professional stakeholders emphasised systemic cultural change, policy development, and organisational transformation, viewing cultural safety through institutional and community engagement lenses. A professional stakeholder observed that *“the Unit has been incredibly important to educating the Court”*, highlighting Yirramboi Murrup Unit's role in building knowledge and capability across the institution, to date Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff have trained 124 people including staff within the courts.

A professional stakeholder pointed to the sophisticated nature of Yirramboi Murrup Unit's cultural work, noting *“it's quite complex, the work that they have to do from a cultural protocol perspective given the diversity of mobs that they're working with”*. Cultural safety is an ongoing institutional practice requiring deep knowledge and careful navigation.

Ongoing learning and reflection of CCOV staff was highlighted to support cultural safety understanding and improved practice, a lived experience stakeholder shared, *“a multi-disciplinary approach and use case studies on how to improve processes. Then it's the ripple effect for culture. A panel to be able to bring, okay, we've had six deaths in custody over 12 months. Because then it elevates the team as well because you're holding, you're bringing the leadership in to have a conversation around a community of practice”*.

These different expressions reflect complementary understandings of cultural safety operating at individual and systemic levels.

Culturally Informed Practice

All stakeholders described certain cultural protocols and practices with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit and coronial process as profoundly meaningful. These included smoking ceremonies before inquests, the use of possum and kangaroo skin cloaks during viewings, culturally appropriate language, recognition of Men's and Women's Business protocols, and flexible accommodation of diverse cultural practices from diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and nations.

Stakeholders valued these tangible expressions of cultural respect deeply. One professional stakeholder spoke about the comfort provided by knowing cultural items were available, sharing that *“they've got a possum skin cloak or something that they use down there and so that was so comforting to me when I knew that”*.

A lived experience stakeholder recalled the ceremonies that marked their experience, describing how *“we got the smoking. We got the smoking, smudging”*. Another reflected on a particularly significant moment, explaining how *“they actually covered him with a possum skin cloak. So, it really was that that assistance in that space of just making it culturally safe”*. These practices transformed what could have been a cold, institutional process into something that honoured cultural values and provided spiritual comfort.

Professional stakeholders recognised the complexity of this cultural work from their operational perspectives. A professional stakeholder observed the care taken with every interaction, noting that *“everything they do with our families stands out... greeting them at the door, the smiling face, walking them through, doing everything... because we have different mobs coming from all over Australia and everyone has something different”*. This attention to cultural diversity requires not just knowledge but ongoing learning and responsiveness to the specific needs of each family and community.

Flexible Cultural Responsiveness

A critical finding was Yirramboi Murrup Unit's ability to adapt to diverse cultural needs across diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and individuals with varying levels of cultural connection. This flexibility was highly valued by both lived experience and professional stakeholders and seen as essential to providing truly culturally safe support.

A professional stakeholder emphasised why this adaptability matters so deeply. They explained that *“we don't want to make the process too white, and we don't want it to be the standard process of this is what you're what you constructed to do, and this is all you can do. As black fellas, we know the process for a long time. We know that for non-Aboriginal people, the Sky's the limit and for black fellas, limits the sky”*. This powerful observation speaks to historical experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people encountering rigid, limited responses from systems that offer far greater flexibility to non-Indigenous people. Yirramboi Murrup Unit's willingness to adapt challenges this pattern, offering families the individualised, responsive support that should be standard but has rarely been the reality.

Effectiveness with Non-Indigenous Family Members

Non-Indigenous lived experience stakeholders also experienced profound respect and cultural learning through Yirramboi Murrup Unit's approach. This suggests the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's model of cultural safety creates respectful environments that benefit all families when their loved one is identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

A lived experience stakeholder spoke directly to this experience, stating *“I'm not Aboriginal and they were a great support to me as a non-Aboriginal father”*. Another lived experience stakeholder who defined themselves as having ‘distant’ Aboriginal heritage described their learning journey, sharing how *“I have never had any cultural background... I haven't been aware of things. And then I've learnt things on the way through if I've had questions and then [YMU staff] has explained it... I'm actually a lot more inclined and educating myself”*. Yirramboi Murrup Unit's approach created space for genuine curiosity and growth, allowing people to reconnect with heritage or simply learn with respect.

Professional stakeholders described how this approach has influenced broader institutional practice. One professional stakeholder noted *“the work of this Unit was partly behind our thinking to establish some work with all of the faith leaders in Victoria and the multicultural community”*, demonstrating how Yirramboi Murrup Unit's cultural model has sparked wider thinking about respectful engagement. Another professional stakeholder spoke to the learning culture Yirramboi Murrup Unit has created, explaining that *“you never feel like you're asking a stupid question. And I've certainly worked in places where your kind of like, oh, my God, I don't want to answer. You know, that's really dumb. But they really, really encourage that two-way education”*. This openness to questions and mutual learning is perceived as an important strength and learning from the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's continued work with families and the courts.

A professional stakeholder observed the broader impact of this transformation, noting that *“having the Unit has encouraged a better relationship with the Coroner's Court and understanding of day-to-day life and community engagement with Aboriginal community”*. Yirramboi Murrup Unit's presence has shifted not just individual interactions but the relationship between the court and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities more broadly.

Community Engagement and Trust



Community Connection

Community embeddedness and recognition of Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff provide a foundation of trust that enables their work within the coronial system. Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff members are known and respected within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria, which significantly enhances engagement and trust-building during the coronial process. This pre-existing connection means families aren't meeting strangers at their most vulnerable moment but rather turning to people their community already know and trust.

A professional stakeholder spoke to this visibility and recognition, observing that *“they're well known in community. You see [YMU staff] out at different events and you know, then no one within community too”*. This presence at community events and gatherings means Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff are seen as part of the community fabric, not just institutional staff. Another professional stakeholder noted how this has changed community awareness and confidence, explaining that *“it opened a lot of talk within the communities now, you know that they do have the YMU there at a state level”*. Knowing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are embedded within the coronial system has shifted how communities perceive and relate to an institution that has historically felt distant and unwelcoming.

Lived experience stakeholders described how these existing relationships facilitated their engagement with coronial processes. One lived experience stakeholder explained the importance of these connections simply, noting *“knowing people is important... we are a relational people”*. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, relationships are foundational to trust and engagement. Another described how this pre-existing connection eased their family's entry into a difficult process, recalling that *“it was an easy in for us... I know a girl in there and this is, you know. You know, Yep, she's fine, you know, all right, Dad”*. That familiar face and trusted

relationship provided reassurance that allowed the family to move forward when everything felt overwhelming and unfamiliar.

Competence and Care

For lived experience stakeholders without existing relationships, trust developed rapidly through demonstrated competence, genuine care, and consistent follow-through on commitments. Lived experience stakeholders described deep trust forming quickly when professional excellence was combined with authentic personal connection.

Lived experience stakeholders reflected on the trust they developed. One shared that they *“trusted them massively. I still talk about it at work and people I have seen in a while. I still talk about those two”*. This speaks to the lasting impact of that trust. Another described the sense of safety Yirramboi Murrup Unit created in an unfamiliar and frightening process, reflecting that *“they're just a really safe place, you know, something that I... and I just, I didn't know the process at the start”*. When nothing else felt certain or comprehensible, Yirramboi Murrup Unit provided stability and security. Another lived experience stakeholder captured the importance of being truly understood, observing *“we felt confident that they understood where we were coming from”*. This mutual understanding formed the foundation of trust.

Lived experience stakeholders emphasised Yirramboi Murrup Unit's effectiveness in making complex processes accessible. They explained that Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff *“are able to explain the procedures to you in a way that is, that eases it for you”*, transforming overwhelming legal and institutional information into something families could grasp and navigate. Yirramboi Murrup Unit's responsiveness to information needs was highlighted, *“if they didn't have the answers to the questions that you asked, then they would go find the answers and come back to you ASAP”*. This demonstrates the reliability that deepened trust with families.

Partnership and Collaboration

Strong themes emerged around Yirramboi Murrup Unit's collaborative approach with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and their role as cultural brokers within the justice system. Professional stakeholders consistently praised partnership practices and regular engagement that kept communication open and relationships strong.

A professional stakeholder described the quality of their ongoing partnership, sharing that *“the experience we've had with the team like they have been so proactive and consistent with meeting with us on a monthly basis”*. This regular contact ensures coordination and shared understanding. Another noted the strength of key institutional relationships, observing that *“the working relationship between the Unit, Department of Justice and the AJC is seamless”*.

Professional stakeholders observed Yirramboi Murrup Unit's bridging function between families, community organisations, and the court itself. One explained that *“the YMU is also incredibly supportive of the legal practise and the Coroners, I guess in turn in a lot of the practical issues that we need to deal with in our work”*. This support flows in multiple directions, benefiting not just families but the court's operations. They also noted the mutual trust that underpins this collaboration, stating that *“we absolutely trust that they work within the parameters of the court as well”*. Yirramboi Murrup Unit has earned confidence from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the justice system.

Limited Capacity for Proactive Community Engagement

While recognising Yirramboi Murrup Unit's excellence with families who come to their attention, stakeholders identified limited capacity for broader community engagement and

education due to resource constraints. This concern was more prominent amongst professional stakeholders considering system-wide reach than amongst families focused on their individual experiences.

A professional stakeholder reflected on the practical limitations facing the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, explaining *“it's such a small unit, it's very, very hard, particularly when they've got a number of inquests on and they're needing to support families. So, it's really hard for that to occur”*. When staff are supporting families through active cases, there is little capacity left for proactive community engagement.

Another professional stakeholder raised questions about geographic reach, asking *“how does it make sure that the Coroners get a reach into those areas?”*. The practical barriers to broader engagement were noted, observing that *“unless [YMU staff] can jump on a Teams meeting and they're not going to get around everywhere. Because for them to drive out and do it, it's going to take a day or it's going to use up two days of their time”*. The logistics of connecting with communities across Victoria presents real challenges for a small team.

Professional stakeholders identified ongoing challenges in information dissemination, questioning *“how well are the ACCOs or the ACCHOs aware of, you know, what you mean... because how are you gonna know the family itself? How do you, how do you reach out to that family?”* Even when Yirramboi Murrup Unit exists and provides excellent support, families and organisations need to know about it to make referrals or seek help.

Service Delivery and Support for Families



Communication Excellence

Communication was universally praised as exceptional across both lived experience and professional stakeholder perspectives. Stakeholders described immediate responses, multiple communication channels, and proactive information sharing that anticipated needs before families had to ask.

Lived experience stakeholders emphasised responsiveness and relationship quality. One spoke about the staff's ability to read situations perfectly, stating that *"they responded in a heartbeat. They knew when to be relaxed, they knew when to have banter. Felt like we'd been friends forever"*.

Another described the accessibility that made them feel supported even when staff were busy, sharing how *"even if I was called, [YMU staff] will literally message. Hey, I'm in a meeting. I'll call you back in an hour"*. Further, lived experience stakeholders reflected on the sustained nature of this engagement, noting *"I can contact whenever... we're 10 months into this process. They still make contact"*. This ongoing communication showed families they hadn't been forgotten once initial crisis moments passed.

Professional stakeholders observed this communication approach supporting families from operational perspectives noting, *"they're checking up on them to see how they are... they're having that communication with the families, that I feel is very important and they're you know, walking through step by step what's gonna happen"*. A professional stakeholder highlighted the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's bridging function, describing *"the communication between and being not only that that conduit between the Coroners and community, but also the department as well"*.

Proactive Information Management

A critical theme was Yirramboi Murrup Unit's *"no surprises"* approach, where families were prepared for developments rather than receiving unexpected communications. This proactive approach was highly valued and contrasted sharply with other parts of the system where families felt uninformed and blindsided.

Lived experience stakeholders consistently praised this practice. One described how staff prepared them for difficult information, recalling *"she calls me and says it's gonna happen. They're all deidentified, but I'm I know you're gonna be able to pick it"*. Another stated that *"they always we always knew what to expect... we didn't get anything from the Coroner without knowing it because they had already... Say, hey, listen, this is where we're at"*. The value of this preparation was further emphasised, explaining *"she's very big on giving me the heads up. So, when documentation's coming out and she's obviously aware touching base, how are you going? Are you okay?"* These advance warnings transformed potentially traumatic moments into experiences families could prepare for and manage.

Tailored Information Needs

While all stakeholders valued communication, variation emerged in preferences for detail and frequency. Some wanted comprehensive information and regular updates, whilst others preferred to trust that staff would contact them when necessary. Yirramboi Murrup Unit adapted effectively to these different needs, recognising that there is no single right approach to supporting grieving families.

This variation revealed a difference between family and professional stakeholder priorities. Professional stakeholders emphasised the need for clear processes, written materials, and consistent approaches across cases. Lived experience stakeholders showed varied individual

preferences, with many preferring trust-based approaches over systematic information provision.

Lived experience stakeholders needing detailed information explained their reasoning. One stated that *“So for me, I needed the details, um, for my brother in particular”*. Another reflected on why understanding every detail mattered to their grief, explaining *“I need to understand it so I can understand his last moments, so I can actually, you know, um, put that to bed”*. For these families, information was part of processing loss and finding peace.

Others preferred a trust-based approach with less frequent contact. One participant explained their reasoning simply, saying *“we feel confident that they would be letting us know if they knew something. So, we're not wanting... To take up their time”*. For these families, trust in Yirramboi Murrup Unit's proactive approach meant they could step back without anxiety.

Staff Excellence and Personal Qualities

Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff were recognised as professionals and exceptional individuals whose personal qualities were central to their effectiveness. This finding was consistent across family and professional stakeholder perspectives, representing one of the strongest areas of convergence in the data.

Lived experience stakeholders described staff in deeply personal terms. One stated simply that *“[YMU staff] was the most amazing support I could ever have had”*. Another reflected that *“[they] did a brilliant job. Um, I can't speak highly enough of, um, how respectful”*. It was emphasised that the personal connection made all the difference, sharing *“[YMU staff] has the most beautiful soul, we want to adopt him as our child. Was calming as fuck. Knowing I had that support”*. These weren't merely descriptions of competent professionals but of people who had become genuinely important to families during their darkest times.

Professional stakeholders also recognised individual excellence whilst considering sustainability implications. A professional stakeholder noted how readily staff provided support beyond their core work, observing *“[YMU staff], it's been no trouble for them to just, you know, whip out whip up that data for us whenever we needed it”*. Another observed, *“both of them do such a good job in, like, understanding each, you know, diverse situation that everyone's in”*.

Trauma-informed Practice

Yirramboi Murrup Unit's ability to respond appropriately to traumatic experiences, grief, and distress of a loved one passing was consistently praised. This included knowing when to be serious, when to use humour, how to provide comfort, and how to respond to anger or frustration without judgement.

A lived experience stakeholder described this emotional intelligence and how its value became clear with hindsight, reflecting *“very educated, very sensitive... Yeah, like they kind of just know the right things to say, which at that time I may not have seen it... And then I look back and I'm like, Oh my God, they said the perfect thing”*. Another emphasised the non-judgemental environment the Yirramboi Murrup Unit created, stating *“there's just never been any judgment, any anything. It's actually been like a safe place”*. In a system that can feel cold and evaluative, this acceptance was seen as profoundly comforting and healing.

Professional Boundaries

Multiple stakeholders noted how Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff maintained appropriate professional boundaries whilst providing genuine personal care, cultural connection, and

acknowledgement of their cultural obligations to community. This balance was valued and contrasted with more clinical or distant professional relationships that can leave families feeling isolated.

One professional stakeholder described reciprocal support that transcended typical professional dynamics, sharing *“even on a personal basis, you know, like she's the one who calls me too, if she's. If she's struggling with something... and I just let her debrief”*. Another reflected on availability that matched community expectations rather than standard office hours, explaining *“their phones are available like mine is. So, my mob, if they go into custody or coppers pull them over, you make yourself available because your community based”*. This approach reflected cultural values about how you show up for community, however, worries were raised around the emotional toll and the long-term sustainability for Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff to maintain healthy work/life balance.

Cultural Obligations and Service Boundaries

Stakeholders consistently described staff going far beyond what would be expected in their role. However, perspectives on this practice revealed important differences between lived experience and professional stakeholders about what constitutes appropriate service, and what organisational structures are needed to support culturally responsive practice.

Lived experience stakeholders celebrated and expected service that exceeded standard professional boundaries, viewing this as essential rather than excessive. One described how staff were instrumental in their journey, recalling *“I was really struggling and [YMU staff] came with me, and [staff] sat with me. They really got me through that process.”* Another reflected on facilitated connection that went beyond typical duties, sharing *“I wanted to put a face to the name as they had my daughter longer than I had my daughter and she facilitated all of that. And we had the most beautiful meeting”*. A third observed acts that made space for significant support and safety during an impact statement as he didn't feel he could do what was required, noting *“knowing how hard it was for me, they went that bit extra. I went for a smoke and come back in there was 3 seats. They're not usually are able to do it”*. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit had arranged for them to stay and support throughout the impact statement process.

Professional stakeholders recognised this pattern whilst noting it reflects both individual excellence and cultural obligations, and expressing concerns about sustainability, work-life balance, and equity across service users, *“sometimes they might do stuff that's outside what their role is to assist the family to make it easier”*. Another reflected on cultural expectations, explaining *“we know as Aboriginal people do it doing roles or doing things, we go that you go that above and beyond you do that extra stuff”*. A third observed that *“they'll do everything whether it's in their job description or not. You know that that's what mob does”*. This framing recognised the practice as culturally grounded rather than simply individual choice.

A professional stakeholder expressed concern about the personal cost of this approach, stating *“the willingness of both [YMU Staff] to be on literally all the time and be taking things after taking calls after hours trying to sort things at the weekend is something that I think is very risky personally”*.

This tension reflects different but compatible perspectives. Professional stakeholders evaluate through sustainability and equity frameworks whilst lived experience stakeholders evaluate through immediate support needs and relationship quality. Both perspectives recognise the practice's value whilst identifying different implications for how the service should be resourced and sustained.

Critical to resolving this tension is ensuring the Yirramboi Murrup Unit has the flexibility and autonomy to work within cultural and community protocols and expectations. This requires management with deep cultural understanding and awareness who can advocate for community-focused approaches within the broader CCOV structure. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit requires sufficient autonomy to determine how they conduct their work in ways that honour cultural obligations and community expectations, whilst being appropriately supported and resourced by the organisation to do so sustainably.

System Navigation and Advocacy

Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff served as advocates and interpreters, helping families understand complex, and distrusted systems and ensuring their voices were heard. This advocacy role was particularly valued by families who felt overwhelmed by coronial processes that seemed designed to exclude rather than include them.

A lived experience stakeholder reflected on their ongoing confusion about processes and the comfort of having support, acknowledging *“like even now you can tell we're still not really sure on what's, you know, what's going on. So, I think it was, um... Lovely to have the assurance that we could contact them”*.

Professional stakeholders described Yirramboi Murrup Unit's contribution to system improvements beyond individual cases, noting *“they have assisted us in drafting practise directions... including contemporising, you know, words that we use like don't talk about Aboriginal deaths. About Aboriginal passings”*. They further noted Yirramboi Murrup Unit's role in resolving complex cultural questions, explaining *“I recently had a case where... The deceased's the question about whether the deceased identified as an Aboriginal person or not was actually an issue like that was contested... the YMU actually took that issue on board and went out to community”*. This work benefited individual families while improving the system for all future families.

Long-term Engagement

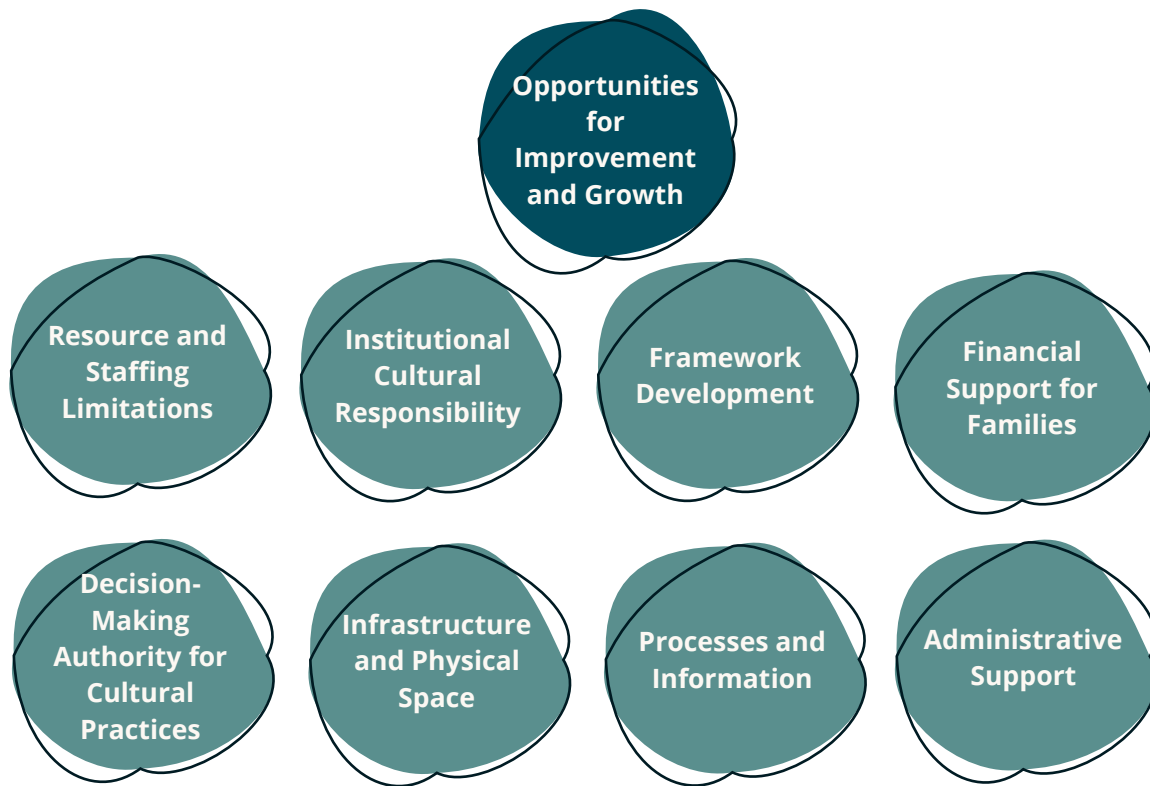
Relationships with Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff extended well beyond formal completion of coronial processes. This sustained engagement was highly valued and recognised as addressing the ongoing nature of grief and healing, which doesn't end when legal processes conclude.

Lived experience stakeholders described a continuing connection that defied typical service boundaries. One stated that *“as far as it like, she's just went far and beyond... I check in if. Every other day from YMU staff”*. Another reflected on the enduring nature of this support with stark honesty, sharing *“it'll be probably till the day I die, you know? And I don't mean that, you know, hysterically funny, but that's reality”*. The ongoing accessibility even after their active case had concluded was considered important by lived experience stakeholders, explaining *“Yeah spoken to them a couple of times... they ask how I was going. Now a waiting game. I know I can ring them any time 100%”*.

Stakeholders had varying views on Yirramboi Murrup Unit's role in healing, with some seeing it as central to their healing journey and others viewing it more as essential support during a deeply emotional period of time. One lived experience stakeholder reflected honestly that *“to be honest, uh, not so much in the healing process. I don't think that it's, um, I think, yeah, we haven't been ready for any of that anyway”*. Another expressed a contrasting experience, stating *“huge. Um, 100%... the closure I got when [YMU staff] organised this beautiful meeting”*. These different

perspectives highlight that healing looks different for everyone, and Yirramboi Murrup Unit's value isn't diminished for those still in acute feelings of loss and grief.

Opportunities for Improvement and Growth



Resource and Staffing Limitations

All stakeholders recognised that Yirramboi Murrup Unit operates with significant resource constraints, with only two staff members serving the entire state. This was universally seen as limiting the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's capacity to provide comprehensive support, representing one of the strongest areas of convergence between lived experience and professional stakeholder perspectives.

It is important to note that the CCOV operates within a highly constrained budget environment and currently allocates proportionately more resources to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families than to any other cohort. There are also Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in other areas of the coronial support system beyond the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, including an Aboriginal nurse in Coronial Admissions and Enquiries available to support families, and an Aboriginal data coder responsible for handling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case data to reveal systemic trends. These roles contribute to culturally responsive service delivery across the organisation.

That said, stakeholders identified specific worries about the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's capacity given its statewide remit and specialist cultural support role. Lived experience stakeholders identified this constraint directly. One stated plainly that *“you need a bigger team. I think there's only two in there at the moment”*. Another emphasised the fundamental resource need, saying *“there probably needs to be more staff. There needs to be more funding within that space”*.

Professional stakeholders expressed similar concerns from operational perspectives. One noted the sheer volume of work falling on so few people, observing *“maybe the size of the team? I think you know it's a big load for such a small team to have to, to deal with”*.

Another acknowledged the broader context, stating *“we have a really, really constrained budget environment at the moment”*. Others identified the practical reality, explaining that *“two-person unit is manageable but there are issues of cultural loads or when one staff member is unable to work”*. When a two-person team loses even one member temporarily, the entire service is at risk.

Any expansion of resources would need to be evidence-based and pursued through appropriate funding channels such as Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5), recognising both the capacity and sustainability constraints identified by stakeholders and the significant resource limitations facing the Court.

Institutional Cultural Responsibility

Professional stakeholders with experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts raised concerns about the significant colonial and cultural burden given current staffing capacity and the demanding nature of the role. These concerns featured more prominently among professionals than families, reflecting their different perspectives on long-term sustainability.

The role requires staff to bridge two distinct worldviews: holding space for families' feelings of grief and traumatic experiences while working within Western institutional frameworks, maintaining their own cultural obligations and connections while fulfilling professional responsibilities, and bearing the colonial load of operating within a system historically implicated in causing harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One professional stakeholder highlighted the challenge of this delicate balance, stating *“I think riding that boundary between work and community and family is a very taxing one for Aboriginal staff”*. Another reflected on the weight carried by such a small team, observing *“that's a lot for two people... They don't just hold this. The space for the families, they hold this space for our whole mob”*. A third noted simply that *“the cultural load would be, would be massive”*.

This load encompasses more than individual cases; it includes accountability for how the coronial system as a whole responds to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their passings. Staff carry the responsibility of educating a colonial institution from within, while simultaneously providing support to families.

Framework Development

A significant tension emerged between the current model, which relies heavily on exceptional individual staff members, and the need for systematic approaches ensuring consistent quality regardless of personnel changes. This tension revealed important differences between family and professional stakeholder perspectives on what makes services sustainable and effective.

Professional stakeholders prioritised structural improvements, framework development, succession planning, and systematic approaches that can survive personnel changes. A professional stakeholder highlighted career pathway concerns, noting *“there's no pathway up. I think is for them”*. While the CCOV offers career pathways underpinned by the Koori Employment Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff both within the organisation and across the broader court system, this comment reflects concerns about visible progression opportunities specific to the cultural support role, or the challenge of retaining specialised

expertise when staff advance to other positions. Another questioned sustainability, asking “how do you embed that cultural obligation or responsibility into a broader team when it is such a really small team?” These concerns reflected understanding that individual excellence alone cannot sustain a service long-term.

Lived experience stakeholders generally expressed satisfaction with the current relationship-based approach, with improvements focused on resource expansion rather than structural changes. One emphasised the structural need alongside the importance of relationships, explaining “you need to have the right people there, but ultimately those people are never gonna stay... you need to have the framework there to be able to support those people”. However, another reflected satisfaction with current arrangements, stating “we've got the right people in there right now... I don't know what else. You know, we how we can make it any better than it is right now”.

These perspectives are compatible rather than conflicting. While the Yirramboi Murrup Unit operates with established frameworks and processes, stakeholder feedback suggests opportunities to strengthen knowledge transfer mechanisms, document cultural protocols and decision-making processes more explicitly, and ensure continuity of approach during staff transitions. This is supported by professional stakeholders and not opposed by lived experience stakeholders, whilst both groups recognise that current success relies heavily on exceptional individual qualities. The challenge is identifying any gaps in existing systems and ensuring they fully capture the cultural knowledge and relationship-building approaches that make the Unit effective, so this work can continue seamlessly when staff members inevitably move on.

Financial Support for Families

A critical gap identified across stakeholder groups was lack of funding for practical family support needs, such as accommodation and travel to attend coronial processes. For families already dealing with financial strain from a family member’s passing and some living in regional or remote areas, the cost of participating in coronial processes can be prohibitive.

A professional stakeholder stated the gap plainly, noting “there's no, uh, financial assistance for the families to get to where they need to go or where they need to be”. Another noted that “the Unit doesn't have any funding to support families to attend in the sort of way by the way of accommodation or things like that”. A third described a specific challenge that illustrated the scale of need, recalling “one example we there was 20 family members that wanted to come, a couple of kids... and I'm out at ACCOs everyday I'm asking for funding to assist this”. When large families want to attend to support each other and honour their loved one, which is a cultural practice, the financial barriers are a concern.

While providing direct financial assistance is not within the remit of the CCOV or the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's scope, establishing or strengthening relationships with organisations or services that can provide this support, where possible, would help address this critical gap for families.

Decision-Making Authority for Cultural Practices

Some professional stakeholders expressed concern about decision-making processes for cultural practices suggesting approval or processes may sometimes duplicate or delay delivery. It is important to note that Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff do have authority to arrange and approve cultural practices as part of their core role and are empowered to make decisions about culturally safe and appropriate practices without requiring approval.

A professional stakeholder stated that *“I think they need more, I can't think of the word, but more support and more if they come and say we need this, there should be more of a yes, okay, not questions, reports”*. Another observed the administrative burden that precedes what should be standard practice, noting *“there seems to be a lot of discussion leading up to this... even though they're generally, they'll happen at every, you know, beginning of every inquest... there's a lot of background”*.

These comments may reflect several possibilities: misunderstanding of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's actual authority among some staff members; confusion about which decisions the Yirramboi Murrup Unit can make independently versus those requiring coordination with other departments for logistical or resource reasons; or communication gaps about routine cultural practices that are standard rather than exceptional.

The perception that cultural protocols like smoking ceremonies require extensive justification, when they are in fact routine and within the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's decision-making authority, suggests an opportunity to strengthen understanding of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's role and authority. Clarifying that the Yirramboi Murrup Unit has expertise and authority to determine appropriate cultural practices may help ensure their decisions are supported efficiently and without unnecessary questioning.

Infrastructure and Physical Space

Several stakeholders identified aspirations for enhanced cultural spaces and facilities to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families during coronial processes. The CCOV currently has two dedicated family rooms with access to an outdoor space that are private without passing traffic, and when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are using them, they are made culturally appropriate. The CCOV has recently undertaken renovations to family rooms and viewing waiting spaces to provide improved privacy and has incorporated cultural artefacts and murals into the environment.

A professional stakeholder envisioned what could be possible, describing *“a dedicated space or area that is a mob space... rooms that are set out for mob to have conversations in with that indoor outdoor element”*. Another identified a specific and immediate need, stating *“having a designated smoking area for our families”*. A third suggested improvements to privacy and safety, saying *“if there was a dedicated space where people can't just be walking past or coming in and stuff like that. That'd be amazing”*.

Lived experience stakeholders identified the need for culturally safe spaces. One lived experience stakeholder shared *“I know those Coroner's rooms are for every person that passes away, but maybe there could be you know, a room that has cultural things, where you can sit in there, not just stand, have some artwork in there. I just think it could be a little bit more comfortable”*.

These comments may reflect several factors: some stakeholders may not be fully aware of recent improvements and existing facilities; families may experience or use these spaces differently than intended; or there may be aspirations for features beyond what current infrastructure and space constraints allow. The Court does not have additional physical space to allocate for separate culturally dedicated areas within the current building. However, should the Court ever be relocated or rebuilt in the future, incorporating permanently dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural spaces with enhanced outdoor access and cultural design elements would be an important consideration.

Processes and Information

Stakeholders identified specific areas where processes could be enhanced, including better written information for overwhelmed families, more regular updates during waiting periods for those who request it, and clearer explanations of timeframes. This area revealed different emphases between professional stakeholders and families, with families focused on their immediate information needs and professionals considering system-wide improvements.

Lived experience stakeholders made specific suggestions based on their experiences. One stated that *“maybe a quick um, itemisation of the process, just so you can look back on it, I suppose, because everything was verbal”*. When families are in shock and grief, verbal information can be difficult to retain, and written materials provide something concrete to reference. Another reflected on the need for ongoing contact during long waiting periods, saying *“there really does... need to be more in-depth, um, supports in that space like you know being in touch all the time”*. A third noted the challenge of long timeframes while being careful not to attribute this to Yirramboi Murrup Unit, explaining *“no, I did. As I said, I did struggle a bit with the long process, but nothing linked to YMU”*.

Professional stakeholders identified information accessibility needs from systemic perspectives. One raised a practical barrier that affects extended families, asking *“there's another point that I'd like to raise is when other I guess you could say extended family members want to be involved in the process. What, what, what? What identification do they have to provide to be able to access information?”* They emphasised the need for clarity, stating *“I think that needs to be cleared up and needs to be made clear for all community members”*. These access questions reflect broader tensions about who gets to be recognised as family within Western legal frameworks that may not align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship structures.

Case Support

Professional stakeholders identified that additional administrative (case) support could ‘free up’ Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff to focus more extensively on direct family support work. This operational consideration was not raised by families focused on their direct experiences, nor has it been identified as a priority concern by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit itself but reflects professional stakeholder perspectives on long-term sustainability.

A professional stakeholder observed the potential impact of additional support, noting concerns about workload sustainability given the caseload and remit of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit. The question of whether case support would enhance the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's capacity to deliver direct family services could be explored through evidence-based resource proposals, such as through Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5) funding opportunities, with any such proposal led by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit based on their assessment of need.

Should case support be pursued, it would be critical that the Yirramboi Murrup Unit retain control over case management decisions to ensure cultural safety and appropriate handling of sensitive family information. Any case support role would need to operate under the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's direction and could potentially be provided in partnership with other areas of the court or department. Establishing responsive mechanisms for the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to access case support if they identify this need in future would strengthen sustainability while respecting their current assessment and professional autonomy.

Discussion

The evaluation found the Yirramboi Murrup Unit is a successful model of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination within the CCOV, with positive impacts for families, ACCOs, ACCHOs, CCOV and government itself. Those with lived experience and professional stakeholder's had positive experiences with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit and working with staff; however, findings also found areas for potential improvement with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's ability to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families throughout the coronial process. Overall, the evidence supports the success and ongoing commitment of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, which has led to a more culturally responsive coronial process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their families.

Self-Determination Within Colonial Institutions

The recognition of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's positive impact speaks to what becomes possible when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority is genuinely embedded within institutional structures. Lived experience stakeholders consistently described the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support as making participation in coronial processes possible rather than simply easier, a marked shift from documented experiences of Aboriginal people in coronial systems as adversarial, culturally unsafe, and exclusionary⁶.

This reflects the implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations regarding family involvement and cultural protocols⁷, though decades after these recommendations were made. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's success demonstrates that longstanding difficulties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with coronial systems can be mitigated when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities hold genuine authority over cultural practice rather than providing advisory input subject to non-Indigenous approval. This mediates Western power dynamics where institutions dictate appropriate cultural accommodation, instead enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to guide institutional change for their communities.

It is important to acknowledge that the CCOV allocates proportionately more resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family support than to non-Aboriginal sections of the Court, demonstrating institutional commitment to culturally responsive service delivery. However, stakeholders identified the current two-person team structure serving all of Victoria as potentially inadequate for the scope of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's statewide remit and the complexity of cultural support work required. This concern reflects broader patterns identified in previous literature where Aboriginal-led initiatives within mainstream systems face challenges in securing adequate resources despite evidence of effectiveness, with Aboriginal expertise expected to compensate for structural constraints⁸. The Victorian Aboriginal Justice

⁶ Newhouse, G., Ghezelbash, D., & Whittaker, A. (2020). The experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in Australia's coronial inquest system: Reflections from the front line. *International journal for crime, justice and social democracy*, 9(4), 76-89. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.1691>

⁷ NAA. (2025). *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. National Archives of Australia. Accessed 18 October 2025: [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody | naa.gov.au](https://www.naa.gov.au/royal-commission-into-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody)

⁸ Poirier, B. F., Hedges, J., Soares, G., & Jamieson, L. M. (2022). Aboriginal community controlled health services: an act of resistance against Australia's neoliberal ideologies. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(16), 10058. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191610058>

Agreement Phase 4⁹ emphasises self-determination and culturally safe systems, providing a potential pathway for evidence-based resource proposals. Should further resourcing be pursued to support staff wellbeing and service sustainability, this would need to be sought through appropriate funding mechanisms such as Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5), with clear evidence demonstrating service demand, staff workload, and anticipated outcomes of additional capacity.

Cultural Safety Beyond Competency Training

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has supported feelings of cultural safety simultaneously at individual and systemic levels, with families experiencing it through deeply personal dimensions while professional stakeholders observed institutional practice change. This finding aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasising that cultural safety requires examining how colonialism and power shape service encounters¹⁰, not merely training non-Indigenous staff about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's effectiveness derives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff holding cultural authority and guiding institutional practice, consistent with research showing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership produces better outcomes than cultural competency training alone¹¹.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's flexible cultural responsiveness across diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and nations, individuals with varying cultural connection, and non-Indigenous family members demonstrates sophisticated practice challenging deficit assumptions. This flexibility operates within the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's current remit of family support through coronial processes, and has supported families observe cultural protocols, community, and support throughout the process.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has achieved significant success in building cultural capability across the organisation, having trained 124 staff members and judicial officers in cultural awareness and safety. This substantial training reach demonstrates widespread organisational engagement with cultural learning and the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's effectiveness in sharing cultural knowledge throughout the Court. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has also contributed to policy development, including Practice Direction 6 of 2020 on Aboriginal Passings in Custody¹², reflecting their recognised expertise within coronial processes.

Community Embeddedness

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's success in building trust through both pre-existing community relationships and rapidly established trust with new families reflects principles identified in Aboriginal community-controlled health research; community governance, Aboriginal staff,

⁹ Caucus, A. J., & Unit, K. J. (2018). Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement-phase 4. [Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement - phase 4](#)

¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services Victoria. (2019). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural safety framework*. Melbourne: State of Victoria. [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural safety framework | health.vic.gov.au](#)

¹¹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2023). Self-determination and Indigenous peoples. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/self-determination-and-indigenous>

¹² Judge John Cain. (2024). Practice Direction 6 of 2020: Aboriginal Passings in Custody. Coroner's Court of Victoria. [20240514 Practice Direction on Aboriginal passings in custody.pdf](#)

culturally appropriate delivery, and holistic approaches are central to effectiveness^{13 14}. Staff visibility within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities means families encounter people their communities already trust rather than strangers at vulnerable moments, whilst the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's bridging function between families, community organisations, and the court requires navigating multiple relationships and cultural contexts.

Cultural Load and Sustainability

The remarkable agreement between lived experience and professional stakeholders about staff excellence validates effectiveness whilst raising sustainability worries. Families celebrated service exceeding standard professional boundaries as essential rather than excessive, reflecting cultural values about community obligation and reciprocity. Professional stakeholders recognised this pattern whilst expressing concerns about sustainability, work-life balance, and the impossibility of current workload expectations.

The “*going above and beyond*” practice must be understood within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural contexts of community responsibility and the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's deep commitment to families. While the Yirramboi Murrup Unit is resources at a higher level than standard Coroner's case management, reflecting recognition of the intensity required for culturally response family support, staff's emotional and cultural long-term sustainability is important to consider. Young et al. (2024) documented how Aboriginal workers in mainstream institutions experience exploitation of their cultural knowledge and community connections, expected to provide cultural expertise, community liaison, and emotional support beyond position descriptions¹⁵. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit operates differently, with resourcing that acknowledges the cultural model of family support. However, with two people carrying the responsibility for over 170 families at varying levels of intensity, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Victoria through traumatic experiences whilst simultaneously educating the institution and maintaining their own cultural connections and wellbeing.

The cultural expectations present a significant risk given current staffing. Staff “*don't just hold this space for the families, they hold this space for our whole mob*”, carrying awareness that they are providing culturally safe support within an institution historically responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander harm. Research has documented how Aboriginal staff navigating between communities and predominantly non-Indigenous institutions experience significant emotional labour, cultural load, and burnout¹⁶. The specific context of supporting families through passings including those that were preventable or result from systemic failures poses additional risk to the psychological wellbeing of staff.

¹³ Durey, A., McEvoy, S., Swift-Otero, V., Taylor, K., Katzenellenbogen, J., & Bessarab, D. (2016). Improving healthcare for Aboriginal Australians through effective engagement between community and health services. *BMC Health Services Research*, 16, 224. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1497-0>

¹⁴ Russo, S., Wurm, J., Wurm, G., Hoang, H., Heyeres, M., Butler, D., ... & Diaz Reyes, D. (2020). Aboriginal community-controlled aged care: principles, practices and actions to integrate with primary health care. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 29(5), 1402-1411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13182>

¹⁵ Young, N., Sherwood, J., Anthony, C., Gilbert, J., Gray, K., McEwan, C. (2024). *A Hidden History of Aboriginal Women's Work In The Community Controlled Health Sector*. Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. <https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/sites/am2024-19/am202422-lit-review-191124.pdf>

¹⁶ Lai, G. C., Taylor, E. V., Haigh, M. M., & Thompson, S. C. (2018). Factors affecting the retention of indigenous Australians in the health workforce: a systematic review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(5), 914. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15050914>

Opportunities for Improvement

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has demonstrated success in providing culturally safe support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families navigating the coronial system. To sustain and strengthen this success, ongoing support should address emerging needs and challenges as they arise.

While the absence of financial assistance for families to attend coronial processes (including travel and accommodation costs for those from regional and remote areas) remains a significant barrier, this sits outside the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's remit. However, they could be supported to identify and strengthen relationships with organisations that provide brokerage services or financial assistance where possible. This would help connect families with existing support mechanisms without requiring the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to directly provide financial aid. This gap reflects broader access inequities affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in remote communities¹⁷.

Professional stakeholders have suggested that additional administrative (case) support could free up Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff to focus more extensively on direct family support work. While this operational consideration was not raised by families or identified as a priority by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit itself, this reflects professional perspectives on long-term service sustainability. The question of whether case support would enhance capacity could be explored through evidence-based resource proposals, such as through Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5) funding opportunities. Should this be pursued, it would be critical that the Yirramboi Murrup Unit retain control over case management decisions to ensure cultural safety and appropriate handling of sensitive family information. Any case support role would need to operate under the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's direction and genuinely expand capacity of staff rather than introducing additional bureaucracy or external control. As Crooks et al. (2021) found, support operating under non-Indigenous management separate from Aboriginal programs can create cultural safety problems¹⁸.

Continued support for the Yirramboi Murrup Unit should focus on maintaining adequate resourcing, addressing operational challenges collaboratively, and ensuring staff have the capacity to sustain this vital work while managing the cultural and emotional load inherent in supporting families through grief. The establishment of responsive mechanisms for the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to access additional case support if they identify this need in future would strengthen long-term sustainability without compromising the cultural responsiveness and relational practice that families value.

Supporting Frameworks

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit operates within established frameworks that guide its work. Professional stakeholders noted an ongoing tension between the current model's reliance on skilled practitioners and the need for systematic approaches that ensure consistent quality across personnel changes. This reflects genuine complexity in balancing relationship-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice with institutional requirements for

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2015). The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 2015. *Cat. no. IHW 147. Canberra: AIHW* [The health and welfare of 2015 \(full publication; 1June2015 edition\) \(AIHW\)](#)

¹⁸ Crooks, K., Tully, B., Allan, L., Gillham, K., Durrheim, D., & Wiggers, J. (2021). Development and implementation of a shared governance model in a mainstream health unit: a case study of embedding Aboriginal voices in organisational decision making. *Australian Health Review*, 46(2), 178-184. <https://doi.org/10.1071/AH20369>

consistency. While professional stakeholders emphasised the importance of supporting these frameworks and succession planning, families generally expressed satisfaction with current relationship-based approaches.

Framework development guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities could potentially address both perspectives, creating documented approaches supporting rather than constraining culturally appropriate practice. The risk is that frameworks prioritise institutional accountability over cultural appropriateness, creating documents satisfying bureaucratic requirements whilst undermining relational practice making the Yirramboi Murrup Unit effective.

Continued support for existing frameworks, which have been developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, can address both perspectives by maintaining documented approaches that support rather than constrain culturally appropriate practice¹⁹. The key is ensuring that frameworks continue to prioritise cultural appropriateness alongside institutional accountability, preserving the relational practice that makes the Yirramboi Murrup Unit effective. Ongoing support should strengthen these existing approaches while maintaining the flexibility that enables culturally safe, family-centred practice.

Career pathway concerns (e.g. "there's no pathway up" for staff), raise additional sustainability questions about professional development opportunities and long-term retention within a two-person structure. Continued support for the Yirramboi Murrup Unit should include consideration of how to provide career development and growth opportunities that retain expertise while maintaining the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's cultural integrity and effectiveness.

Success Within Broader Context

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's demonstrated effectiveness must be situated within broader policy frameworks including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap²⁰ and Victoria's Aboriginal Justice Agreement²¹, which articulate commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and justice reform. However, progress on Closing the Gap targets reveals persistent challenges. Nationally, Target 1 (long and healthy lives) shows some improvement but is not on track, whilst Target 10 (reducing over-representation in criminal justice) is worsening from baseline, though Victoria has seen some improvement on Target 10²².

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has demonstrated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, adequately resourced initiatives can achieve significant change within their scope, providing both tangible support to families and evidence of what is possible when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is genuinely enacted within justice systems. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and narratives now

¹⁹ [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

²⁰ Closing the Gap. (2025). National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Closing the Gap. Accessed 20 October 2025. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement>

²¹ State of Victoria. (2024). The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja. Accessed 20 October 2025. <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/the-agreement/the-victorian-aboriginal-justice-agreement>

²² Australian Institute of Family Studies. (n.d.). Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications. Australian Institute of Family Studies. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a8fa81a6-b183-441c-bc2e-737c41b55fc2/aihw-ihw-294-ch10-criminal-justice.pdf>

provide key reference points for advocacy, around investment, around Aboriginal-led approaches, potentially informing broader prevention efforts.

Conclusions

This review demonstrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, culturally grounded support within the coronial system can fundamentally transform how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience justice processes. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has moved beyond accommodating cultural needs to embedding cultural authority and self-determination within an institutional setting, historically experienced as exclusionary and harmful.

Summary of Key Findings

The Yirramboi Unit has established itself as essential to the coronial process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with many stating they could not have navigated the process without this support. Impact extends beyond individual cases to institutional transformation, including enhanced cultural awareness across the CCOV, contribution to policy development, and provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives that inform systemic advocacy. Cultural safety operates at both personal and systemic levels. Families experience profound validation of identity and culture during extreme vulnerability, whilst the institution builds lasting capability through training and shifts in attitudes. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's flexible cultural responsiveness across diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and nations demonstrates sophisticated practice that honours diversity.

Staff excellence is both a strength and sustainability worry. Success relies on exceptional individuals demonstrating remarkable professional skill, cultural knowledge, and personal qualities. However, the two-person structure serving all of Victoria creates significant risks around colonial and cultural load, burnout, and service continuity. The challenge lies in building systems that preserve effectiveness whilst ensuring sustainability.

Addressing the Evaluation Questions

Impact and Outcomes

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit effectively meets family needs by enabling meaningful participation. Families receive emotional, cultural, and practical support throughout investigations, including facilitation of viewings, impact statements, hearing attendance, and informed decision-making.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit has influenced broader CCOV practices through staff education, policy development including Practice Direction 6, and provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives for systemic advocacy. Families who experienced losses before the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's establishment described profound differences, with earlier experiences characterised by isolation, confusion, and absence of cultural consideration.

Cultural Safety and Responsiveness

Engagement with families is experienced as profoundly culturally safe through smoking ceremonies, use of cultural cloaks, appropriate language, and recognition of diverse protocols. The Yirramboi Murrup Unit adapts to individuals with varying cultural connection whilst maintaining authentic practice and creates environments where non-Indigenous family members also experience respect and cultural learning.

Trauma-informed practices are embedded throughout, with staff knowing when to be serious or use humour, providing comfort without judgement, and employing a "no surprises" approach that prepares families for difficult developments rather than leaving them blindsided.

Community Engagement and Trust

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit engages effectively through staff embeddedness within community. Staff are known and trusted before families enter crisis moments. For new relationships, trust develops rapidly through demonstrated competence and consistent follow-through. Strong collaborative partnerships exist with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, and key services.

However, capacity for proactive community engagement is constrained by resourcing. When supporting active cases, little capacity remains for outreach or relationship-building with communities who may be unaware of available supports. Geographic reach across regional and remote Victoria presents particular challenges for a two-person team.

Service Delivery and Support for Families

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit provides comprehensive support characterised by exceptional communication, proactive information management, and tailored responses to individual needs. Staff maintain professional boundaries whilst providing genuine personal care reflecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values about community obligation.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit enables system navigation, translating complex processes into accessible information whilst advocating within decision-making structures. This extends to improving systemic practice through contributions to practice and cultural accessibility.

Opportunities for Improvement and Growth

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's demonstrated success in supporting over 170 active cases at variable levels of intensity with a two-person team reflects exceptional commitment and capability. This achievement also highlights opportunities to strengthen sustainability and expand impact through expanded resourcing. Staff's deep connection to community and sense of responsibility for improving experiences across entire communities represents a profound strength, whilst also indicating the need for adequate support structures to sustain this vital work.

Building on current strengths, several refinements would further support the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's continued effectiveness and sustainability. A critical element is ensuring the Yirramboi Murrup Unit has clear mechanisms to identify when additional case support may be needed, and the ability to readily access such support if staff identify a need in future. While diverse stakeholders raised concerns about administrative burden on Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff, the staff themselves have expressed not feeling burdened at this time. However, establishing responsive case support systems that can be accessed if and when Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff identify the need would support long-term sustainability without compromising the cultural responsiveness that families value. Ongoing learning and accountability to support cultural safety is required to support the effectiveness of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit.

The Yirramboi Murrup Unit's success demonstrates what becomes possible when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is genuinely enacted within justice systems. With appropriate resourcing and organisational support that honours cultural obligations and community expectations, the Yirramboi Murrup Unit is well-positioned to expand its transformative impact. The effectiveness evidenced through this evaluation provides compelling justification for investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches, with valuable lessons for similar initiatives across jurisdictions.

Recommendations

In truly hearing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, several opportunities for improvement and growth emerged to strengthen support navigating the coronial process. Given the demonstrated impact of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit and the growing number of families it supports, the following is recommended for consideration and action.

Continue to Prioritise Staff Support and Wellbeing

Continue to prioritise support mechanisms for Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff to prevent burnout, recognising the colonial load, cultural obligations, and community expectations inherent in this work. Maintain and strengthen opportunities for ongoing cultural supervision, debriefing, and wellbeing support as determined and guided by Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff themselves, ensuring these supports remain culturally appropriate and responsive to their needs. Regular consultation with the Unit about their support needs will help identify any gaps or additional requirements as the work evolves.

Strengthen Workforce Sustainability

Ensure the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's workforce planning aligns with and leverages the existing Koori Employment Plan and established support mechanisms for Koori staff across the court system. Co-design additional recruitment, retention, and succession strategies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that address the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's specific needs, including clear career pathways recognising cultural expertise and supporting professional development within this specialised context.

Establish Ongoing Feedback Mechanisms with Families

Develop a structured process for regularly gathering feedback from families who engage with the service to inform continuous improvement. This should include diverse methods that respect families' preferences and capacity to participate, ensuring their voices directly shape service refinement and future program development. Feedback mechanisms should be trauma-informed and accessible, recognising that families may wish to contribute at different points in their healing journey. This should include culturally safe methods for families to share their experiences and suggestions, ensuring their voices directly shape service refinement and future program development.

Increase Resourcing and Funding Opportunities

Pursue additional funding for brokerage and related supports through budget bids and justice sector partnerships to expand the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's capacity to meet holistic community needs across Victoria. This includes financial assistance for families to attend coronial processes, particularly those from regional and remote areas, addressing fundamental access barriers that currently prevent full participation regardless of the quality of cultural support provided.

Establish Responsive Case Support Mechanisms

Develop clear pathways for the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to access additional case support if and when staff identify this need. This could be pursued through evidence-based resource proposals such as Aboriginal Justice Agreement 5 (AJA5) funding opportunities, with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit leading any such proposal. Any allocated staff must demonstrate cultural responsiveness and operate under the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's direction to maintain cultural safety and appropriate handling of sensitive family information. This support should

free highly skilled staff from administrative burden without introducing additional layers of bureaucracy or external control over the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work.

Role Recognition and Remuneration

Continue to ensure Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff remuneration remains aligned with role requirements, recognising the specialist nature of the work, cultural knowledge required, and emotional labour involved. Building on the 2023 reclassification review that benchmarked roles across courts and comparable positions, establish regular review mechanisms to ensure remuneration continues to reflect evolving role complexity and appropriately recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise in line with justice and health sector standards.

Accessibility and Practical Cultural Support for Court Attendance

Expand knowledge sharing and communication strategies to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are aware of existing culturally safe spaces and facilities available to them at the court. Develop clear, accessible information about how to access these dedicated internal and external areas, available support services, and practical assistance options, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can fully utilise the current resources and feel welcomed and supported when attending court.

Collaborative Mechanisms

Maintain support for existing collaborative mechanisms that provide statewide cultural guidance and reinforce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority in decision-making processes. Ensure the Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff have autonomy to determine which collaborative forums and working groups best serve their needs, with adequate resourcing and organisational backing to participate meaningfully in these partnerships with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and other key stakeholders as they see fit.

Extend Self-Determination Commitments

Align Yirramboi Murrup Unit operations and future planning with the principles of self-determination outlined in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, supporting pathways toward future Assembly and Treaty processes.

Strengthen Cultural Understanding within CCOV Leadership and staff

Strengthen the cultural capability of CCOV internal leadership and staff to ensure genuine understanding, respect, and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches. Leadership should uphold the integrity of program deliverables, avoid mainstreaming culturally specific initiatives, and maintain a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working and self-determination.

Close the Feedback Loop with Evaluation Stakeholders

Provide all stakeholder participants who have participated in the evaluation with an overview of the evaluation findings and progress, acknowledging their contributions and reinforcing transparency and shared accountability. Curiyo is happy to distribute to all participants.

These recommendations are presented as interconnected rather than isolated actions. Addressing workforce sustainability, for example, requires simultaneous attention to staff wellbeing, remuneration, decision-making authority, and case support. Similarly, strengthening cultural decision-making authority depends on leadership cultural capability and organisational commitment to self-determination. Implementation should be approached holistically, with

priorities determined in collaboration with the Yirramboi Murrup Unit, Aboriginal Justice Caucus and key stakeholders. Regular progress reporting and ongoing engagement with families and communities will ensure accountability and enable adaptive responses as the Yirramboi Murrup Unit continues to evolve.

Appendix A – Literature Review Overview

Policy and Legislative Context	
Relevant Legislation Examine legislation governing the coronial process, particularly any provisions related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	The Coroners Act 2008 Victoria embeds considerations for Culture and established the CCOV to make systemic reform. - Acknowledges the need to respect the culture and spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people during the coronial process. - Mandates a coronial inquest into deaths in custody, which includes police, prison, and mental health facilities. - Allows Coroners to make recommendations to prevent future deaths, supporting systemic reform.
Policy Frameworks Review national and state Aboriginal justice, health, and death review strategies (e.g., Closing the Gap, Aboriginal Justice Agreements).	Closing the Gap: By aiming to close the gap in life expectancy (Target 1) and reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody (Target 10), the National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims to reduce deaths in custody, making this directly relevant to coronial inquests. - Target 1: Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives. Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met for males or females. Victoria has no data available to demonstrate an assessment of progress 2005-07 to 2020-22 (from the baseline). - Target 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening. Victoria has seen an improved assessment of progress 2019 to 2024 (from the baseline). Aboriginal Justice Agreement (Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja) - AJA4: Founded on the RCIADIC, the AJA4 focuses on the challenge of over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, and its key policy focus is growing self-determination. The key relevant opportunities fall under Goal 3.1: The needs of Aboriginal people are met through a more culturally safe system. Opportunities include: - Recruit a designated Koori Registrar in the Coroners Court to ensure coronial practices are both culturally aware and appropriate. - Support for Aboriginal Elders to provide cultural advice in the Coroner's Court.
Human Rights Instruments Include UNDRIP, RCIADIC recommendations, and	UNDRIP: Formally endorsed by Australia in 2009, the UNDRIP (2007) states that Indigenous people have the right to: - not be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Article 8) - practise and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs (Article 11)

any local human rights frameworks.	- participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights (Article 18) - maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions (Article 31) - and that states in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration. (Article 38) RCIADIC: The RCIADIC found that many deaths were preventable and gave 339 recommendations. Relevant recommendations include: - Coronial Oversight and Procedures: develop a protocol for coronial inquests for Aboriginal deaths in custody, implement a mandatory coronial inquest (preferably public) to ensure transparency and public accountability, and that Coroners must not only determine cause of death, but also examine the quality of care, treatment, and supervision the deceased received before death to highlight systemic failings (Rec 8, 11 & 12) - Family and Community Involvement: ALS and deceased's family must be informed of date and time of inquest, the inquest cannot occur without their knowledge or presence, and that family have the right to view the body and the scene, have independent medical oversight of the post-mortem, and receive the autopsy report (Rec 21, 22 & 25) - Legal and Investigative Support: that a solicitor or barrister must be appointed, and they must be independent from custodial authorities, comprehensive and impartial, monitor the investigation's conduct and escalate unresolved disputes to the Coroner (Rec 26, 27, 28, 30 & 31) - Police Investigation Standards: Police must treat all deaths as potential homicides (don't assume suicide), investigate lawfulness of custody and quality of care, examine circumstances of arrest and pre-custody events, etc. (Rec 35).
Program Foundations	
Purpose and Objectives Document how the unit defines its role (e.g., advocacy, cultural liaison, emotional support).	The Yirramboi Murrup Unit (YMU) is also referred to as the Coroners Aboriginal Engagement Unit (AEU). It is made up of Aboriginal team members to provide cultural care and support to families during coronial process and facilitate communication between the CCOV and them. Also support during court hearings to uphold cultural support. - The Aboriginal Family Engagement Manager provides primarily advocacy work to the Coroner's Court to help with investigations and to provide advice on cultural issues, cultural competency, and cultural sensitivity, and in managing the delivery of culturally safe care for families.

	- The Aboriginal Cultural Support Advisor focuses primarily as a cultural liaison between the Coroner's Court and families to assist with investigations, cultural engagement and cultural competency. They also provide direct culturally appropriate emotional support to families, and advocacy work to the Coroners Court.
Establishment Documents Founding proposals, business cases, funding agreements.	None provided.
Organisational Structure and Governance Understand reporting lines, partnerships, and Cultural governance mechanisms (e.g., Elders or community advisory roles).	Organisational structure: Aboriginal Engagement Unit (AEU) = Yirramboi Murrup Unit (YMU) > Coroner's Support Unit > Coroners Court of Victoria (CCOV) > Court Services Victoria (CSV). Reporting lines: - Aboriginal Family Engagement Manager > Principal Registrar - Aboriginal Cultural Support Advisor > Aboriginal Family Engagement Manager - Reporting lines include to State Coroner, Deputy State Coroner and CEO. Partnerships: - Reporting lines include to State Coroner, Deputy State Coroner and CEO. - Relationships with ACLOs (Community) and PALOs (Police) are being built through regular meetings. - Strong relationship established with VIFM through training, Reconciliation and NAIDOC events, and with communication regarding Aboriginal passings. - Relies on relationship with RAJAC, VALS and ACLO for support with supporting families from Regional Victoria. - AEU regularly meets with VACCHO. - Engages with CSV Koori Network and encourage participation for Aboriginal staff to join. - AEU continues to engage with communities and ACCOs. - Potential partnerships with Koori Justice Unit, Aboriginal Justice Forum, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJAC), Local Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, however, there isn't clarity how these interact or partner with the YMU.

	Cultural governance mechanisms: Not clear, except that YMU "continues to engage with communities and ACCOs to further enhance connections and relationships" and has been working with Torres Strait Islander cultural leaders to update cultural protocols and practices.
Operational Materials	
Operational Materials Review how the unit operates including referral pathways, consent processes, and interaction with coronial staff.	Referral pathways: In the Yirramboi Murrup Unit (YMU) Brochure, the YMU states it will be present with the family when in the presence of police (first contact) and with CA&E (Coronial Admissions and Enquiries) during the viewing. As outlined in the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries for families (1FC, 2FC and SNOK) document, the YMU (AEU) is engaged if an Aboriginal SNOK opposes an autopsy. This document does not provide any context/information on the potential cultural concerns or advice on cultural appropriateness and safety during these moments. It states for "AEU to assist". Consent processes: The YMU facilitates the consent processes for certain tasks which are outlined in the YMU Process Guides (MER, TOC and CB) and to assist in the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries for families (1FC, 2FC and SNOK). Both documents are incomplete. The document outlining the Process Guides (MER, TOC and CB) refers to a "below process" which is not included. The document outlining the CA&E processes (1FC, 2FC and SNOK) relies on knowledge of jargon (with no table of abbreviations). It includes no SNOK hierarchy. Aside from saying to refer matters to the AEU when there are cultural conflicts to an autopsy, there are no other references as to the role Yirramboi Murrup Unit plays in ensuring cultural safety. Interaction with coronial staff: - AEU has full access to the Coroners (State and Deputy State) and executive (CEO) who encourages engagement and development. - AEU there with State Coroner or delegate at scene of passing - AEU meet with investigating Coroner for advice on cultural considerations - AEU to write cultural brief for investigating Coroner - AEU attend viewing with CA&E to support cultural safety - AEU engage with and support family through coronial process, making clear the timeframes.
Service Delivery Models	Practices include:

Identify trauma-informed, culturally safe, or strengths-based practices.	- Attendance when CA&E and police interact with family in order to ensure cultural considerations and safety is upheld (especially in relation to Sorry Business) - Investigating Coroner convene a meeting within 48 hours with Manager of AEU to seek advice on cultural considerations and discussion of media coverage - Investigating Coroner will direct the preparation of a cultural brief by the AEU to ensure awareness of relevant cultural issues specific to the deceased and his or her community. - SNOK will be consulted to cultural considerations around proposed autopsy and release of body - AEU will engage with CA&E to ensure viewing is in a culturally safe manner, whether in the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine or at the funeral home. YMU staff have access to culturally appropriate supports: - Mental health professionals - External supervision with professional of choice - Time on Country (supported by CCOV Execs) - Access to cultural and ceremonial leave per policy.
Training Materials Check if there are internal or cross-agency training programs on cultural safety and the coronial process.	Training for Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff includes: - AEU induction session that will incorporate historical and contemporary Aboriginal concepts and issues, CAEU roles at the CCOV, and expectations of CCOV staff concerning cultural sensitivity. Cultural training includes: - AEU develop and implement Cultural Awareness Training (CAT) - CAT for all court staff and CCOV (suggests is tailored to focus on Sorry Business) - Quarterly 'Yarning With' sessions for CCOV and VIFM staff - New CCOV recruits undertake compulsory cultural induction session with AEU as part of intake program - CAT for VIFM - Elders with lived experience as guest speakers for CCOV.
Cultural Safety and Community Engagement	
Cultural Protocols Explore documented practices for engaging with families, conducting	Engaging with families, providing cultural support and conducting Sorry Business: - The AEU will support with making the Coroner understand Sorry Business and the family's cultural protocols such as cultural artefacts, smoking ceremonies, use of names and images, helping submit cultural considerations on the next of kin to the Coroner, and supporting visitation at CA&E.

Sorry Business, or responding to deaths in custody.	- Reviewing culturally informed print and creating audio-visual guides for families who come in contact with CCOV - AEU provides cultural briefings for Coroners, Legal and Registrar including cultural concerns and aspects, kinship, language and community relating to the Aboriginal deceased - AEU reviews all findings before they're sent to families. Responding to deaths in custody: The Passing Direction 6 in relation to Aboriginal Deaths in Custody outlines the processes of the State Coroner, coronial investigator, timeframes, and where presence of the AEU is required: - AEU there with State Coroner or delegate at scene of passing - AEU meet with Investigating Coroner for advice on cultural considerations - AEU to write cultural brief for investigating Coroner - AEU attend viewing with CA&E to support cultural safety - AEU engage with and support family through coronial process, making clear timeframes The SDAP includes mention of an Indigenous Inquest Working Group: - AEU and CCOV have established an Indigenous Inquests Working Group that has been developed to support families that are going through an inquest process. The meetings are held quarterly. However, Sutherland et. al. (2014) found that only one third of recommendations received by Victorian agencies were accepted and implemented.
Community Engagement Plans Identify how the unit involves Aboriginal communities in service design or review.	How communities have been included in service design or review: - An engagement strategy and process of understanding is being looked at in late 2025. - Aboriginal Project Officer to develop engagement plan - AEU guides implementation of cultural perspectives in the Process of Understanding - Implementing Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and practices in the Process of Understanding guide with help from families (with permission) Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and cultural leaders.
Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms Look for mechanisms that allow Aboriginal	No direct mention of feedback and complaints mechanisms but Yirramboi Murrup Unit (YMU) participates in community events to enable 'open communication' and allow for the community to have direct connection to YMU.

clients and communities to voice concerns or provide input.	
Previous Evaluations and Reports	
Internal Reviews or Audits Analyse any previous assessments of the unit's performance, challenges, or outcomes.	The CCOV Self Determination Action Plan included an update on the progress against 4 action areas. The biggest challenges they self-reported was in relation to limited resourcing and staff capacity, but that current feedback overall had been positive, especially in regard to face-to-face engagement. They saw need to improve their ability to support families in regional Victoria and rely on their relationships with RAJAC to support them.
Relevant Inquiries Include findings from coronial inquests, Ombudsman reports, or Royal Commissions (especially into Aboriginal deaths in custody).	Research has found that Coroners frequently limit the scope and ambit of inquests to identifying the immediate cause and nature of the death. It has been argued that as public servants themselves, Coroners may hesitate to lay blame upon other public servants. - It has been suggested that Coroners may be reluctant to emphasise systemic factors that contribute to individuals' deaths, focusing instead on their personal weaknesses and frailties. Because of this reluctance to acknowledge systemic issues such as racism, this creates a barrier to addressing these issues.
Lessons Learned Draw out recommendations and whether/how they were implemented.	Relevant recommendations from the RCIADIC: - Coronial Oversight and Procedures: develop a protocol, mandatory coronial inquests and investigate cause, quality of care and surrounding circumstances (which in response the Practice Direction was developed) - Family and Community Involvement: deceased's family and ALS to be informed and present for inquest, and the family's right to view the body, have medical oversight, and receive the autopsy report (which YMU acts as a cultural liaison to support engagement between the family and the CCOV).
Comparative Models and Literature	
Best Practice Examples Scan for similar models in other jurisdictions or sectors (e.g., Family Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Health	Other jurisdictions: In Australia - YMU and the Koori Education Unit have been leaders in supporting families during a coronial jurisdiction and have provided advice and support in setting up WA and QLD's support units. Globally

Workers in justice settings).	- New Zealand has implemented a practice note explicitly detailing cultural death practices (recognition of tikanga Māori and other cultural expectations when considering applications to view a body) and guides Coroners in making decisions that respect cultural beliefs and practices. - The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) in British Colombia, Canada, works closely with the BC Coroners Service to improve understanding of First Nations cultural practices, increase cultural humility and change processes to create a better system for First Nations and all British Colombians. Other sectors: - Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers (AHLOs) and social workers working together in Victorian hospitals. The relationship and practice between AHLOs and social workers have the potential to positively impact the hospital stay and health outcomes of Aboriginal patients. - The contribution of Aboriginal Health Workers and Liaison Officers (AHWLOs) to quality of care in the acute health care setting in Australia have a positive effect on communication between healthcare professionals and patients, rates of discharge against medical advice and continuity of care.
Academic and Grey Literature Includes research on Indigenous experiences of coronial systems, bereavement support, and culturally safe justice interventions.	Relevant literature: - The experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in Australia's coronial inquest system: Reflections from the front line (2020): This article explains the way that Australian Coroners' Courts often fail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It looks at the gap between the expectations of families of the deceased and the realities of the process of the Coroner's Court, focusing on family participation, the court's adversarial nature, and Coroner's hesitation to apportion blame and address wider issues in their recommendations. - What happens to Coroners' recommendations for improving public health and safety? Organisational responses under a mandatory response regime in Victoria, Australia (2014): This study examined how Victorian organisations implemented/actioned the recommendations made by Victorian Coroners. They found that only one third of recommendations received by Victorian agencies were accepted and implemented. There is nuance to be understood between why they were rejected (potentially quality of the recommendation or reasonableness of organisation's response) or if they were supplanted (potentially inadequate consultation). - Coroners' perspectives on deaths in custody in Australia (2022): This article reiterates some of the existing literature through interviews with 6 of the 45 Coroners across Australia. The key themes Coroners discussed included whether racism played a role in Indigenous incarceration and deaths, the potential

	underreporting of Indigenous deaths, that families face a power balance during the coronial process and do not have sufficient legal aid and support. They stated that Indigenous people should direct policy and legal change and be central to any reforms proposed. - Improving Indigenous family engagement with the coronial system in New South Wales (2021): This article explores the barriers experienced by Indigenous Australians that prevent adequate engagement with the coronial system in New South Wales. The findings presented here are the result of a qualitative study involving key legal professionals and advocates in the coronial jurisdiction. A number of significant shortcomings are identified, including inadequate funding, a lack of information and appropriate communication, and significant delays between time of death and conclusion of the inquest.
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Appendix B - Evaluation Matrix

Key Question Area	Indicators	Data Sources	Methods
Impact and Outcomes	Families report feeling supported, changes in CCOV practices, evidence of advocacy	Yarning circles, interviews, document review	Thematic analysis, document analysis
Cultural Safety and Responsiveness	85% families feeling culturally safe, observed use of protocols, evidence of tailored support	Family feedback, staff interviews, policy review	Thematic analysis, coding of policy alignment
Community Engagement and Trust	Level of trust reported, examples of community voice influencing practice	Community consultations, RAJAC feedback, internal reports	Thematic analysis
Service Delivery and Support	Range and type of supports provided, family satisfaction, gaps identified	Family (lived experience) interviews, staff reflections	Thematic analysis, descriptive summaries
Opportunities for Improvement and Growth	Barriers identified; feasible recommendations developed	All data sources; validation feedback	Thematic synthesis, co-design workshop with Yirramboi Murrup Unit staff

Appendix C - Indicators and Measures for Key Evaluation Areas

Evaluation Area	Indicators	Measures / How success will be defined
Impact and Outcomes	Families report their needs are met	≥80% of families feel their emotional, cultural, and practical needs were addressed
	Evidence of positive outcomes	Examples of enhanced understanding, participation, healing, or advocacy identified through feedback
	Influence on CCOV practices	Documented changes in CCOV policies, procedures, or attitudes linked to Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work
Cultural Safety and Responsiveness	Families feel culturally safe	≥85% of families report feeling culturally safe and respected
	Cultural protocols are embedded	Evidence of use of cultural protocols in casework and engagement practices
	Trauma-informed practices are in place and effective	Families report trauma-informed supports were offered and helpful, evidence of distress protocol use when needed
		Staff report trauma-informed supports are in place and effective
Community Engagement and Trust	Level of trust in Yirramboi Murrup Unit and CCOV	≥80% of families and communities report moderate to high trust in the Yirramboi Murrup Unit
	Community voices influence practice	Documented examples where community feedback led to changes, evidence of ongoing advisory input
	Engagement, reach and inclusivity	Yirramboi Murrup Unit has engaged communities across regions and diverse identities (e.g. rural, remote, urban, Elders, young people)
Service Delivery and Support	Relevance and usefulness of supports	Majority of families describe supports as relevant, timely, and useful
	Gaps identified in support model	Clear gaps consistently identified through feedback (e.g., post-coronial support)
	Responsiveness to family needs	Families describe timely, flexible, tailored responses; case examples demonstrate adaptation
	Strengths of Yirramboi Murrup Unit model	Themes of valued practices consistently identified (e.g., advocacy, communication, cultural respect)

	Cultural safety in service delivery	Families report services reflected Cultural values and included Cultural support options
	Mechanisms for incorporating family voices	Mechanisms (e.g., feedback loops, advisory roles) exist and are used to adjust practice
Opportunities for Improvement and Growth	Barriers identified	Barriers clearly described in feedback (e.g., systemic, resource-related, operational)
	Recommendations are feasible	Recommendations align with existing CCOV budget and capacity; ≥80% of recommendations considered practical
	Cultural safety embedded at CCOV level	Evidence of acceptance or interest in Yirramboi Murrup Unit-inspired practices across CCOV (e.g., training, procedural change)

Appendix D – Key Evaluation Questions and Sub Questions

Impact and Outcomes	How effectively is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities during coronial processes?	What specific needs of families are being met well?
		Where do families feel their needs remain unmet?
		Did the Yirramboi Murrup Unit help to understand the coronial process?
		How do families describe the difference the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's involvement made during the process?
		What do you feel would be the impact and outcome if Yirramboi Murrup Unit was not available or not in existence?
	What tangible outcomes has the Yirramboi Murrup Unit contributed to and/or for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities?	What emotional, cultural, or practical benefits do families report?
		Are families able to engage more fully in the coronial process as a result of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's support?
		How has the Yirramboi Murrup Unit supported healing or trust-building for families?
	How has the presence of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit influenced broader CCOV practices and culture?	Are CCOV staff and systems demonstrating greater cultural awareness and respect?
		What changes in coronial practice or attitudes are attributed to the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work?
		Has the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's presence encouraged broader adoption of cultural safety practices?
Cultural Safety and Responsiveness	How culturally safe and inclusive is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families?	How do families describe their experiences of cultural respect during engagement?
		How do families describe their experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity confirmation through the Yirramboi Murrup Unit process?
		How does the Yirramboi Murrup Unit tailor its engagement to reflect diverse community needs?
	To what extent do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families feel culturally respected and understood throughout the coronial process?	Do families feel their cultural identity, practices, and values are acknowledged?
		How does the Yirramboi Murrup Unit advocate for cultural considerations within coronial proceedings?
		Are spiritual, ceremonial, or cultural supports offered and respected?

	What trauma-informed practices are in place, and how are they working?	How does the Yirramboi Murrup Unit create a safe space for families to engage?
		Are support and referral mechanisms adequate when families experience distress?
		Do families and stakeholders perceive these practices as effective?
		Do staff feel that cultural and wellbeing supports are in place and effective?
Community Engagement and Trust	How effectively is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria?	Are engagement strategies inclusive of diverse regions and community groups?
		How accessible is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to families in different locations?
		What partnerships are in place to support engagement?
	What level of trust exists between communities and the CCOV through the Yirramboi Murrup Unit?	How do families and communities describe their trust in the Unit?
		Are there examples where the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work has strengthened or restored trust?
	Are community voices being meaningfully heard and acted upon?	What are the key factors supporting or limiting trust?
		How does the Yirramboi Murrup Unit gather and respond to community feedback?
		Are there mechanisms to ensure community priorities influence practice?
Service Delivery and Support for Families	What supports are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and how are these experienced?	What evidence is there that community input leads to action?
		What specific supports are provided to families by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit?
	Are there gaps in the support model during and after the coronial process?	How do families assess the relevance and usefulness of these supports?
		Where do families identify unmet needs?
	How responsive is the Yirramboi Murrup Unit to the needs of families?	How is follow-up support provided post-coronial process?
		How does the Yirramboi Murrup Unit adapt to individual family circumstances?
	What are the strengths of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through the coronial process?	Are responses timely and appropriate to the situation?
		What practices or approaches are most valued by families?
		What are stakeholder perceptions of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's core strengths?
		What challenges are raised most consistently by families?

	Where are the gaps or opportunities for improvement?	What limitations are identified by staff or partners?
	How culturally safe and inclusive are the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's approaches to engagement and service delivery?	Are cultural protocols consistently embedded in service delivery?
		How do families assess inclusivity across diverse identities and communities?
	How are the needs, voices, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families being incorporated into practice?	What mechanisms exist to capture family input?
		How has family feedback shaped the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's work?
Opportunities for Improvement and Growth	What mechanisms can improve the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's responsiveness and impact?	Are there opportunities for new or enhanced partnerships?
		What tools or processes could strengthen the Yirramboi Murrup Unit's model?
	What are the current challenges or barriers faced by the Yirramboi Murrup Unit?	Are there systemic or resource-related barriers?
		What operational challenges limit cultural safety or responsiveness?
	What practical improvements could be made within the existing CCOV budget?	What recommendations can realistically be actioned within current resources?
		How can existing partnerships and practices be strengthened cost-effectively?
	How can cultural safety be further embedded within CCOV?	What lessons from the Yirramboi Murrup Unit can inform wider CCOV practices?
		Are there training, policy, or procedural improvements that could be adopted CCOV-wide?

Appendix E – Information and Consent Form



Project Title: Evaluation of Yirramboi Murrup Unit

Organisation: Curiyo Pty Ltd

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in an independent evaluation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit within the Coroners Court of Victoria. This information sheet explains the purpose of the evaluation, what your participation would involve, and your rights as a participant.

You have been invited to participate because you have experience with the Victorian coronial process or work with organisations and services that support Aboriginal families and communities. Your views are valuable to help improve how the Yirramboi Murrup Unit supports Aboriginal people during this process.

Purpose of this Review

The evaluation aims to assess and reflect on the current effectiveness, Cultural safety, and impact of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit in supporting Aboriginal families and communities.

It will help:

- Identify what is working well and building trust.
- Explore any challenges or barriers faced by Aboriginal families and the Yirramboi Murrup Unit.
- Find ways to strengthen community engagement, communication, and healing processes.
- Provide practical recommendations that help the Unit improve its services while working within the Coroners Court of Victoria's budget.

What does Participation Involve

- Semi-structured online interview via a yarning approach for Aboriginal people with lived experience, lasting up to 60 minutes, with the optional of a support person, or
- Online focus group via a yarning approach for workers in the sector lasting up to approximately 120 minutes.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this evaluation is entirely voluntary. You may:

- Decline to participate without any consequences
- Withdraw from participation at any time without providing a reason
- Choose not to answer specific questions during focus groups



- Request that your data be removed from the review (up until the point of analysis)

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected through the following measures:

- All information you provide will be treated confidentially, your name or details will not be shared without your consent
- Your identity will not be disclosed in any reports or publications
- Data will be de-identified and aggregated where possible
- Only authorised evaluation team members will have access to identifiable data
- All data will be stored securely in accordance with privacy legislation
- Audio recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed
- Raw data will be stored for 5 years as per legislative requirements (Privacy Act 1988)

Use of Information

Information collected will be used to help shape the evaluation's findings and recommendations.

Culturally restricted information

We will not intentionally collect any Culturally restricted information. We will not ask specific questions about your Cultural background and where you are from and will not report on this in the report. If you do share Culturally restricted information, this will not be included in the report.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Potential Risks:

- Talking about your experience may bring up strong emotions, especially when reflecting on grief, loss, or trauma connected to the coronial process.
- You will be offered Cultural and emotional support during and after your participation.
- You can pause, stop, or ask for support at any time
- Time commitment required for participation.

Potential Benefits:

- Your contribution can help improve Cultural safety, trust, and support for Aboriginal families who go through the coronial process in future.
- The evaluation aims to honour community voices and promote positive change.

Evaluation Team Contacts

To contact Curijo please contact Belinda Kendall or Natasja Witbreuk



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- Email: Natasja.Witbreuk@curijo.com.au
Ph: 0476 524 554

To contact Yirramboi Murrup please contact Jessica Gobbo

- Email: Jessica.Gobbo@courts.vic.gov.au
Ph: 0460 659 905

Complaints

If you have a complaint about any component of the Project, please contact:

- Tina McGhie at Curijo, on (02) 6285 4802
- Yirramboi Murrup Unit contact – Alex Cottrell Principal Registrar on 1300 309 519



Written and or Verbal Consent Form for Participants

I understand the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet and understand what this consultation is about.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I can change my mind at any time about participating in the consultation, without saying why, including after the conversation has been completed.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I can skip questions without saying why.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand I can ask questions at any time if I don't understand something.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to have my conversation audio-recorded to support notetaking.	Yes ☐	No ☐
If no, I understand that the person I am talking to will take written notes to record my answers to questions.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that once I participate in the consultation, my answers will remain confidential and will be deidentified, so they cannot be taken out of the outcome report.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I can ask for the recording and text version of my conversation to be destroyed if I wish.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to allow quotes to be included in the report, that won't identify who I am. If no, this answer will be confirmed and recorded against my consultation input.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that all information gathered in this project that is confidential will be kept secure for 5 years and then destroyed.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I can complain if I'm not happy about the way I've been treated in the conversation.	Yes ☐	No ☐

Signatures

I understand the information provided to me in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signature: _____ Date Signed: _____

Name: _____ Verbal Consent: Yes ☐ No ☐

Date and time verbal consent provided: _____

Name of person receiving verbal consent: _____

Appendix F – Distress Protocol

Purpose

This protocol provides guidance for evaluation team members on how to identify, respond to, and manage participant distress during the evaluation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit. It ensures participant wellbeing is prioritised and appropriate support is provided when needed.

Scope

This protocol applies to all research activities and any other data collection methods involving program staff, departmental personnel, and stakeholders.

Identifying Distress

Verbal Indicators	Expressions of hopelessness, despair, or overwhelming stress References to self-harm or suicidal ideation Statements about being unable to cope Extreme emotional language or distress about situations Expressions of trauma related to difficult cases or experiences
Non-Verbal Indicators	Excessive crying or emotional distress Physical signs of anxiety (trembling, rapid breathing) Withdrawal or becoming non-responsive Agitation or restlessness Sudden changes in demeanour or mood

Immediate Response Procedures

Step 1: Pause and Acknowledge

- Immediately pause the research activity
- Acknowledge the participant's distress with empathy
- Use phrases like: "I can see this is difficult for you" or "It's okay to take a moment"
- Offer tissues, water, or a brief break

Step 2: Assess Safety

- Ask directly: "Are you having thoughts of harming yourself or others?"
- If YES → Follow CRISIS RESPONSE procedures (see below)
- If NO → Continue with support procedures

Step 3: Provide Immediate Support

- Validate their feelings: "Your reaction is completely understandable"
- Remind them participation is voluntary, and they can stop at any time
- Offer to reschedule or discontinue the session
- Remain calm and supportive throughout

STEP 4: Determine Next Steps

- Ask what support they feel they need

- Provide resource information (see resources section)
- Follow up on their preferred course of action
- Document the incident (without identifying details)

Crisis Response Procedures

Immediate Safety Concerns (Suicidal/Self-harm Risk)	Non-Immediate Safety Concerns
If participant expresses immediate intent to self-harm: DO NOT LEAVE THE PARTICIPANT ALONE Call emergency services immediately: Emergency: 000 Request ambulance (or police) if necessary Contact crisis support: 13YARN: 13 92 76 (available 24/7) Lifeline: 13 11 14 (available 24/7) Stay on the line with participant until help arrives Notify research supervisors immediately Complete incident report within 24 hours	If participant expresses distress but no immediate safety risk: • Provide immediate support and resources • Encourage professional help-seeking • Contact participant within 24-48 hours to follow up • Document incident and follow-up actions

Support Resources

Crisis and Emergency Support	13 YARN: 13 92 76 (24/7 crisis support) https://www.13yarn.org.au/factsheets Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14 (24/7 crisis support) Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (24/7) Brother to Brother: 1800 435 799 Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
Mental Health Services	Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 (24/7) Headspace: 1800 650 890 (12-25 years) SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 (mental illness support) Black Dog Institute: Online resources and support
VIC specific Services	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA): 03 9287 8800 Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS): 03 9419 3000 Djirra (Aboriginal women's support): 1800 105 303 Victim Support Victoria: 1800 819 817
Workplace Support	Employee Assistance Programs (EAP): Available through VIC Government or employer

Professional Support

Australian Association of Social Workers:
1800 304 400

Reporting And Documentation*Incident Documentation*

- Record date, time, and nature of distress (without identifying participant)
- Document immediate response actions taken
- Note resources provided and participant response
- Record follow-up actions and outcomes

Reporting Requirements

- Inform Yirramboi Murrup Unit if appropriate and with participant consent

Confidentiality

- Maintain participant confidentiality in all documentation
- Only share identifying information when safety is at immediate risk
- Store incident reports securely and separately from research data

Research Team Support*Self-Care for Evaluators*

- Debrief with supervisors after any distressing incidents
- Access employee assistance programs if affected
- Recognise signs of secondary trauma in research team
- Implement regular team check-ins and support

Training Requirements

- All research team members must be familiar with this protocol
- Knowledge of local mental health services and referral pathways

Appendix G – Wellbeing Information



Thank you for your contribution

We deeply appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences as part of the evaluation of the Yirramboi Murrup Unit at the Coroners Court of Victoria.

Your input is powerful. It helps strengthen the support provided to Aboriginal families, communities, and others' navigating the coronial process.

Take Care of Yourself

We understand that talking about your experiences with the coronial system can bring up difficult feelings.

- Please look after yourself during and after this process.
- You can reach out for support at any time.
- You are not alone; help is always available.

If You Need Immediate Support

In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).

These services are available 24 hours a day:

13YARN (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people)	13 92 76 www.13yarn.org.au
1800RESPECT (family, domestic and sexual violence support)	1800 737 732
Lifeline	13 11 14
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
MensLine Australia	1300 789 978
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467
Full Stop Australia	1800 385 578 or 1800 211 028

Mental Wellbeing Supports:

Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Black Dog Institute	www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
SANE Australia	1800 187 263
QLife (for LGBTIQ+SB)	1800 184 527
Headspace (12 – 25 years)	1800 551 800

Other Victorian Supports:

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	03 9287 8800
Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)	03 9419 3000
Djirra (Aboriginal women's support)	1800 105 303
Victim Support Victoria	1800 819 817

Your Wellbeing Matters

Thank you for sharing your voice. Please remember to care for yourself and reach out if you need support.