THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY:

CONNECTIONS CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

CONTENTS

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TERMS USED

Indigenous – the term used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people collectively.

Aboriginal – the term used to describe the native people and their descendants from mainland Australia, including Tasmania.

Torres Strait Islander – the term used to describe the native people and their descendants from the Torres Strait region of Australia.

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ACRONYMS AND TERMS

THE FOLLOWING ABBREVIATIONS HAVE BEEN USED THROUGHOUT THE DOCUMENT

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACELG	Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government
AHT	Aboriginal Health Team
BTH	Bringing Them Home
CtHG	Closing the Health Gap
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
EH	Eastern Health
EMR	Eastern Metropolitan Region
HICSA	Healesville Indigenous Community Service Association
IAC	Indigenous Advisory Committee to Yarra Ranges Council
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MMIGP	Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee
PAR	Participatory Action Research

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Connections to Urban Indigenous Culture project (the Project) was conducted on Wurundjeri Country in the Yarra Ranges, Victoria during 2014/15. Funding for the Project was provided by the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government (ACELG) and Yarra Ranges Council. Governance and cultural oversight of the project was provided by a project reference group comprised mainly of Indigenous community representatives.

Yarra Ranges Council with partners, Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association (HICSA) and Inspiro, embarked on this research project to deepen understanding of particular aspects of local Indigenous culture, their relationship to health and wellbeing, and how this is experienced in the Yarra Ranges urban context. It was anticipated that a deeper understanding of how cultural strengthening programs can be appropriately measured would enable these organisations to increase efficiency in resource allocation, to support Indigenous community health and wellbeing, and to assist with effective culturally informed planning and evaluation.

Working in accordance with local cultural values and reference group guidance, the project sought to better understand, and build new knowledge about, how the current inequities in health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians in urban areas can be understood, and then improved, through cultural strengthening initiatives. In addition, it explored the issues associated with measurement as it sought to identify culturally appropriate methods to evaluate the impact of funded projects.

This report offers new knowledge about the meaning of urban Indigenous culture, the importance of identity and of Country, and the connections of these to health and wellbeing in a contemporary Indigenous urban context. It provides examples of effective ways of supporting culture as a means of improving Indigenous health and wellbeing in urban areas. It contributes to our understanding of the urban Indigenous experience and highlights the significance of distinction from remote community environments. It provides Victorian local governments, and their partners, with a sound evidence base to inform effective initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of their Indigenous communities. By highlighting the health/culture identity connection, the project broadens the scope of the role local governments can play in 'Closing the Gap' of urban Indigenous health and wellbeing.

Cultural strengthening initiatives and other services offered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) such as HICSA, are effective mechanisms for building and reinforcing positive notions of Indigenous identity. The positive reinforcement of identity through participation in cultural strengthening initiatives has proven to be an effective approach in improving the health and wellbeing of the urban Indigenous community.

The project has shown that an investment in an ACCO's sustainability and capacity is an effective investment in the health and wellbeing of the Indigenous community itself. ACCOs provide the essential social, physical and culturally appropriate space that acts as a central place for culture to renew itself within a broader urban, non-Indigenous community. In a non-Indigenous dominant paradigm, they are the interface where non-Indigenous and Indigenous service sectors and communities can interact. Through this interface, Western and Indigenous culture and influences flow. Given their immersion in a mainstream community, ACCOs such as HICSA are able to exert an awareness of, and make visible, Indigenous culture to the broader non-Indigenous community. ACCOs therefore have a key role in breaking down notions of stigma and racism, influencing community identity and adding richness to the community social space.

The report identifies the ethical issues pertaining to evaluation of local cultural programs, recognising and distinguishing these from international research and evaluation initiatives undertaken in Indigenous communities that focus on defining cultural indicators and benchmarking cultural connection. Ensuring cultural integrity has been the fundamental precept informing project design, decision-making and implementation. This has resulted in an integration of common research practice into an interpretative filter of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Project design elements therefore included:

- foundational attention to Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing
- adherence to core cultural values of respect, caring and sharing
- participatory action research (PAR) methodology and
- incorporation of the principles of Dadirri and Mirrim ngarn ga.

The building new knowledge section invites readers to recognise the interplay of key themes such as cultural decimation, cultural reclamation, urban invisibility, and social and systemic racism. There are 18 project findings listed throughout the report. (These have also been aggregated in Appendix 4.)

In examining the intricacies of urban Indigenous identity, the report touches on difference between urban and remote Indigenous communities. For example, as Australia's southeast bore the brunt of European settlement, Victorian Aboriginal culture was decimated. Many of the languages, the stories, rituals and song lines in Victoria were lost; talking in traditional language and practicing ceremony was forbidden by law. As a result, opportunities for cultural participation in urban settings are now often less than those of remote communities where, for example, traditional language is stronger.

The report notes that local urban traditional owners within urban Indigenous communities are typically in a minority, while those from remote communities are not. Victorian urban Indigenous communities themselves remain very much a minority, situated as they are within much larger non-Indigenous communities.

These simple differences create unique circumstances and challenges for the urban Indigenous community. Questions of authenticity of Aboriginality emerged as an issue for urban communities. Non-Indigenous people may have historically stereotypical views of urban Indigenous identity as 'illegitimate or less than authentic'. This stigmatised view regarding identity is one area of difference between remote and urban Indigenous identity. The report emphasises that despite the challenges of living in a dominant Western society, the Aboriginality or cultural identity of Indigenous people living in urban communities is no less authentic than that experienced by those from remote areas.

The report also notes that the identity of Indigenous peoples living in urban communities is equally determined by cultural connections, as those from remote communities. All Indigenous communities are different. It is the nature or the intricacies of the culture of a particular place that is variable, not the connection to it. It is also apparent that connection to culture is a deeply personal matter and individuals determine the nature of that connection.

The project also explored the importance of Country in urban Indigenous contexts and its capacity to contribute to community health and wellbeing. The report notes that where an urban Indigenous community establishes itself, centred on shared communication and participation, a unique Indigenous community identity and a connection to that place, of that Country, that is spiritual in nature, emerges. The nature of this connection does not require the surrender of original Country links, or seek to replace 'belonging' to distant traditional lands. The importance of the local traditional owner group in providing key traditional linkages to Country for those living off their traditional lands in urban areas, and for all Australians, is highlighted and acknowledged.

The central importance of core cultural values is also discussed. Key features of cultural knowledge that may be shared outside of community have been explained, offering insights into both their intrinsic significance and their significance in programs focusing on health and wellbeing through cultural strengthening.

Evidence-based research and analysis used in Western evaluation design is often not appropriate or constructive when applied to Indigenous health and wellbeing. This is particularly the case with cultural strengthening programming where measures regarding cultural identity may be inappropriate, ineffective and unwelcome. Local Indigenous leaders and Council's Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) were very clear it is not the business of mainstream organisations to be involved in matters to do with measuring or assessing cultural identity. In recognising that program sponsors and funders have an obligation to assess whether or not funded activities (such as those that seek to build cultural identity) are achieving their aims, the project explored how this issue can be addressed.

The report offers an evaluation framework for cultural programs outlining preparatory, delivery and evaluation elements to address possible tension between reporting obligations and cultural respect. Using precepts such as those embedded in Participatory Action Research models, ethical program design situates the locus of control with community, via respectful consultation, strong community participation and other methods that visibly demonstrate an acknowledgement of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

The Reconciliation programming model discussed in the report provides multiple benefits to participants, schools, families and the wider community. Most importantly, it creates a stronger connection between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous children providing an environment for young people and the community to grow together, valuing each other and respecting each other's culture. The model has the capacity to reduce racism by building a united community that recognises the special place and culture of Indigenous peoples as first Australians; and values their participation in all aspects of community, supporting opportunity for all. Project findings highlight the need for project partners to deepen their appreciation and understanding of key tenets of Indigenous culture. Essentially, those who would enter into genuine partnerships with Indigenous communities have an opportunity to integrate Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing into their own practice. Receiving and processing information and knowledge beyond the five senses is very much part of the life of our urban Indigenous community. There is an invitation for project partners and funders to listen to the wisdom of the past whispering in our ears, as it emerges through Deep Listening – Dadirri/Mirrim ngarn ga, where the voices of the ancestors can be accessed.

The structural layout of the report follows an Indigenous approach to sharing information. Consequently, after the executive summary, readers are introduced to the local urban Indigenous story, its past and present, local culture and values and the Yarra Ranges cultural framework. Sequencing of the report elements is as follows: an executive summary, background, data analysis collected from project activities, project findings, an evaluation framework for cultural programming and a suite of appendices.

1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr Pauline Zardo from Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, from the University of Melbourne, was commissioned to conduct a literature review of relevant research regarding connections to culture and its relationship with health and wellbeing in urban contexts to provide the research background for the project. Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit is an Indigenous health research team committed to research and teaching, underpinned by principles of Indigenous community development, leading to long-term improvements in Indigenous health. Dr Zardo's literature review is referred to throughout the report and provides a sound platform for the themes and concepts emerging through the research. The full review is included in the report as Appendix 1.

2. INTRODUCTION

Local government has a significant role to play in supporting and contributing to the health and wellbeing of its communities. Yarra Ranges Council has a long commitment to working in partnership with local Indigenous communities to achieve this aim. Community cultural development programs have been resourced by a dedicated role, funding of programs, joint applications for major projects and ongoing dialogue about improving cultural safety. To date, programs have been evaluated predominantly using a process approach. Recognising the need for impact and outcome evaluation, discussions commenced with local leaders and members of the Yarra Ranges IAC to identify culturally appropriate evaluation methods. In searching for examples of previous work it became evident this was an emerging field. Also evident was the need to raise awareness and understanding of the social impact, challenges and opportunities of belonging to, and living in, an urban Indigenous culture.

VicHealth research acknowledges there are gaps in understanding of the meaning of Indigenous culture in the urban context. The 2011 Vic Health 'Life is Health is Life. Health Promotion Strategy' has identified the need for further research to address significant gaps in knowledge in the areas listed below. [1]

Land

- While the critical importance of Country to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians is firmly established, there is a need for more knowledge regarding the best ways of promoting Indigenous health through connection to Country. This is the case in urban and regional areas.

Culture

- Further exploration of the meaning of culture for Indigenous Australians living in urban and regional areas is needed.

- Increased knowledge of effective ways of supporting culture as a means of improving health and wellbeing is also needed in urban and regional areas.

Identity

- Increased understanding is needed regarding the influence of cultural identity on health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous people living in urban and regional areas.

- Greater knowledge is required about effective interventions which build cultural identity and link identity to health outcomes.

1 M Kelly, 'Life is Health is Life', [website] https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/life-is-health-is-life Appendix 3, 2011 , Melbourne p 1-2 (accessed 9 October 2015)

3. BACKGROUND

"Efforts to Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage must recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities." [2]

3.1. LOCATION AND POPULATION

This project was conducted in Healesville, on the ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri peoples, where the Creator spirit Bunjil watches over and guides the local community. The Wurundjeri people are the traditional owners of the place Yarra Ranges. For at least 35,000 years they have inhabited the lands that lie within the inner city of Melbourne, extending north to the Great Dividing Ranges, east to Mt Baw Baw, and south to Mordialloc Creek and west to the Werribee River.

Yarra Ranges is located on the eastern fringe of metropolitan Melbourne. The population of 146,886 people covers an area of almost 2500 square kilometres. It is the seventh largest local government area in Melbourne, in terms of population size, and it's the largest in area. Yarra Ranges is a mix of urban and rural communities with over 55 suburbs, townships, small communities and rural areas.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the Indigenous population of Yarra Ranges is 972, or 0.7% of Council's population (June 2011), although the ABS acknowledges the true figure is most likely double this. This is the largest concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, accounting for about 35% of the Region's total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The hub of the Region's Indigenous community is in Badger Creek, Healesville, which represents 2.79% of the population within the catchment area and is higher than the proportion of the Victorian population, which is 0.6% according to the 2011 Census.[3]

ABS data (June, 2011) claims 56.8% of Australian Aboriginals live in major cities and inner regional areas[4], and yet, the role of culture, Country and identity in these urban areas is the least understood. Despite a nearby abundance of forest, farmland and mountains, in social terms the Indigenous community of Healesville is considered as urban. The local Aboriginal community controlled organisation is Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association (HICSA). The heavier metropolitan areas of Lilydale, Mooroolbark and Kilsyth are an easy 25 minute drive away to the west.

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2 National Indigenous Reform Agreement. http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health_indigenous/indigenous-reform/national-agreement_sept_12.pdf. (accessed 21 October)

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data June 2011', Population and Housing Yarra Ranges Indigenous I01 Selected Person Characteristics By Indigenous Status By Sex (1 of 2) Table Io1 2011 Census.

4 ibid.

3.2. LOCAL INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE

Indigenous communities all have unique features that define them, such as Country and geographical location, the people and history. In order to consider the role of culture in local Indigenous health and wellbeing, it is essential to have a sound understanding of the particular story of the local community, as well as national, historical and social challenges. This project features the Healesville community, unique, distinctive and heavily influenced by Coranderrk.

Prior to colonisation there were approximately 38 Indigenous languages spoken throughout Victoria, many of these have now been lost. People of the Woiwurrung language group, the Wurundjeri people, first occupied the area that is today called the Shire of Yarra Ranges. The Wurundjeri people are part of the Kulin Nation, which is made up of five communities across central Victoria:

Wurundjeri – of the Yarra catchment

Wathaurong – of the western plains

Boonwurrung – of the bays and south coast

Dja Dja Wurrung – of the northwest Loddon River

Taungurung – of the Goulburn River region

There are a considerable number of cultural heritage sites within Yarra Ranges. One such place of significance is Coranderrk Mission Station, home to many Indigenous people who were moved to Healesville from their traditional lands, under the direction of past protection and assimilation policies.

The Yarra River was a central resource for Indigenous communities in the area, and there are still many 'scar trees' to be seen along the river and inland, left behind by skilful canoe makers. The Yarra was a great source of food, as well as a way to travel to the various communities to trade and hold meetings.

3.3. CORANDERRK

In 1858 and 1859, a Parliamentary Select Committee of Inquiry recommended that land be set aside for the Aboriginal people. In 1862, a 2800 acre site was chosen in the Yarra Valley, which became known as the Watts River Reserve. This area includes what is today the main street of Healesville.

In 1863, Watts River Reserve was closed and the Aboriginal Protection Board approved the establishment of what became known as Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, a 2300 acre parcel of land south of the township of Healesville. Later that year, John Green (Manager of Coranderrk; 1862-1873), Simon Wonga and William Barak walked ahead of a long line of Kulin people on a trek from the Acheron to Coranderrk, through what became known as 'The Black Spur'.

By 1865, the population of Coranderrk numbered 105 people, making it Victoria's largest reserve at the time. The Indigenous residents cleared much of the property over the next four years, developing a thriving farming community. Coranderrk residents also established a bakery, a butcher, numerous houses and a schoolhouse.

In 1866, Coranderrk was allocated another 2500 acres, making it a total of 4800 acres. The residents cleared the land for farming and planted hops in 1872. Coranderrk became famous for its hops and won first prize at Melbourne Exhibitions.

Coranderrk became self-sufficient, growing all of its own fruit, vegetables and cereals to meet the needs of the Reserve. By 1874, there was a local push to close the Mission. Many Aboriginal people from the mission walked the 40 miles to Melbourne to protest to Parliament. It was eventually closed 50 years later in 1924, and the residents moved to Lake Tyers while some families remained.

Over time, Coranderrk was gradually taken away. Portions were sold off and used for farms including the Army School of Health and the Healesville Sanctuary, until all that remained was the half acre cemetery. The Coranderrk community fought for their land and were able to secure control of Coranderrk's cemetery. Indigenous Land Corporation funds were accessed to buy some of the land back, including the manager's house.[5]

The story of Coranderrk is one of great hope, success, sadness, betrayal, generosity, anguish, resilience and courage. These elements are still very much evident in the Indigenous community of Healesville today, particularly that of generosity and resilience. Inconsistent government commitments still have the capacity to revive past betrayals and trauma. Some sadness remains, but so too does great hope, optimism and courage.

5   Yarra Ranges Council, Reconciliation Paper [website], 2013, http:
yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Lists/Policy-directory/Reconciliation-strategy. (accessed 14 August 2014)

3.4. A DIVERSE CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY

Today, the Yarra Ranges Indigenous community is diverse, made up of traditional owners and family groups whose traditional lands are elsewhere; and some, because of past government policies, are unaware of their traditional lands.

Some of the Indigenous peoples represented in Yarra Ranges are the:

Taungurung, Goulburn River Region, Victoria.	Nunga, South Australia.
Gunai Kurnai, Gippsland, Victoria.	Nyoongah, South Western Australia.
Monero, Far East Gippsland and Southern New South Wales.	Wiradjuri, Central New South Wales.
Yorta Yorta, Central North Victoria.	Wotjabaluk, Wimmera Region, Victoria.
Kamilaroi, North Central New South Wales.	Pallawah, Tasmania.
Walpiri, Central Australia.	Dja Dja Wurrung, North West Loddon River, Victoria.
Wuthathi, Eastern Cape York, Queensland.	Mabuiag Island, Torres Straits.
Worimi, Central New South Wales.	Yolgnu, Top End, Northern Territory.
Gunditj Mara, South Western Victoria.	Bardi, Cape Leveque, Western Australia.

Given the complex cultural diversity in the Indigenous community within Yarra Ranges, it has been challenging to accurately portray what contemporary culture and cultural practice looks like. While there has been an historical decimation of culture, the irrepressible nature and resilience of local Indigenous peoples provide the connections for their culture to grow and evolve again in contemporary urban society. Through honouring the traditions and following cultural values to address prevailing challenges, the diverse Yarra Ranges Indigenous community is working together to reclaim, and reshape it's culture.

3.5. RECONCILIATION AND YARRA RANGES

The Yarra Ranges Council vision for Reconciliation as defined in Council's Reconciliation Policy is for a united community that recognises the special place and culture of Indigenous peoples as first Australians; and values their participation in all aspects of community, supporting equal life chances for all. In 1997 Council demonstrated its commitment to Reconciliation through the Statement of Apology and Commitment to Indigenous Australians launched that year. In doing so Yarra Ranges Council became the first local government in Australia to recognise and apologise for the past injustices and treatment of Indigenous people. The spirit of the Apology has now been enshrined in Council's Reconciliation Framework for Action, 2013-2023. Council also formalised its position in a Reconciliation Policy which ratifies the content of the previous Statement of Commitment to Indigenous Australians.

Council acknowledges that working towards Reconciliation is fundamental to healing past injustices towards Indigenous people, and is vital to community health and wellbeing. There is clear evidence that having control over decision making in our own lives has a significant impact on improving health and wellbeing.

3.6. INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To guide Yarra Ranges Council through the Reconciliation process the Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) was established in 2005. The IAC membership includes a range of Indigenous people from government, academia and community. Operating within its designated role as advocate on agreed issues, the IAC provides an effective platform for ongoing consultation between members of the Indigenous community and Yarra Ranges Council across a broad range of social, health and wellbeing issues.

Council and the IAC have a strong commitment to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing in Yarra Ranges. The IAC has advised Council of the need for strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities to be based on the concepts of Indigenous Ways of Knowing and the strengthening of culture.

3.7. THE CENTRALITY OF CULTURE

"Culture is fundamental to identity — it is our past, our present and our future...We need our culture to sustain us and to keep us well. But importantly, we need culture because it tells us who we are." [6]

After the European colonisation of South Eastern Australia, much Indigenous culture, cultural practice, stories, rituals and song lines were lost. Government policy at the time made it illegal to practice Indigenous culture, speaking in language was forbidden. The impacts of disconnection from culture in Victoria are clearly evident, and have manifested in a range of social and mental health issues, such as: loss of family connection, increased risk of chronic disease and early morbidity. In recognising these negative impacts, the IAC and Council have chosen to take a strength-based approach to lead change. This means working with the positives, the existing and emerging strengths and assets that exist within our community, such as the centrality of culture. This approach is both a model for community development, and an investment in local leadership and community itself.

The IAC and Council recognise that strategies aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities are more effective if underpinned by a strong cultural framework. A cultural framework respects and acknowledges the centrality of culture in the lives of Indigenous peoples. A cultural framework also describes the values and elements of that culture to ensure the application of their principles are informed and understood.

This view is underpinned by IAC members' life experience of cultural practice, research and reflection on the critical role that culture has on both individual and community identity and Aboriginality. This approach is also endorsed in the national discourse on Indigenous health and wellbeing.

"Culture and identity is a big part of who we are. It's about place, it's about pride, and it's about connections across the generations. You can put all the money you want into health, but unless you invest in culture and pride, you won't cut through. Culture encircles everything." [7]

Given the review of the academic research, qualitative data and the reflections of key Elders on the importance of culture, the IAC recommended to Council that community cultural development initiatives take a cultural strengthening approach, based on Indigenous Ways of Knowing as this is clearly fundamental to improving the lives of our Indigenous community.

6 Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, http://arts.gov.au/indigenous-culture-support-fs, cited in T. Calma, 'Our culture: Preserving the legacy,' speech given at the Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 2008. (accessed 14 November 2015)

7 J Eades, in M Kelly, 'Life is Health is Life' [website] https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/life-is-health-is-lif2011 , Melbourne, Melbourne, 2011, p. 29.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

3.8. OUR LIVING CULTURE

"Cultural knowledge is now as important as general literacy, numeracy or computer skills … It is like moving blindly through the world or trying to speak without a vocabulary." [8]

When asked, what local Indigenous culture is, local Elder Aunty Dot Peters replies, 'Indigenous culture is Respect, Caring and Sharing.[9] The IAC views Aunty Dot's Respect, Caring and Sharing as the 'values of culture' and informs their definition of Reconciliation as: 'A pathway to healing the past and moving forward toward a future of respect, caring and sharing with all cultures living in harmony
The interconnected values of Respect, Caring and Sharing are defined as:

Respect – An appreciation that leads to positive interactions even if there is not always an agreement. Respect occurs when people feel heard, acknowledged and are a part of decision making when possible. Respect honours individual and community rights while requiring personal and community responsibility, in an ongoing and reaffirming cycle. It includes respect for oneself, other individuals and the wider community, as well as upholding cultural protocols.

Caring – A genuine interest that seeks to achieve positive outcomes, possibly with no expected return. Caring is the result of understanding, compassion and being able to empathise with others without judging them. It includes care for oneself, other individuals and the wider community.

Sharing – A willingness to gift items of value, such as resources, knowledge and time, to enable good things to happen to individuals or the wider community. Sharing is maximised in an environment of trust and reciprocity. The concept adopts a contemporary cultural definition of sharing by including non-Indigenous friends as participants to appropriate group activities.

To help us understand the practical use of these values, local Indigenous Elder, Aunty Doseena Fergie explains we can situate the words in different positions to think through the importance of each one and their relationship to each other.

8 Charles, Landry, 'Culture & Urban Regeneration: Integrated Approach; The role of culture and creativity in the city (re)development', [website], 2006, p47 ,http://www.mdrl.ro/urbactII/urbact/projects/cultural_activities/UC-Integrated%20approach.pdf.

9 Aunty Dot Peters, Healesville Indigenous Elder Community Conversations, Healesville 2012

FIGURE 2

Respect, Caring and Sharing: If you say you respect me and my mob, my family, my group, you will show it by Caring for me/us and Sharing what is yours with me/us. Now let's swap ends and put Sharing first.

Sharing, Caring & Respect: If you share what is yours with me/us it shows you care and you will earn my/our respect. In this instance, you can see that the words Sharing and Respect pivot around the word Caring.

Caring, Sharing & Respect: If you care about me, you will Share what is yours with me/us and thereby showing me and my mob, my family, my community, Respect. In doing so you earn the Respect of my mob, my family and community, and on the cycle goes.

The three values can therefore be seen as existing in a symbiotic relationship with each one interdependent on the other in a never ending, reaffirming cycle. However, without the presence of 'Caring' the whole concept falls over.

Through participating in workshops and reviewing research, the IAC has identified the elements of Indigenous culture that provide an authentic platform to develop cultural strengthening initiatives. The IAC determined these elements to be those included in Figure 2.

If these five points are regarded as the central elements of culture, and one then considers that art is an artefact of culture, then it can be acknowledge that art has the capacity to capture the elements of Land and Country, Language, Family and Kinship, and Spirituality. Art and cultural practice can then also be regarded as a transmission point for this cultural knowledge. Therefore, artistic works and cultural practice such as painting and carving, story-telling, music, dance, ceremony and performance are all effective modes of cultural knowledge transmission.

Culture is known to be fluid, shifting and can change shape to reflect the needs of a contemporary community. Art, once understood as an artefact of culture and as a mode of knowledge transmission, can create the space for new stories to be written and told, and new cultural practice and ceremony to emerge. This concept underpins cultural strengthening initiatives such as HICSA's Cultural Strengthening through the Arts, and Yarra Ranges Council projects outlined in Appendix 2.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cultural integrity has been the fundamental guide informing both project design and decision making. This has meant an incorporation of common research practice elements into an interpretative filter of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Project development, implementation and evaluation were all conducted following local Indigenous cultural values. This approach honoured the key strategic Reconciliation directions developed by the IAC.

Initial conversations with ACELG noted that a project of this scope was a new experience for local government. It acknowledged that a project of this nature was breaking new ground as it sought to integrate mainstream ethical research requirements with cultural authenticity and integrity. In the past, mainstream Western research has attempted to be respectful, while unintentionally maintaining a dominant perspective of research methodologies. Consequently, project design elements included:

- foundational attention to Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing
- adherence to core cultural values of respect, caring and sharing
- participatory action research (PAR) methodology and
- incorporation of the principles of Dadirri and Mirrim ngarn ga.

4.1. THE YARRA RANGES CULTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR RECONCILIATION

Yarra Ranges and the IAC developed a useful Framework for Reconciliation (the Framework) to inform a host of Council projects and processes. This ensures the Indigenous Way of Knowing is acknowledged and that the cultural competency of the organisation continues to build. The Framework lifts relevant Council organisational and community outcomes to a higher level of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

The key components of the Framework are:

- The Cultural Strengthening Approach – creating opportunities for culture to be experienced, practiced and grown in order to strengthen identity and improve health and wellbeing
- The core cultural values – Respect, Caring and Sharing
- The elements of culture – the contexts in which culture is practiced, the pathways for strengthening culture.

These are graphically represented in Figure 3. Where applied, the Framework ensures the inclusion of an Indigenous perspective in a range of local government processes that can include:

Strategic and community planning	Community Development
Capital Works	Events and exhibitions
Policy and strategy development	Municipal Public Health planning
Decision making	Project/program development and implementation

The concepts captured in Figure 3 have been adopted as the Yarra Ranges Cultural Framework for Reconciliation. An extensive list of the number of Council processes and initiatives that the Cultural Framework has informed at Yarra Ranges Council can be found in Appendix 2.

Respect

Family & Kinship
Country
Spirituality
Language
Art & Culture

Sharing

Caring
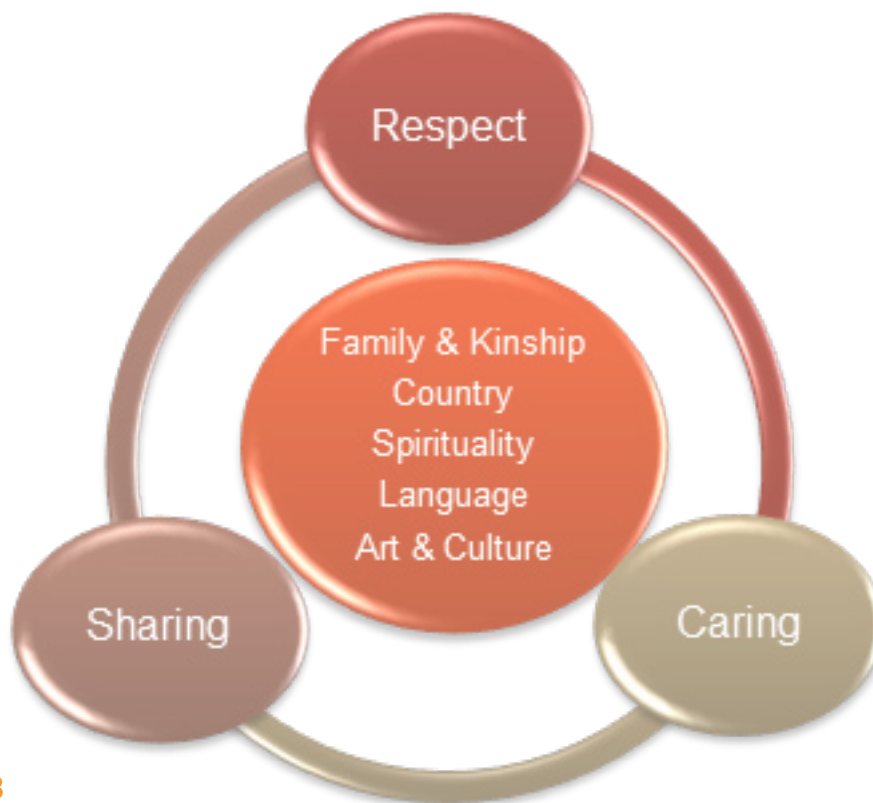
FIGURE 3

4.2. DADIRRI / MIRRIM NGARN GA

The project was conducted in accord with the principles of Dadirri from the Daly river area of the Northern Territory. Dadirri as a research methodology was developed by Aboriginal researcher Judy Atkinson (2001) based on the work of Miriam Rose Ungunmerr from the Ngangiwumirr language group and stipulates the principles and processes required to respectfully engage with Aboriginal communities. Dadirri means inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. It is a 'tuning in' experience. Dadirri recognises the inner spirit that calls us to reflection.[10] The local term for Deep Listening in the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjeri people is 'Mirrim ngarn ga'. To ensure that local cultural authenticity is maintained, the principles described are referred to as Mirrim ngarn ga. Mirrim ngarn ga captures and facilitates the Aboriginal concept of 'listening to one another' as a way of learning. It is listening with an open heart; it's not only about what is said, but what is not said.

Project finding: It's not so much about a difference in perceptions of reality or which world one resides in. It's about extending the sense of what reality is so it's multi-dimensional, sentient beyond the visible. Essentially this is about acknowledging the existence of information beyond that experienced by the five senses. It is a central and essential part of the Indigenous cultural space. This fundamental tenet of culture needs to be

10 M Ungunmerr-Baumann, Deep listening (Dadirri) [website] http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/education/deep-listening-dadirri#axzz3zGqYWTXM. 2015 (accessed 14 October 2015)

understood by the corporate, government and service sectors if they wish to deliver effective services in 'Closing the Gap'. But what is it we are listening to? We're listening to the wisdom of the past as it emerges through Deep Listening, through Mirrim ngaan ga, whispering in our ears, the voices of the ancestors. Receiving and processing information and knowledge beyond the capacity of the five senses is very much part of the life of our urban Indigenous community.

4.3. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

PAR differs from conventional research in three ways. Firstly, it focuses on research whose purpose is to enable action. Action is achieved through a reflective cycle, whereby participants collect and analyse data, then determine what action should follow. The resultant action is then further researched and an iterative reflective cycle perpetuates data collection, reflection, and action as in a corkscrew action. Secondly, PAR pays careful attention to power relationships, advocating for power to be deliberately shared between the researcher and the researched: blurring the line between them until the researched become the researchers. The researched cease to be objects and become partners in the whole research process: including selecting the research topic, data collection, and analysis, and deciding what action should happen as a result of the research findings. Conventional research methods see the world as having a single reality that can be independently observed and measured objectively, preferably under laboratory conditions where all variables can be controlled and manipulated to determine causal connections. By contrast PAR posits that the observer has an impact on the phenomena being observed and brings to their inquiry a set of values that will exert influence on the study. Thirdly, PAR contrasts with controlled approaches that remove data and information from their contexts. Most health research involves people, even if only as passive participants: as 'subjects' or 'respondents'. In positive contrast, PAR advocates that those being researched should be involved in the process actively. [11]

Participatory research methods are geared towards planning and conducting the research process with those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study. Consequently, this means that the aim of the inquiry and the research questions develop out of the convergence of two perspectives – that of the researcher and that of community. In the best case, both benefit from the research process. This is why PAR as a research methodology is considered to be culturally appropriate. It gives as much as it takes.

By engaging HICSA as field researches, PAR in the context of the Project directly involved the local Indigenous community, working in partnership to affect change, based on self-reflective inquiry. This process is considered "directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture and local context and embedded in social relationships. It affirms that experience can be a basis of knowing and that experiential learning can lead to a legitimate form of knowledge that influences practice". [12]

11 F Baum et al. Participatory Action Research, [website] 2006 http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2566051/, (accessed 15 November 2015.
12 ibid

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

4.4. THE REFERENCE GROUP

A reference group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and cultural advisors was established to advise the researchers on all aspects of the project, including quality, ethical considerations and cultural integrity. Particular attention was given to ensuring that the cultural voice directed and guided both processes and activities. At the inception meeting, the Indigenous members present provided sound advice and strong direction as to the need to ensure the project implementation followed the principles of Mirrim ngarn ga and Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. Mirrim ngarn ga sits within Indigenous Ways of Being, Doing and Knowing as a learning and communicating practice steeped in ancient tradition. Indigenous reference group members also undertook a critical role in analysing data through the Indigenous lens.

4.5. RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

The research seeks to better understand how the health inequities of Indigenous Australians in a contemporary urban context can be improved through cultural strengthening initiatives. The overarching research question is: How can cultural strengthening initiatives build connections to culture and cultural identity, and how can this be measured?

The research had four main aims:

- Build new knowledge about the meaning and importance of 'culture' and 'cultural identity' in a contemporary urban context
- Measure how a 'Cultural Strengthening Through the Arts' program can build connections to culture and strengthen cultural identity
- Support local governments to undertake culturally sensitive, appropriate and rigorous research and evaluations to ensure best-practice in policy development
- Support Indigenous community organisations in particular to demonstrate the importance of culture and identity, the link to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, and the value of cultural strengthening programs.
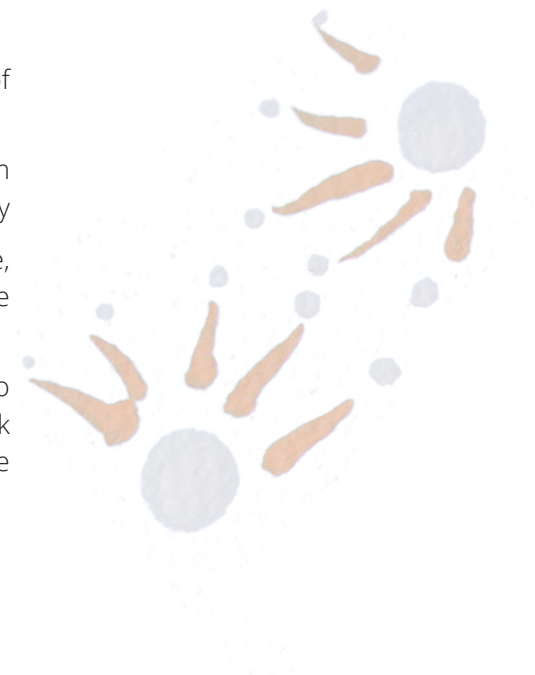
4.6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

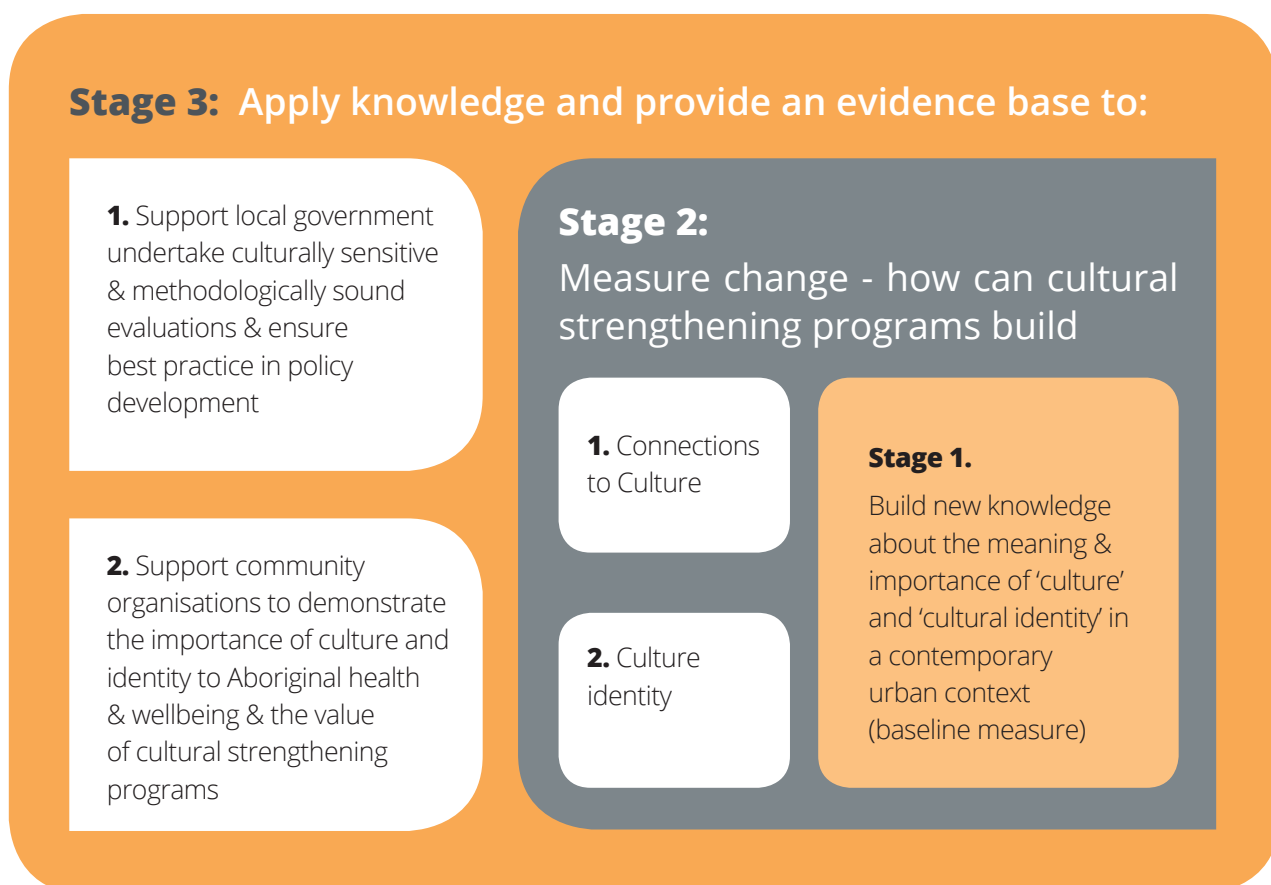A community information session delivered prior to research commencement explained to community the intent of and justification for the research to ensure alignment with their priorities. The researchers were clear that the Intellectual and Cultural Property Rights of the research knowledge will be owned by community, with agreement to share the knowledge, or part thereof (depending on the sensitivity of the knowledge),

to interested stakeholders including the academic community in line with the research outputs. A second community session was held at the end of the research to inform community about the research findings and to validate the interpretation and representation of the research findings. The positional attitude of the non-Indigenous researchers was also important. They acknowledged and conducted themselves with awareness that they were only the conduit for the data to come together, since ownership of the project belonged to community.

4.7. PROJECT STAGES

The Project was segmented into three stages.

Stage 3: Apply knowledge and provide an evidence base to:

1. Support local government undertake culturally sensitive & methodologically sound evaluations & ensure best practice in policy development

2. Support community organisations to demonstrate the importance of culture and identity to Aboriginal health & wellbeing & the value of cultural strengthening programs

Stage 2:

Measure change - how can cultural strengthening programs build

1. Connections to Culture

2. Culture identity

Stage 1.

Build new knowledge about the meaning & importance of 'culture' and 'cultural identity' in a contemporary urban context (baseline measure)

Stage 1.   Build new knowledge about the meaning and importance of culture and cultural identity in a contemporary urban context.

Stage 2.   Measure change – how can cultural strengthening programs build:
   - Connections to culture
   - Cultural identity

Stage 3.   Apply knowledge and provide an evidence base to:

- Support local government to undertake culturally sensitive and methodologically sound evaluations and ensure best practice in policy development

- Support community organisations to demonstrate the importance of culture and identity to Indigenous health and wellbeing and the value of cultural strengthening programs

4.7. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Within the overall PAR model, the following specific methods were used to collect information/ data:

- A comprehensive literature review was undertaken by Dr Pauline Zardo from Onemda, Vic Health Group, University of Melbourne, capturing the nature, scope and learnings of previous works and how they can inform the current approach. Specific literature review topics identified by the Reference Group for consideration include:

  o   Research through the concept of Indigenous and Western Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing

  o   The effects of colonisation on culture, identity, health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples

  o   Culture and identity for young Indigenous people and people living in urban environments

  o   The value of cultural strengthening initiatives as a mechanism for strengthening culture, identity and wellbeing

  o   Effectiveness of Programs that focus on culture and identity to improve health and wellbeing

  o   Measuring the effectiveness of cultural strengthening programs and initiatives

- One on one interviews and focus groups. This enabled data to be gathered from research participants and their families. The researchers working with HICSA recorded the information that was provided by the participants, subject to their approval, in written or audio form.

- The in-direct research processes of observation aligned with Mirrim ngarn ga also informed the data collection process. This included observational data obtained by HICSA through engagement of the participants in the Cultural Strengthening through the Arts (CSTTA) program.

- Digital filming of the CSTTA program was also undertaken by HICSA as a component of program delivery. This visual information source, subject to permission, also served as a data source for the current research.

- Independent research undertaken by the researches of relevant academic journals, literature and other relevant sources.

THE HIP-HOP PROGRAM

As part of the delivery of the CSTTA program, HICSA engaged the Indigenous Hip-Hop Project (IHHP) as facilitators to run a series of Hip-Hop workshops after school once a week over three school terms. The IHHP is a team of hip-hop and performing artists who work nationally with Indigenous communities. Many of the artists are Indigenous and come from communities across Australia.

The CSTTA Hip-Hop program data was collected by HICSA in the following ways:

- Pre and post program interviews with parents and participants.
- Information captured from the cultural sessions held at the beginning and end of the Hip-Hop program. These sessions were run by HICSA staff to explore concepts of culture and identity with participants and parents.
- A series of program questionnaires based on understandings of health, social supports, self-awareness, physical activity and culture were designed for, and completed by, the young participants. The age range was seven to 16 years of age.
- A focus group of parents of participants and HICSA staff participating in the Hip-Hop program was conducted. Focus group participants signed an 'informed consent form' to allow their information to inform the Project.
- Data was analysed by a panel of Indigenous and non-Indigenous team from the academic and community sector.

5. BUILDING NEW KNOWLEDGE – URBAN IDENTITY, CULTURE AND COUNTRY

Research Aim: Build new knowledge about the meaning and importance of 'culture' and 'cultural identity' in a contemporary urban context

"Culture is defined in many ways and the debate about it has continued since the 19th century. For Aboriginal people it is an inherited strength and obligation, it has a spiritual dimension, it is law and history and tradition, a way for Aboriginal people to live together and a framework for interaction with the non-Aboriginal world and it is song and dance and other objects for Aboriginal people. Culture is a set of standards for perceiving, believing, valuing and acting that are imposed on, and make sense of the world, and that guide relationships and behaviours within a social group and with the environment (Country). Culture is both a set of rules and behaviours and a template that is inherited by one generation from another. It lies at the very core of Aboriginal identity." [13]

13 Department of Health Western Australia., 'Aboriginal Cultural Security, A background paper, http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwj4wvrJ9q_LAhWHjpQKHdobDwQQFggbMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.palmerston.org.au%2FLiteratureRetrieve.aspx%3FID%3D112992&usg=AFQjCNEXWguhWH9t4smejCCLiFYEpQAPSw (accessed 25 October 2015)

5.1. THE URBAN INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

In examining the intricacies of urban Indigenous identity it can be useful to explore what makes urban Indigenous communities distinctive and unique from other Indigenous communities such as remote or rural remote communities. A few clear distinctions become immediately apparent.

Generally, a remote community is one clan or language group or all have very close tribal links. Communities such as this tend to be the 'whole' community and are normally the traditional owners of the land they occupy. Within most urban Victorian Indigenous communities, traditional owners are a minority group with the majority having their traditional lands elsewhere. This is the case in Healesville where the local Wurundjeri community share the Indigenous social space with Indigenous people from across Australia. Like other urban Indigenous communities, this space is filled with an array of diverse interests, agendas and power structures, all grounded in a sense of Indigenous culture, identity, ethnicity and history. All these interests play out in time, shifting landscapes, identity and culture, all contributing to the construction of an ever-changing boundary of the Indigenous social space and defining the nature and the experience of the Indigenous community.

The impact of colonisation on Victorian Aboriginals was swifter than that experienced by those from more remote areas as Australia's southeast bore the brunt of European settlement.

This period was devastating to Victorian Aboriginal culture, talking in traditional language and practicing ceremony was forbidden by law. Many of the languages, the stories, rituals and song lines in Victoria were lost. As a result, opportunities for cultural participation in urban settings are now often less than those of remote communities, where, for example, traditional languages remain stronger, and where English is often the second or third language spoken.

However, "Aboriginal culture, like any other, is not static and Aboriginal people neither become bereft of culture when they 'lose' the traditional, nor are they suddenly transformed into non-Aborigines". [14]

This is supported by findings from Dr Pauline Zardo in the literature review. "In urban environments experiences and practice of culture and belonging can be complicated by a range of different factors. Formal bureaucratic constructions of 'Aboriginality' are currently centred on Aboriginal descent, identification as an Aboriginal person, and acceptance as Aboriginal by one's community. However, as Hansen and Butler (2013) have argued, non-Aboriginal people have constructed views of urban Aboriginal identity as illegitimate or 'less authentic'". [15]

14 M Morrisey,. et al., 'Chapter 15: Culture as a Determinant of Aboriginal Health', Beyond Bandaids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health, Lowitja Institute [website], http://www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/Beyond-Bandaids-CH15.pdf 2007, p. 245, (accessed October 2015)

15 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p. 6.

This 'illegitimate or less than authentic' stigma is also a distinctive difference between remote and urban Indigenous identity as the contestation of identity of those from remote communities is seldom undertaken. The issue has the capacity for further complexity as Indigenous identity is at times contested within Indigenous urban communities themselves, as some within seek to determine who is 'black', who is not and who gets to decide.

Dr Pauline Zardo's literature review notes that the non-Indigenous constructed views of urban Indigenous identity "…(have) resulted from false perceptions including that that urban Indigenous people have 'lost' culture and connection to land and language, are not dark skinned and do not perform traditional 'Aboriginality' as expected. It has been suggested that Aboriginal people residing in urban locations are not as deserving of social and economic support as those living in remote communities, and that any health and welfare issues they experience are due to 'individual pathologies' and not affected by social determinants of health". [16]

The false perceptions referred to in Dr Zardo's literature review emerged publicly in Healesville during 2006 where issues concerning local Indigenous identity, in particular, were contested in the local press. The view supported by a few challenging the validity of urban Indigenous identity argued anything less than half-caste could not possibly be considered Indigenous.

Dr Zardo's literature review again, Hansen and Butler (2013) explain:

"The myth that Aboriginal people 'aren't around anymore' or, worse, that 'they're not real Aborigines' continues to play out in public and private settings every day, nowhere more so than in our town and cities.

However research by Yamanouchi (2013) and Thompson (2013) showed that despite these barriers, Aboriginal people living in urban environments develop and utilise organisations, programs and initiatives to come together and support or strengthen culture and identity". [17]

Uncle Alan Wandin, Senior Wurundjeri Elder, resolves the issue when he notes 'If you have a cup of coffee and add milk, it's still coffee'.

Another distinction between the urban and the remote is that Victorian urban Indigenous communities exist within larger non-Indigenous communities and are generally very much in the minority. As a minority within broader Western communities, Victorian urban Aboriginals are presented with unique issues regarding identity, culture and its relationship with health and wellbeing.

17 Ibid.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

"Aboriginal health is deeply affected, not just by Aboriginal culture, but also by the exposure to non-Aboriginal cultures and subcultures of various sorts. In fact Aboriginal culture itself has been profoundly altered by these contacts (as the history of the last 200 years makes blindingly obvious), and probably continues to be altered in ways that are often not so obvious" [18]

Minority Indigenous urban communities are compelled to engage with the broader non-Indigenous community that they are situated within. How this dynamic between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members plays out is a defining factor and a key determinant in the uniqueness of that community. It is interesting to note that this dynamic also makes a contribution to setting the boundary of the local urban Indigenous social space.

This dynamic also has the capacity for positive experiences to occur. The positive interaction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in sports such as Australian rules and netball played at the local level has been well documented. How this plays out locally can contribute to the identity of the whole community and Healesville has a long, proud heritage in this space.

An example of a community-identifying event occurred in 2015 as the broader Healesville community celebrated their 150 year anniversary. The local Indigenous Elders and community proudly led the street parade. The genuine appreciation for the value of the history, culture and the Indigenous peoples of Healesville themselves, from the non-Indigenous peoples was clearly evident during the parade and the ensuing activities. The Healesville 150 celebrations added richness to the experience of the whole Healesville community, further defining identity and producing significant Reconciliation and community healing outcomes.

5.2. THE HEALESVILLE RECONCILIATION MODEL

Opportunities for Indigenous community engagement and consultation can also produce profound outcomes. For example, in 2007 extensive Indigenous community consultation was undertaken regarding the development of a community cultural centre in Healesville with a focus on a youth space. The young Indigenous residents engaged in the conversations made it clear any Indigenous youth space needed to include room for their non-Indigenous friends. They did not see the separation between different cultures. Young people were young people, they went to school together, played sport together and they were mates.

18 M Morrisey, et al., Culture as a Determinant of Aboriginal Health', Beyond Bandaids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health, Lowitja Institute [website], 2007, www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/Beyond-Bandaids-CH15.pdf. p. 241(accessed October 2015)

This factor became a key driver in establishing local Indigenous services based on what is known in Healesville as the Reconciliation model. The Reconciliation model is based on inclusivity, recognising Healesville is one community. This model has been embraced by organisations such as HICSA in both programming and governance structures. For example: HICSA's Cultural Strengthening through the Arts program embraced the Reconciliation approach where non-Indigenous children, eager to participate in a respectful manner, were made welcome.

The Reconciliation model that emerged through the 2007 Healesville Indigenous community youth consultations remains an identity defining feature of the local Indigenous community. The Healesville urban Indigenous identity has been shaped by a range of factors based on the community's connection to local culture. The nature or character of the distinctive local culture, distinctive from all others, has influenced this identity.

Dr Zardo's literature review notes "...*positive connections with culture are critical to positive self-identity and health and wellbeing for young Indigenous people. Wexler (2009) explains that engaging with culture and building an identity connected to culture and history provide young people with a framework to understand their current location and experience in relation to the present, past and the future".* [19]

Project findings: Despite the challenges of living an existence immersed in a dominant Western society, the Aboriginality or cultural identity of Indigenous people living in urban communities is no less authentic than those living in remote communities. The identity of Indigenous peoples living in urban communities is determined by cultural connections as much as those from elsewhere. As all Indigenous communities are different, it is the nature or the intricacies of the culture of a particular place that is variable, not the connection to it. The connection to culture is a deeply personal matter and it's up to each individual to determine the nature of that connection.

5.3. IDENTITY, WHITENESS AND RACISM

"On an individual level, exposure to racism is associated with psychological distress, depression, poor quality of life, and substance misuse, all of which contribute significantly to the overall ill-health experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Prolonged experience of stress can also have physical health effects, such as on the immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems." [20]

19 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p. 6.

20 P Anderson, NACCHO Aboriginal Health News Alerts, NACCHO Aboriginal health and racism : What are the impacts of racism on Aboriginal health [website], 2015, http://nacchocommunique.com/2014/02/28/naccho-aboriginal-health-and-racism-what-are-the-impacts-of-racism-on-aboriginal-health. (accessed 20 November 2015)

The prevalence of racism is an inescapable fact of life in this country and therefore can't be ignored in any discussion regarding Indigenous identity and health; it is systemic and institutionalised into the social pillars of our dominant white society. The evidence that racism is alive and well in Australia is compelling.

One young Hip-Hop participant asked a HICSA program worker why black kids get treated worse than white kids. A HICSA program staffer mentioned growing up in a NSW country town with the Aboriginal kids all supporting each other against blatant racism at the local school and in the mainstream community.

Examples of racist behaviour include ridicule, racist abuse, property damage, racial harassment, racist propaganda, racial vilification and physical assault. It also includes practices that exploit or exclude members of particular groups from aspects of society. Australian history includes extreme examples of racist behaviour such as ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Institutional racism is often the most difficult to recognise and counter, particularly when it is perpetrated by institutions and governments who do not view themselves as racist. For example, parts of Australia's justice system include laws such as mandatory sentencing. In 2000 the UN's Committee against Torture called the mandatory sentencing laws in Australia racist.

According to journalist John Pilger, mandatory sentencing laws have given Aboriginal people:

> *"...an imprisonment rate at least as high as that of apartheid South Africa, and have been a primary cause of one of the highest suicide rates in the world, among young Aborigines".* [21]

The rationalisation of racial oppression by racist ideology is a key way in which systemic racism operates and is central to its reproduction. Racist ideology often asserts that whites are superior to people of colour for biological or cultural reasons, and manifests in stereotypes, prejudices, and popular myths and beliefs. These typically include positive images of whiteness in contrast to negative images associated with people of colour, such as civility versus brutishness, chaste and pure versus hyper-sexualized, and intelligent and driven versus stupid and lazy. [22]

This form of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform. It regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and cultural groups and disadvantages and marginalises others. [23]

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21 J. Pilger cited in Creative Spirits, Aboriginal Culture, Law & Justice, Mandatory sentencing, [website], 2014, www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/mandatory-sentencing#axzz3obKpRrNd. (accessed 5 October 2015)

22 Wikipedia, 'Institutional Racism', [website], https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systemic_racism. (accessed 6 October 2015)

23 Racismnoway,'Fact sheets: Institutional Racism', [website], www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/32.html. (accessed 7 August 2015)

Racism manifests in many ways. A focus group parent spoke of a non-Indigenous extended family member who when on a camping trip and asked the name of his dog, to be told it was 'Abo'. The Aboriginal parent, disguising hurt and anger, replied calmly 'Well me and my kids won't be calling it that and will think of another name to call it'. This lack of understanding by many within the current white paradigm presents ongoing challenges to Reconciliation and perpetuates the myth of Aboriginals being less than equal or at times, thanks to novel interpretations of Darwin's Origin of the Species, less than human. All present at the focus group noted the Western need to feel superior as something they've grown up with. They acknowledged there is something in the 'Whiteness' of the current social majority that reinforces stigma and prevents many Western eyes from understanding the correct nature of the Indigenous story and the disadvantage that continues to perpetuate racism.

One mother from the parent's focus group made the popular point that the current dominant (white) system reinforces its own values through all levels of education. She also had the view that the successful 1967 referendum captured international views on social justice at the time rather than an acceptance of Indigenous people by mainstream Australia. All focus group members noted the ignorance of 'white Australians' as a constant source of amazement and disappointment along with the frustration of the perceived 'gravy train' notion that many believe provides Aboriginals with a free ride in life.

Dr Zardo's literature review notes the *"Lack of recognition and respect for Aboriginal history and culture and the impacts of colonisation and racism on health and wellbeing have affected Aboriginal people's ability and willingness to access mainstream health, education, employment, housing and other mainstream private and public services. Whilst there have been significant efforts and advances toward recognising and addressing Aboriginal history and the trauma and loss caused by colonisation and stolen generations, as well addressing and supporting contemporary needs and issues; research shows that racism and intergenerational trauma continue to affect the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. Past and continued colonisation, and the racism that underpins these issues, can negatively affect Australian Aboriginal peoples' opportunity and ability to engage in cultural practice and to learn and teach Aboriginal culture and history within their communities."* [24]

> *"Irrespective of its sources, racism is racism. Ignorance is no excuse. Insecurity is not justification... racism in all its forms should be uncompromisingly condemned."* [25]

24 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. P 4

25 Professor Michael Dodson in Understanding - What is Racism [website] http://www.racismnoway.com.au/about-racism/understanding/((accessed 3October 2015).

5.4. RACISM, CULTURE AND RECONCILIATION

Members of the focus group have all experienced different levels of racism in Healesville and elsewhere. They strongly supported the view that racism is alive and well in urban areas and activities that build identity by facilitating cultural connections within a culturally appropriate environment and led by community, provide a sense of resilience and internal strength that can reduce the impact of racism.

Racism is a learned phenomenon; children are not born choosing to discriminate against others for the way they look. One Indigenous focus group mother of young children noted her kids are yet to place importance on the ethnic differences in the local community.

Providing opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children to grow together, learning to embrace cultural diversity as a natural part of life can have a significant impact on the prevalence of racism. The Reconciliation programming model mentioned previously has demonstrated many benefits to participants, the schools, parents and the wider community. Most importantly, it created a stronger connection between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids providing an environment for young people and the community to grow together, valuing each other and respecting each other's culture. The model has the capacity to build a united community that recognises the special place and culture of Indigenous peoples as first Australians; and values their participation in all aspects of community, supporting equal life chances for all.

Embracing Reconciliation programming that targets early years and primary aged children in particular, can therefore be considered an effective community strengthening initiative. Cultural strengthening programs that build stronger connections to family and community, and that raise self-esteem and pride in culture, are also shown to be effective responses to negative social attitudes such as racism.

> *"Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures contain natural protective and wellbeing factors such as kinship networks; and language, culture and cultural identity have been found to be key protective factors that predict resilience in children.*
>
> *According to the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association and the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association, connection to land, family, culture and spirituality can protect against ill health and serious psychological distress.*
>
> *Identifying, participating in and engaging with culture are essential to the development of strong and resilient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people."* [26]

26 Australian Government, 'Culture and Closing the Gap', Office for the Arts, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, [website], http://arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/indigenous/closing-the-gap/ccg-factsheet.pdf.

5.5. BUILDING IDENTITY

"Culture and identity are central to Aboriginal perceptions of health and wellbeing." [27]

Dr. Zardo's literature review suggests, "For young people experiencing disadvantage, hardship and/or racism, being connected to and learning from culture, community and history helps them to see why and how they have come to experience disadvantage and helps them understand that the causes of this are not internal or 'their fault'. Engaging with culture and community also provides the opportunity for positive role models and experiences of strength, resilience, success and survival to influence their self-identity and self-esteem." [28]

While Indigenous identity is a very personal thing and is experienced differently by each individual, it can be nurtured through support and encouragement from parents, family and other positive role models. One mother made the point that her Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents encouraged her to embrace her Aboriginality while growing up, which she still does as an adult. A non-Indigenous father mentioned encouraging his Aboriginal son to embrace his Aboriginality and have pride in Aboriginal identity. Today the young man expresses gratitude for that encouragement, his pride in his identity as an Aboriginal man is evident. Another mother also expanded on her two boy's personalities as being completely different but, thanks to positive parental influence, both are very much aware and proud of their Indigenous heritage.

A parent mentioned the difficulty in knowing what teenagers are thinking, so it's hard to know exactly how culture and identity plays out in their minds. When discussing her own teen daughters, 'I tell my kids their Aboriginality is their business and its personal'. She spoke of a cultural project undertaken at her children's high school. As the only Indigenous students at the school, the daughters indicated a strong awareness the project was about their culture and were proud to have their grandfather, a senior Wurundjeri Elder, attend the school as part of the project. Her daughters made it known they were aware and proud of their Indigenous heritage throughout the project. The girls also performed at the MCG during AFL finals and the AFL's Reconciliation Round and enjoyed the attention. The cultural activities experienced by these urban Indigenous teenage girls played a key role in building identity, therefore resilience and self-esteem through strengthening pride and increasing connection to culture.

The effectiveness of cultural activities to build identity such as the example provided above was acknowledged by the data analysis team. They noted that it is not easy to make the cultural connection today in urban settings and that the Indigenous Hip-Hop program did what traditional dance used to do, in enabling

27 Department of Health South Australia, 'Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2004–2009', [website], p. 7, www.wchn.sa.gov.au/library/sah_aboriginal_cultural_respect_framework.pdf.

28 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. P 6

expressions of culture, but also provided the space for culture to be practiced in a communal setting. The HICSA Cultural Strengthening program provided the space for notions of Indigenous identity and the individual realisation of it to be explored through contemporary cultural practice.

At the initial program cultural session, the pre-teen participants were asked to name a local Aboriginal person and not to say Aunty Dot (well-known local Elder). After a time the penny dropped when one of the participants claimed 'I know one, me, I'm an Aboriginal', others soon followed. The teenage participants would have gone straight to 'Me'. The data analysis team acknowledged that the age of a program participant was a determinate in the level of culture and identity that could be understood experientially and conceptually. The older students were observed to have a deeper capacity in their understanding and experience of their Indigenous identity than that experienced by the younger students. The data analysis team described this as 'not as a lack of capacity for the program to instil a meaningful sense of identity through cultural participation in the younger participants, but as a reflection of more traditional times when children's experience and learning of culture would be matched to their age and capacity'.

Project finding: As traditional children grew, their cultural teaching experiences would grow with them. This is the same for contemporary urban Indigenous children.

HICSA's cultural strengthening program was designed to enable a cultural experience that built identity through cultural activity across the age range of the program participants. The model used by HICSA built connections across the age ranges and empowered the older participants to embrace leadership opportunities and mentor younger children, much as in traditional times. One mother noted that her two teenage girls enthusiastically supported the younger children, mentioning this would not have happened without the program. A male teenager was observed to positively influence a younger boy by gaining his respect through positive behaviour and demonstrating cultural values of Respect, Caring and Sharing. It was noted by program staff that the younger boy's behaviour increased significantly and exhibited these values as part of his own experience. The sense of respect experienced by the male teenager strengthened his own sense of identity, culture and self-worth.

The Hip-Hop program culminated in a Hip-Hop routine written and performed by all the program participants as a collaborative activity. The routine featured strong cultural identity themes in supporting healthy and positive lifestyle choices. The performance has been captured on DVD; the growth in the strength of 'sense of Indigenous identity' of all the program participants is evident. The focus group parents and the data analysis team made it clear that raising children in a culturally supportive and positive environment and community nurtures the growth of Indigenous identity and this is transcending the stereotypical notions of Indigenous identity in the Healesville urban context.

Project finding: Cultural strengthening programs and initiatives such as those offered by HICSA and other ACCO's have proven to be an effective mechanism for building and reinforcing positive notions of Indigenous identity through cultural strengthening activities. The inclusive Reconciliation model can be regarded as a powerful Reconciliation tool in strengthening both personal and community's resilience and connectedness.

5.6. UNDERSTANDING THE URBAN CULTURE / COUNTRY CONNECTION

"Despite being the most fundamental pillar of Indigenous identity, the connection that Aboriginal people feel to our country is one of the hardest concepts to explain to the layman. Connection to Country is inherent, we are born to it, it is how we identify ourselves, it is our family, our laws, our responsibility, our inheritance and our legacy." [29]

While mainstream community tend to think of country as meaning land and land use, for Aboriginal people Country is the core of all spirituality and this relationship and the spirit of 'Country' is central to the issues that are important to urban Indigenous people today. While 'Land' is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, it's more expansive and all-encompassing importance is referred to as 'Country'. It is natural then that the traditional owners of Healesville, located in the heart of Wurundjeri Country in the Yarra Valley, feel this deeply.

"It doesn't matter where I go, which direction away from these mountains, but when I come back, and see them, I know I'm home." [30]

5.7. WURUNDJERI COUNTRY AND CONTEMPORARY CORANDERRK

As the traditional owners of this area, the local Wurundjeri community's experience is different from all others. Today as yesterday, this Country is their story. The status of traditional owner can bring a certain burden of responsibility and custodianship. How this plays out in this urban context is never static, it's always evolving. The local Wurundjeri community has the responsibility for the cultural heritage of this area and to ensure cultural protocols are upheld. It's their responsibility to offer the Welcome to Country and Smoking ceremonies and other specific cultural activities such as language reclamation that honour traditional practice and continue to grow culture, thereby making it accessible to all. The demand for their cultural and heritage services grows exponentially as does the demands placed on them by those seeking such services.

29 C. Liddle, 'Why a connection to country is so important to Aboriginal communities', Daily Life, [website], 2015, www.dailylife.com.au/life-and-love/real-life/why-a-connection-to-country-is-so-important-to-aboriginal-communities-20151021-gkf0nj.html. (accessed 24 November 2015)

30 B. Collins, Wurundjeri woman, 'Sharing Our Stories', DVD, Indigenous Community Services Association Yarra Ranges Council, Healesville, [online video], 2013, www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Community/Reconciliation. (accessed 3 November 2015)

A key determinant shaping local Indigenous identity, culture and connection to Country is Coranderrk Aboriginal Mission Station, widely regarded as the spiritual home of Aboriginality in Victoria. Coranderrk, alive and influential, exists in the hearts of all Indigenous Victorians as all have ancestors buried there. The mere mention of Coranderrk evokes deep emotion in many; its name is interwoven with the legendary stories of men such as Simon Wonga, William Barak and John Green. Within the story of Coranderrk, the totality of the agony and tragedy of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australia is plain for all to see.

Today the local Wurundjeri community controls the last remaining acreage of Coranderrk. The local Wurundjeri have held a series of festivals and events at Coranderrk to not only honour the pride and dignity of the original inhabitants, but to make its story available to the lives of the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that seek it out. The Illbijeri theatre company tours nationally with its play of Coranderrk, We Will Show the Country, a re-creation of the 1881 Royal Commission into the future of the Mission Station. A Victorian Year 10 High School curriculum on Civics and Citizenship examining the Coranderrk story is currently under development. The story is also underpinning academic research on how the enduring legacies of past injustices continue into the present, despite official responses designed to redress them, and to foster new ways of thinking about structural justice in the present and future.

According to local Indigenous leader and academic Andrew Peters, "The connection with Land is the underpinning concept of all Indigenous Culture and all Indigenous Knowledge, and without that connection, in essence the Culture is fragmented at the very least and destroyed at the worst." [31] The contemporary relevance of Coranderrk as Country, identity and culture to the local urban and Victorian Indigenous community is therefore profound.

Through the local Wurundjeri community, Coranderrk remains a centre of cultural gravity where the land, people, culture connection continues to grow and offers healing and wellbeing to Indigenous people through that connection. Coranderrk provides a tangible or physical place for community to anchor connections to Country too. The local Wurundjeri people are currently developing opportunities for Coranderrk, to offer mainstream people an authentic Indigenous experience through an emersion in the concept of the land, people and culture connection. Despite its official closure in 1924 the story of Coranderrk is not about to end anytime soon.

> *"It is the People, Land Culture connection and the way we represent ourselves in the world around us and the way we adapt to that environment that hasn't really changed for 60,000 plus years, and probably won't change, and that's the message I'm hoping we can get non-Indigenous people to recognise and embrace, because they're part of that culture."* [32]

31 A. Peters, 'Sharing Our Stories', DVD, Indigenous Community Services Association Yarra Ranges Council, Healesville, [online video], 2013, www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Community/Reconciliation. (accessed 3 November 2015)

32 Ibid

Country and protocol

As the Yarra Ranges is the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people, people outside culture might wonder about the potential for conflict to arise as those with traditional land elsewhere seek to claim a 'pseudo' ownership of this Country. This does not present issue or challenge the Wurundjeri people's natural connection to their traditional lands or cultural heritage responsibilities. A well understood cultural protocol is the central role of the traditional owners as stewards or custodians of a particular Country. As such this protocol has particular relevance in diverse Indigenous communities and is respected by all.

This protocol may however present an issue for Indigenous Australians living off Country in cultivating a meaningful relationship or connection with the Country they're currently on. How can Indigenous health be improved through better connections to Country, if you're living on someone else's?

Community Signage, Meeting Place Garden, Healesville

Recently, HICSA and the local Traditional Owner group, Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation signed a Memorandum of Unity (Understanding) to provide a strong platform for both organisations to assist each other achieve their aspirations. The Memorandum of Unity offers a symbolic and culturally appropriate mechanism for the Traditional Owners and the broader Indigenous community to respectfully co-exist on Wurundjeri Country, working together, and to recognise the value of continued collaboration and identification of opportunities to improve the health and well-being of Healesville's Indigenous community. The strong relationship between HICSA and Wandoon Estate enables the participation in a range of Caring for or Belonging to Country programming activities, designed to promote health through connection to Country, in partnership, and with the blessing of, the Traditional Owners. The local Wurundjeri community remain most welcoming of Indigenous peoples from elsewhere.

The data analysis team agreed that Healesville engenders a natural attraction to various Indigenous peoples with traditional lands elsewhere and provides them with a legitimate sense, in line with Indigenous protocol of traditional ownership, of connection to this Country. As previously discussed, the connection

to Healesville as Country does not require the surrender of original place, or seek to replace 'belonging' to distant traditional lands.

For example, it was noted that the connection to the lands surrounding Healesville by those with traditional lands elsewhere was indeed spiritual in nature, and while providing a meaningful sense of 'Belonging', it was a distinctly different experience than that of their own Country. One Elder mentioned that while her ashes will be going back to their traditional lands, she experiences a strong but unexplainable spiritual connection to Healesville. Another Elder whose homeland is in NSW mirrored this view. All noted the Indigenous spirit is alive and well in Healesville and agreed that despite being off Country, they feel their ancestors with them.

The focus group and data analysis process clearly identified Healesville as a centre of cultural gravity attracting Indigenous people from elsewhere. Some mothers with kids in the program, originally from NSW, mentioned an undeniable attraction to Healesville even while not knowing its story from afar. Program staff and HICSA board members whose experiences were similar supported this. It was noted that the other suburbs and townships within the Yarra Ranges did not instil a similar sense of attraction, connection and belonging.

Dr Zardo's literature review explains: *".... studies show that Aboriginal people who come to urban environments from other locations are part of community and kinship in the place that they come from, and also in the urban places they reside and visit. In Thompson's research Aboriginal people described how Redfern has provided a community for Aboriginal people from all over Australia as both residents and visitors. Yamanouchi found that experience of community for Aboriginal people in Western Sydney was centred on shared communication and participation".* [33]

The data analysis team noted that where such a sense of 'Belonging' is established, it cannot exist without a sense of connection to Country and that this connection is of a natural, spiritual nature. Once this concept is understood, opportunities for healing or promoting Indigenous health through connection to Country can be developed around it.

Project finding: Where an urban Indigenous community establishes itself, centred on shared communication and participation, a unique Indigenous community identity and a connection to that place, of that Country, that is spiritual in nature, naturally emerges. The nature of this connection does not require the surrender of original Country links or seek to replace 'belonging' to distant traditional lands.

A long time Healesville Indigenous resident and HICSA program staffer noted witnessing non-Indigenous people develop a deep connection to Healesville, and struggle to stay away once they had moved on, with many returning. Can non-Indigenous people embrace Indigenous concepts of Country and connection to place?

A poem by local Indigenous Elder, Aunty Doseena Fergie, offers insight into Indigenous Ways of Knowing, regarding the fundamental cultural element of Country and those with traditional lands elsewhere. The following is 'Country' by Doseena Fergie, on travelling from far north Queensland to live and work in the Yarra Valley:

33 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. P 6

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

I am a visitor you know. This Country is not where I was born

Yet she welcomes me as friend, daughter, sista, mum and garma.

Four months I travelled across from land to sea.

And what did I feel, what did I hear, what did I see.......

Country, you have many faces, you have many voices,

Your beauty lies in the soil, waterways, wind, Red Gum, cockatoo and kangaroo

Yet though your voice appears silent, your body is scarred and twisted

For tyranny and pain became yours when the tall ships came

Even now your depths are being ravaged by the economist's greed.

"Devoid of life?" "NO"

For in the stillness of the bush I can feel them. Yes I can see them..... watching and waiting - yearning to be acknowledged.

For they have known the life of caring, respect and reciprocity.

They are the holders of knowledge - of culture past. There is no need for them to bridge two worlds.

Source: Aunty Doseena Fergie

This poem talks to us on many levels. It speaks of the separation of nature from Western societies where nature is regarded as something to dominate and to conquer. It talks of the Earth as the mother of life with its beauty and its voice that can be seen and heard through, earth, wind, water, and plants and animals. It speaks of a time across eons when man and nature were one and that nature is waiting for man to again walk on this land, at one with all that exists. It understands 'Knowing' from beyond the five senses.

This is looking at nature and the world through Indigenous eyes. It is Country through Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

> *"We say to everyone, not only Aboriginal people, that there is a place on this land for everyone, so it is their responsibility to look after and nurture this place like our ancestors did for many thousands of years, for the future generations."* [34]

Project Finding: It is apparent that Healesville offers particular Indigenous Australians an authentic connection to Country that is unique. The uniqueness can be described as difficult to understand from the non-Indigenous or five sense perspectives, however it is available to all when viewed through the Indigenous lens with concepts of Country, the non-separation of land, nature and people. It is the land, people and culture connection that provides Healesville with its unique gravitational pull. The pull can be felt by many as a unique resonance with an energy of place and as a notion of 'there's something here for me' that can be more easily understood through the lens of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

5.8. INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, BEING AND DOING

In this time of post-colonisation in the local context of Yarra Ranges, the term 'Indigenous Ways of Knowing' refers to and acknowledges the ways that Indigenous people in our contemporary urban society integrate their culture with an urban way of life. Some local Elders refer to this as living in two worlds. This complex space is about bringing into balance notions of Country, spirituality and living in an urban community. Indigenous Ways of Knowing includes receiving and transmitting information and knowledge that is beyond that of the five senses to determine.

Karen Martin has expanded the view of Indigenous Ways of Knowing to a broader understanding: Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and is described as an ontology, epistemology and methodology for Indigenous culture and life. Martin (2003) defines Indigenous ways of knowing as:

> *"Ways of Knowing is specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups...learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging, applying. Ways of Knowing also entails processes that allow it to expand and contract according to social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals, the group and interactions with outsiders. So this incorporates the contexts as well as the processes. It is more than just information or facts, but is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways at certain times."* [35]

34 Murphy, Aunty Joy., Senior Wurundjeri Elder, 'Sharing Our Stories', DVD, Indigenous Community Services Association Yarra Ranges Council, Healesville, [online video], 2013, www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Community/Reconciliation.

35 K. Martin, 'Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing: a theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous re-search and Indigenist research', [website], 2003, Queensland University of Technology, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/7182/1/7182.pdf. P 10 (accessed 25 November 2015)

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

Ways of being are 'about the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of Country and self'. Martin explains that:

"Our Ways of Being evolve as contexts change. For instance relations change amongst people at particular times such as movement from one life stage to another, or with a birth or death of a member. Relations amongst Entities are also effected in this same way hence the passion and determination behind protection of the Land, Waterways, Skies and Spirits and all Entities." [36]

Ways of being are learned and exercised through relations with Country and kin, in particular through Elders. Ways of being are described as understanding and establishing one's identity, interest and connections through and by relations with other Aboriginal people. As a result of colonisation, Indigenous people now engage with many different Aboriginal people from different Country and kin. Martin explains that "in these circumstances we draw upon what we know and have been taught from our Elders and family members as proper forms of conduct. Through this, our Ways of Being shape our Ways of Doing".[37]

Martin describes Indigenous ways of doing as:

"...a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. These are seen in our: languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation and social control. Again these are life stage, gender and role specific...Our Ways of Doing express our individual and group identities, and our individual and group roles...we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing)". [38]

Why is it important to understand these perspectives? To be part of effective solutions to Indigenous disadvantage, it is critical to have a clear understanding of the world view of the community you're engaging with. This is particularly relevant for local government working at the grass-roots level with a range of varying cultural communities. This understanding can also facilitate a change in perspectives: many a researcher, evaluator, health professional or others exposed to Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing have had their worlds changed.

Project finding: It's not so much about difference in perceptions of reality, or which world one resides in. It's about extending the sense of what reality is, so it's multi-dimensional, sentient beyond the visible. Essentially, this is about acknowledging the existence of information beyond that experienced by the five senses. It is a central and essential part of the Indigenous cultural space. This fundamental tenet of culture needs to be understood by the corporate, government and service sectors if they wish to deliver effective services in

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 K. Martin, 'Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing: a theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous re-search and Indigenist research', [website], 2003, Queensland University of Technology, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/7182/1/7182.pdf. P 11 (accessed 25 November 2015)

'Closing the Gap'. But what is it we are listening to? We're listening to the wisdom of the past as it emerges through Deep Listening, through Mirrim ngarn ga, whispering in our ears, the voices of the ancestors. Receiving and processing information and knowledge beyond the five senses is very much part of the life of our urban Indigenous community.

6. MEASURING CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PROGRAMING

Key research question: How can cultural strengthening initiatives build connections to culture and cultural identity within an Indigenous urban context, and how can this be measured?

The importance of building connections to culture and cultural identity have been strongly highlighted throughout this report. The particular and diverse needs arising in an urban context discussed in earlier sections of this report, have indicated how valuable and important cultural community development programs are as strengthening and protective factors for the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

In this section we will explore what the project findings have to offer to further our understanding on the second part of the question: how can this be measured?

6.1. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AND INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

Evidence-based research and analysis used in Western evaluation design is often not appropriate or constructive when applied to Indigenous health and wellbeing. According to Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "academic knowledge is organised according to disciplines and fields of knowledge that are grounded in Western 'ways of knowing' and are therefore inherently culturally insensitive. Western research simply interprets Indigenous knowledge from a Western framework, effectively distorting reality. In Australia, Indigenous researchers have claimed that Western research has led to a continuing oppression and subordination of Indigenous Australians in every facet of Australian society, to the point that there is nowhere that we can stand that is free of racism". [39]

There are many examples of inappropriate Indigenous research that points to how we go about acquiring knowledge in Indigenous communities is just as critical for the elimination of health disparities – if not more so – as the actual knowledge that is gained about a particular health problem. An important negative impact

39 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in Cochran et al., 'Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community', International Human Rights Funders Group, [website], 2008, www.ihrfg.org/sites/default/files/Indigenous_Ways_of%20Knowing.pdf. P 23 (accessed 10 September 2015)

of inappropriate research methods, no matter how laudable the intent of the researchers, is that they can reduce the validity and reliability of research findings, thus minimising the utility of the conclusions and wasting the time of participants.

Project finding: In our technological driven corporate research world the temptation is to move everything at a fast pace. Traditional and contemporary culture teaches us, and those that would engage in Indigenous research, to stop, centre themselves and listen open-heartedly to all that is said and unsaid. Herein lays a fundamental difference in research and evaluation of Western and Indigenous cultural programming. The normal quantitative and qualitative approaches to research and evaluation completely misses the essential 'cultural gold nuggets' as they fail to register on evaluation surveys.

Project finding: A key element identified in collecting and analysing data is the need to consider the impact of the 'Telling' and the 'Listening' and be aware of how this can contribute to a community's growth as this is a traditional way of information transmission. This has the capacity to impact on the ongoing growth of local Indigenous culture, particularly in urban areas as campfire story- telling and listening remains popular.

6.2. ETHICS OF MEASUREMENT

Given the weight of evidence of the significance and positive influence of connection to culture, it could be tempting to suggest that a logical next step would be to develop and implement evaluative indicators of cultural connection. However, it would only be logical from a mainstream and Western view of research methodology. The central issues here relate to authenticity and cultural respect. If we are genuine about working to improve the social determinants of health for Indigenous people, then we need to place cultural respect and self-determination at the forefront of the way we approach program design, implementation and measurement.

Australian history is heavy with the burden and impact of past practices of 'measuring' Aboriginality. These included skin tests, notions of 'blood content' which arose from the Victorian Half-Caste Act 1886.[40] This was an extension and expansion of the Aboriginal Protection Act which gave extensive powers over the lives of Indigenous people to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, including regulation of residence, employment and marriage.[41] None of these were useful to anyone. They were glaring evidence of cultural dominance, structural injustice and racism, and their implementation by those setting the political agenda at the time, has left a well-deserved legacy of mistrust amongst Indigenous community about mainstream attempts to measure anything, especially culture.

40 An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria.
Victorian Government Gazette, 'Half-Caste Act Victoria', Australasian Legal Information Institute, [website], 1886, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/hist_act/tapa1886265.pdf.
41 Ibid.

At the same time, program sponsors and funders have an obligation to assess whether or not funded activities are achieving their aims. Local leaders have been very clear that it is not the business of mainstream organisations to be involved in matters to do with measuring or assessing cultural identity. In an ideal situation, evaluation of cultural strengthening programs would sit with the community. How can this dilemma be solved?

Fortunately, the way forward is clear. We are guided by local community Elders and leaders. As Dr Zardo explains in her Literature review: "Many of the evaluations (of cultural strengthening initiatives) used qualitative interview and participatory action research approaches which allow Indigenous participants to describe in their own words and in their own way their experience of a program and their views on what the program has achieved and why. Privileging Indigenous voices, knowledges, and practices in the process of program development is critical to developing (and evaluating) programs that are relevant to communities that individuals want to engage in, and both individuals and communities can benefit from." [42]

By following cultural protocols, the issue and the proposed ideas can be discussed with local Elders and leaders. Once guidance and consent from Elders and leaders is established, programming can proceed in a planned and systemic way which has inbuilt consultative processes with community that monitor and ensure ongoing cultural safety and appropriateness. If it is not received then the program does not proceed.

For any program to be successful, it is important that some prerequisite conditions are met. In the next section, a Culturally Appropriate Evaluation Framework (CAEF) outlines the composite elements that enable local government and mainstream organisations to work respectfully together with local Indigenous community in the program evaluation space. It identifies the prerequisites and implementation steps necessary to ensure cultural safety and promote successful program implementation.

Project finding: Privileging the Indigenous voices, making visible the knowledges and practices in the process of Indigenous participants, their families and community, to describe in their own words and in their own way of their experience of a program and their views on what the program has achieved or not achieved and why, is an effective and culturally appropriate way of evaluating the effectiveness of cultural strengthening programming.

Project Finding: Culturally appropriate evaluation and research cannot exist without the presence of the ancestors, the Elders and community.

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42 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p 13

6.3. CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

How can cultural strengthening initiatives build connections to culture and cultural identity within an Indigenous urban context, and how can this be measured?

Content – Relationships and capacity

There are some fundamental prerequisites and four guiding principles that set the foundation for local government and other agencies to enter effectively into culturally appropriate program evaluation of funded community cultural strengthening programs.

Entering into close engagement with Indigenous communities to develop and deliver community strengthening programs requires local officers, engaged in the programs, to be culturally safe, in both their conduct and practice. This implies they will have:

- A good level of awareness of local culture

- A strong understanding and recognition of the social determinants of Indigenous health and wellbeing

- Heightened sensitivity to the past and present impact of major social and cultural destruction caused by Stolen Generations, cultural and land dispossession, endemic racism and continuing social and structural oppression

- The capacity to engender trust and respect

Advanced cultural safety capacities imply skills in deep listening such as those associated with dadirri/ mirram ngarn ga and a commitment to self- reflective practice.

As Cochran et al explain, "it is clear that how we go about acquiring knowledge in Indigenous communities is just as critical ……as the actual knowledge gained". [43] This applies to both program design and delivery. The 'how' needs to start with acknowledging the centrality of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. Using the precepts such as those embedded in Participatory Action Research models, ethical program design situates the locus of control with community, via respectful consultation, strong community participation and other methods that visibly demonstrate an acknowledgement of Indigenous Ways of Knowing Being and Doing.

Planning of programs requires effective engagement with, and inclusion of, local Aboriginal organisations to ensure a participant-led process. The time required to do this will be dependent on the status of existing

43 Cochran et al., 'Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community', International Human Rights Funders Group, [website], 2008, www.ihrfg.org/sites/default/files/Indigenous_Ways_of%20Knowing.pdf. P 23 (accessed 10 September 2015)

relationships. If the relationships are new, this will extend the time required for the program development stage. Staff will need to be introduced and then take the time to establish credible relationships with the local Aboriginal organisation. Skipping this stage is disrespectful and will jeopardise the proposed program.

Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing encompass an Indigenous view of health and wellbeing. Mainstream views currently focus on a combination of determinants and metrics of health indicators. An Indigenous view of health and wellbeing encompasses the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

Principles

- Acknowledgement of social determinants of Indigenous Health: the ongoing impact of the Stolen Generation, cultural and land dispossession, endemic racism
- Centrality of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing
- Indigenous view of health
- Reciprocity

Prerequisites

- Cultural safety
- Capacity for Mirrim ngarn ga
- Program resources
- Established and effective connections with local Aboriginal organisations
- Implementation – Quality and quantity (manner/inclusiveness)

Methodology

- Partner with local Aboriginal organisation/s
- Base project design and implementation on a culturally respectful model such as PAR
- Include the voice of community by involving Elders and community leaders in project design

Outcomes – Effectiveness, magnitude and satisfaction

- Data collection and analysis
- Story telling mode
- Community Centred: capture and include the perspectives of Elders, facilitators, community leaders and family on the impact of the program on participants
- Use the mental health, wellbeing indicators
- Participant experience assessment (age appropriate)

PREREQUISITES

- Capacity for mirim ngan ga
- Established and effective connections with local Aboriginal organisations
- Program resources

CAPACITY

- Principles
- Acknowledgement of the ongoing impact of: Stolen Generation, cultural and land dispossession, endemic racism
- Centrality of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing
- Indigenous View of health
- Reciprocity
- Cultural Safety

IMPLEMENTATION

- Methodology
- Partner with local Aboriginal organisation
- Base project design and implementation on a culturally respectful model such as PAR.
- Include the voice of community by involving Elders and community leaders in project design

OUTCOMES

- Data Collection and analysis
- Story telling mode
- Capture and include the perspectives of Elders, facilitators, community leaders and family on the impact of the program on participants.
- Use the mental health, wellbeing or specifically designed indicators

7. THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ORGANISATION:

BRINGING CULTURE AND HEALTH TOGETHER

Project aim: Support Aboriginal community organisations, in particular to demonstrate the importance of culture and identity, the link to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, and the value of cultural strengthening programs.

7.1. COMMUNITY INFORMED, ENGAGED AND CONTROLLED

The evidence outlined in this report and elsewhere that 'culture and identity are central to Indigenous perceptions of health and wellbeing' is compelling. How then are effective ways to renew culture and build identity in urban contexts?

Dr Zardo's literature review notes, "only local Indigenous peoples can provide the cultural knowledge and information needed to develop culturally focused, culturally relevant, appropriate and safe programs". Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are different for different local communities, and this reflects the need for programs to be locally informed, and adapted to the needs and culture of local communities. Dr Zardo again, ".... studies showed the crucial role played by organisations and programs focused on building skills, strength, knowledge and positive identity for Aboriginal peoples in urban environments through connection with culture and community" [44]

> "Any real attempt to respond to Aboriginal culture must be based on creating a social space in which the lived reality of Aboriginal culture can assert itself over and against the social construction of that reality by non-Aborigines." [45]

Therefore, providing a safe physical, culturally appropriate space is essential for social interaction and cultural renewal to occur. In Victoria, the provision of culturally appropriate space for urban cultural renewal is the domain of the ACCO.

Project finding: ACCOs such as HICSA provide the essential social and physical, culturally appropriate space that acts as a central place for culture to renew itself within a broader non-Indigenous community.

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44 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. P 6

45 M. Morrissey et al. 'Chapter 15: Culture as a Determinant of Aboriginal Health', Beyond Bandaids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health, Lowitja Institute [website], 2007, p. 245, http://www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/Beyond-Bandaids-CH15.pdf. P 245

An ACCO provides a safe, welcoming and friendly, culturally appropriate space for social interaction and cultural connection that instils a sense of belonging. This culturally appropriate space fosters a sense of welcoming, and of being safe to be with one's self, the children, the Elders and extended family. The focus group were clear that they considered HICSA as a place where the cultural values of Respect, Caring and Sharing – and the cultural elements of family and kinship, Country, spirituality and language – pervade interactions within the community. It's a place where the past and the future exist in the present and is felt by tuning in to Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing and knowing intuitively that you share this with others. It is a place to experience Mirrim ngarn ga, a sharing of the presence of the ancestors, the land and the spirits. It creates a resonance with an energy that is ancient and exists in the land and people at the same time. It is a place that nurtures identity and the opportunity to find and know one's self and others, the land, Country and connections to the past and future. It's a place where the arts, cultural strengthening and cultural practice express these concepts of culture old, and of cultural renewal, to those of all ages. It provides a central place for Indigenous people to be Indigenous people, unfettered by mainstream influences.

Community members whose own story has resulted in disconnection from family ties and culture are supported to find the threads of their family history and reclaim familiar connections. ACCOs are a place where the ways of talking and sharing are still practiced. People find out what they need to know because ACCOs are, and know, families and community stories. In a time where the Stolen Generation aftermath continues to impact through communities, ACCOs provide a chance for reconnection and rediscovery of family.

The critical role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the value of the cultural strengthening programs they deliver in meeting specific local circumstance, and the culturally appropriate environments they create in fostering cultural renewal has been clearly shown.

Project finding: To experience positive health and wellbeing, Indigenous communities require positive cultural experiences that help develop a positive self-identity. Cultural strengthening programs delivered by ACCOs provide urban Indigenous communities with the opportunity for positive cultural experiences.

This approach facilitates the process to build on the strengths that exist within the community itself and encourages participation from community leaders and Elders. Dr Zardo's work: "Engaging in cultural activities with respected Aboriginal community leaders, Elders and kin supports Aboriginal people to continue to build on their knowledge, expertise and successes to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities."[46]

46 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p 7

Project finding: Cultural strengthening initiatives and other services offered by HICSA are effective mechanisms for building and reinforcing positive notions of Indigenous identity through cultural strengthening activities designed to meet the distinctive needs of individual Indigenous community. These activities are effective in improving the health and wellbeing of the urban Indigenous community through positive reinforcement of identity and cultural participation.

Project finding: Existing in a non-Indigenous paradigm, urban ACCOs are the interface where non-Indigenous and Indigenous service sectors and communities can interact. Through this interface, Western and Indigenous culture and influences flow. ACCOs such as HICSA are, therefore, able to exert an awareness of, and make visible, Indigenous culture to the broader non-Indigenous community, breaking down notions of stigma, influencing community identity and adding richness to the community social space.

7.2. THE HEALTH/CULTURE CONNECTION

The report has established that to be part of effective solutions to Indigenous health it is necessary to have an understanding of how Indigenous peoples view their health.

> *"Aboriginal health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life."* [47]

Dr Zardo's literature review makes several references to this point. These include: "……. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have consistently identified that their health and wellbeing outcomes are intertwined with cultural experience and identity. This has been reflected in and supported by research that has explored and empirically demonstrated the impact on and associations between culture and identity and health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples around the world" and "Connection to culture, community, family and Country is recognised as a key social determinant of Indigenous health and wellbeing that must be addressed to 'close the gap' in health outcomes". [48]

47 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), 'Definitions', [website], www.naccho.org.au/aboriginal-health/definitions. (accessed 19 August 2015) empirically

48 See Appendix 1. P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p 8

This knowledge has been held by Victorian Indigenous communities for many years and is now making its way into a range of government and other mainstream health and policy sectors. The centrality of culture to health and wellbeing is also reflected in the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's (VACCHO) strategic plan for 2013-2016. Their number one goal is ensuring that the diverse cultures of Victorian Aboriginal peoples are reflected in all aspects of VACCHO's activity. Keeping culture central in all aspects of their work and the programs and services delivered to the community, by and through VACCHO, is expected to strengthen and support 'inclusion, understanding and health' of Victorian Aboriginal peoples. [49]

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT: RECONCILIATION, RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS HEALTH AND WELLBEING
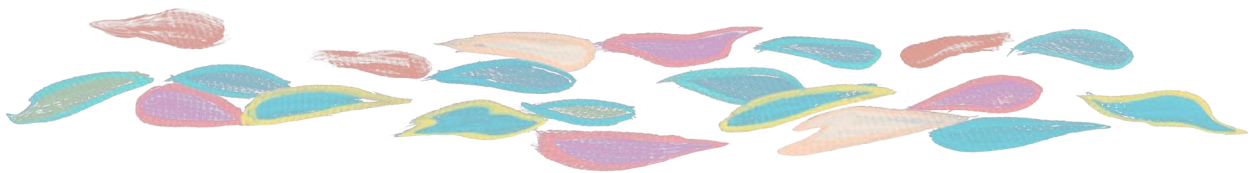
Project aim: Support local governments to undertake culturally sensitive, appropriate and rigorous research and evaluations to ensure best practice in policy development.

Local governments are well placed to work with Indigenous communities to drive positive change in areas such as employment and economic development, health and wellbeing, recognition and respect, civic participation, access to land and protection of cultural heritage.

The examples of the Reconciliation activities and policy approaches undertaken by Yarra Ranges Council provided (Appendix 2) are by no means a definitive list of all that Victorian local governments are undertaking. Victorian local governments are doing much in the Reconciliation space and this work continues to build. An informative resource on Victorian local government Reconciliation activities can be found at www. maggolee.org.au. However, the Yarra Ranges Council approach of privileging the Indigenous voice through the IAC, embracing cultural strengthening and Indigenous Ways of Knowing as key strategic Reconciliation approaches to strengthen community, improve health and reduce disadvantage are, according to Professor Mick Dodson, best practice initiatives within the sector. [50]

49 Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), 'VACCHO Strategic Plan 2013-2017', [website], 2013, www.vaccho.org.au/assets/01-RESOURCES/TOPIC-AREA/CORPORATE/VACCHO-STRATEGIC-PLAN-2013-17.pdf. (accessed 9 September 2015)

50 Professor Michael Dodson, 'Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Connecting Community to Country Symposium', Healesville, 2015.

CULTURE

This report has described the benefits for government at all levels, of increased knowledge about the importance of culture and its link to health and wellbeing outcomes. The report outlines methodologies to inform and enhance the capacity of local government authorities to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities and organisations in the spirit of equality, respect and reciprocity. The Culturally Appropriate Evaluation Framework provides local government with a tool to undertake culturally sensitive, appropriate and rigorous research and evaluations to ensure best practice in strategy and policy development, such as Municipal Public Health Planning. It shows the effectiveness of investing in Indigenous cultural development in achieving tangible outcomes in reducing the over-representation of disadvantage experienced by Victorian Indigenous communities.

Dr Zardo's literature review acknowledges "…….that cultural strengthening activities must be determined and led by Aboriginal people and can be supported by non-Aboriginal people. Governments and other organisations can assist by providing, for example, funding, community centres and other resources that support Aboriginal people to develop and/or reclaim social spaces to practice and assert cultural ways of knowing, being and doing". [51]

The core capacity building approach that Yarra Ranges Council takes in supporting HICSA through partnership grants, funding submission development, strategic planning and advocacy is a direct investment in the strengths of the community and in the leadership within community itself. This particular community partnership approach is a reciprocal relationship that is evident through the strong participation on Council's IAC and the generosity of the IAC members in informing a range of Council policy, strategy and action plans that include the Environment Strategy, The Family and Child Strategy, the Municipal Public Health Plan and the Lilydale and Healesville Structure Plans. ACCOs such as HICSA are the interface between urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous interaction. Supporting an ACCO has direct Reconciliation outcomes in reducing disadvantage and social issues such as stigma and racism.

Project finding: Local governments can play a key role in 'Closing the Gap' on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous urban communities through supporting Indigenous community organisations. An investment in an ACCO's sustainability and capacity is an effective investment in local leadership and of the health and wellbeing of the Indigenous community itself.

The Cultural Framework for Reconciliation and culturally appropriate evaluation and research framework outlined in the report provide local governments with a sound and culturally sensitive approach to research, evaluation, policy and program development, community consultation and engagement. The Framework also has the capacity to inform a range of local government processes that assist in the process of Reconciliation. Examples of the Framework's application by Yarra Ranges Council can be found in Appendix 2. It is hoped that stronger local government responses to Reconciliation will realise the Yarra Ranges Council Indigenous Advisory Committee's vision for Reconciliation of "a pathway to healing the past and moving forward toward a future of respect, caring and sharing with all cultures living in harmony". [52]

51 See Appendix 1.P. Zardo, 'Connection to Culture: Literature Review for the Yarra Ranges Council and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association', Onemda VicHealth Group, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2015. p 5

52 Yarra Ranges Council, 'Reconciliation Strategy 2008-2010', [website], 2008, http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Lists/Policy-directory/Reconciliation-strategy. (accessed 6 June 2015)

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THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

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10. APENDICES

PAULINE ZARDO

APPENDIX 1: CONNECTION TO CULTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE YARRA RANGES COUNCIL AND HEALESVILLE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Note on terminology: In this report the term 'Aboriginal people' is used to identify the First Peoples of Australia and is inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the two unique Indigenous populations in Australia. The term 'Indigenous' refers collectively to the First Peoples of Australia, New Zealand, North America and other countries around the globe. 'Non-Indigenous' is used to refer to those who do not identify as a member of the community of First Peoples of their respective countries.

About this review: This literature review was commissioned by the Steering Committee for the Yarra Ranges Council and the Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association 'Connection to Culture Research Project' to inform project development and evaluation.

OVERVIEW

For all human beings our health and wellbeing is bound up with our social experience. Identity is formed through our relations with and within our families, communities and culture. In Australia, colonisation and the forced removal of children, and the racism that underpins these issues, can negatively affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' opportunity and ability to engage in cultural practice, and to learn about and teach their culture and history within their communities.

Programs that support Aboriginal communities to engage with, share, learn about and teach culture have been found to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in both remote and urban settings. Culturally focused programs that have been most effective in improving health and wellbeing outcomes are those that have been identified, developed and delivered by, or in collaboration with, the Aboriginal community in which the program is to be implemented.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE, IDENTITY, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Cultural experience is critical to identity, health and wellbeing for all people

Research and theory from the fields of social science and psychology demonstrate that, for all human beings, health and wellbeing is bound up with our social experiences (Haslam et al. 2009; Eckersley, Dixon & Douglas 2001; Kitayama & Markus 2000). Humans have always lived in groups and throughout history have formed communities. Our individual and cultural identity develops through the relations and interactions we have with our families and communities, and with formal institutions such as schools, governments, religious or spiritual bodies and health care systems (Kitayama & Markus 2000; Suh 2002). We develop a sense of our place and role in the world, of what is normal and what is possible for ourselves through observing, learning about, experiencing and internalising the behaviour, practice and experiences of relatives, friends and teachers (formal and informal) and of the broader community (Haslam et al. 2009; Suh 2002). As Haslam et al. (2009) explains we are 'social beings whose well-being and intellect is bound up with [our] ability to lead fulfilling social lives'.

Our sense and understanding of our cultural identity develops from the particular way that our knowledges, practices, products, beliefs and norms are created and lived by our families, our communities and ourselves. This means that our ideas and experiences about health and wellbeing are shaped and affected by our relations with our families and communities. Through their research on wellbeing and happiness, Kityama and Markus (2000) found that:

... to feel good or to live a good life requires being able to realize culturally mandated ways of being. Wellbeing then is very much a collaborative project, one can't experience wellbeing by one's self; it requires engaging a system of consensual understanding and practices and depends on the nature of one's connections and relations to others.

This has been found in research with different cultural groups around the world (Eckersley, Dixon & Douglas 2001). Our experience of happiness, health and wellbeing is affected by our experience of identity and culture, which is in turn shaped by and intertwined with our relations with our families and communities. Put simply, to experience positive health and wellbeing we need to have positive cultural experiences that help us to develop a positive self-identity.

The effects of colonisation on culture, identity, health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples

For Indigenous peoples the world over, the experience of colonisation has had devastating negative effects on health and wellbeing (Gracey & King 2009; Stephens et al. 2005; Stephens et al. 2006). It has led to them being forced off and denied access to land and traditional ways of living, including their practice of culture and use of language. Colonisation resulted in rapid population decline through murder, disease and ineffective and inappropriate government policies that restricted or blocked rights and access to adequate food, housing, education, health care and employment (Cunningham & Stanley 2003; Broome 2005).

As a result of the experience of colonisation over the past 250 years in Australia, including the forced removal of children from their families and communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often experience poorer health and wellbeing (Broome 2005; Atkinson 2002; Reading & Wien 2009; Sherwood 2013). It has led to a significant gap between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal Australians on all indicators of health and wellbeing, such as life expectancy and chronic disease rates (Gracey & King 2009; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011; Waterworth et al. 2014). It has also been shown that Aboriginal Australians experience poorer health outcomes than Indigenous peoples in other colonised countries.

Lack of recognition and respect for Aboriginal history and culture and the impacts of colonisation and racism on health and wellbeing have affected Aboriginal people's ability and willingness to access mainstream health, education, employment, housing and other private and public services (Broome 2005; Hayman & Armstrong 2014; Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2013). While there have been significant efforts and advances toward recognising Aboriginal history, addressing the trauma and loss caused by colonisation and the Stolen Generations and supporting contemporary needs and issues research shows that racism and intergenerational trauma continue to affect the everyday lives of Aboriginal people (Ziersch et al. 2011; Paradies, Harris & Anderson 2008). Past and continued colonisation, and the racism that underpins these issues, can negatively affect Aboriginal

Australians' opportunity and ability to engage in cultural practice and to learn and teach Aboriginal culture and history within their communities (Broome 2005; Ziersch et al. 2011; Alfred & Corntassel 2005).

Despite the continual challenges, Aboriginal people have fought to protect and practise their culture, and to integrate and adapt it to new experiences in ways that are culturally appropriate and acceptable (Broome 2005). As such, Aboriginal culture remains strong, relevant and present for Aboriginal people (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2013). By engaging in cultural activities with respected Aboriginal community leaders, Elders and kin, Aboriginal people continue to build on their knowledge, expertise and successes to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013).

Culture, identity and health and wellbeing for contemporary Australian Aboriginal people

Culture has been increasingly recognised as a key social determinant of health and wellbeing in public, academic and government spheres (Department of Health and Ageing 2013; Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013; Anderson, Baum & Bentley 2007). Morrissey et al. (2007), for example, have explored and critically reflected on culture as a social determinant of health for Australian Aboriginal people. They found that:

o the concept of culture is difficult to define;

o definitions and understanding of Aboriginal culture are affected by the ideas and constructions of culture by dominant groups in society; and

o records and reflection on Aboriginal culture tend to ignore the last 25 years of history in which experience of life, health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people has radically shifted (Morrissey et al. 2007).

As a result they specifically do not attempt to define or describe all Aboriginal culture(s) - that is for Aboriginal people to do with and within their communities - and this review follows that direction. As Morrissey et al. (2007) explain that:

> *Aboriginal culture, like any other, is not static and Aboriginal people neither become bereft of culture when they 'lose' the traditional, nor are they suddenly transformed into non- Aborigines. Any real attempt to respond to Aboriginal culture must be based on creating a social space in which the lived reality of Aboriginal culture can assert itself over and against the social construction of that reality by non-Aborigines.*

These ideas link to the findings of a review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by Garvey (2008). The review identifies that there is a need for Indigenous peoples to 'gain acknowledgement in contexts that have otherwise excluded them' and to 'promote identity and culture in settings that have otherwise devalued them'. Garvey (2008) notes that:

> … ruptures to significant relationships and markers of identity including access to culturally significant sites and socially significant persons can serve to compromise the quality of an individuals or communities social and emotional wellbeing.

Connection to land, kin and community are central to Aboriginal culture traditionally and remain so in contemporary contexts. Garvey (2008) explains that 'social and emotional wellbeing is determined and supported by the quality of the nexus of relationships in which Indigenous people locate themselves'. Cultural strengthening programs and activities led by Elders and respected community members, therefore, provide critical opportunities and sites for Aboriginal people to build positive relationships and to connect to or practise culture (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013; Morrissey et al. 2007). Garvey's (2008) review highlights that Aboriginal people's individual experiences of health and wellbeing are bound up with the health and wellbeing of the whole community. This means that opportunities to engage with others in the community provide critical support for the development of positive health wellbeing.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

This also suggests that cultural strengthening activities must be determined and led by Aboriginal people and can be supported by those who are non-Indigenous. Governments and other organisations can assist by providing funding, community centres and other resources that support Aboriginal people to develop and/or reclaim social spaces to practise and assert cultural ways of knowing, being and doing (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013; Morrissey et al. 2007; Martin 2003).

Culture and identity for young Aboriginal people and those living in urban environments

In urban environments, experiences and practice of culture and belonging can be complicated by a range of different factors (Hansen & Butler 2013). Formal bureaucratic constructions of 'Aboriginality' are currently centred on one's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, and identification, and acceptance by one's community, as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person (Hansen & Butler 2013). However, as Hansen and Butler (2013) have argued, non-Indigenous people have constructed views of Aboriginal identity as illegitimate or 'less authentic', particularly with regard to those living in urban settings. This has resulted from false perceptions such as that urban Aboriginal people have 'lost' culture and connection to land and language, are not dark skinned and do not perform traditional 'Aboriginality' as expected (Hansen & Butler 2013).

As such, it has been suggested that Aboriginal people residing in urban locations are not as deserving of social and economic support as those living in remote communities, and that any health and welfare issues they experience are due to 'individual pathologies' rather than the effects of the   social determinants of health. Hansen and Butler (2013) explain:

> The myth that Aboriginal people 'aren't around anymore' or, worse, that 'they're not real Aborigines' continues to play out in public and private settings every day, nowhere more so than in our town and cities.

However, research by Yamanouchi (2013) and Thompson (2013) shows that despite these barriers, Aboriginal people living in urban environments develop and utilise organisations, programs and initiatives to come together and support or strengthen culture and identity. These studies also show that Aboriginal people who come to urban environments from other locations are part of the community and kinship in the place from which they come, as well as in the urban places in which they reside and visit (Yamanouchi 2013; Thompson 2013). In Thompson's research, Aboriginal people describe how Redfern, in inner-suburban Sydney, has provided a community for Aboriginal people from all over Australia as both residents and visitors (Thompson 2013). Yamanouchi found that the experience of community for Aboriginal people in western Sydney was centred on shared communication and participation (Yamanouchi 2013). Both these studies show the crucial role played by Aboriginal organisations and programs focused on building skills, strength, knowledge and positive identity for Aboriginal people in urban environments through connection with culture and community (Yamanouchi 2013; Thompson 2013).

Wexler (2009) has also discussed how positive connections with culture are critical to positive self- identity and health and wellbeing for young Indigenous peoples. These young people are often significantly affected by the trauma of colonisation visited on past generations, without having directly experienced it themselves (Wexler 2009; Atkinson 2002). Wexler (2009) explains that engaging with culture, and building an identity connected to culture and history, provide young people with a framework to understand their current location and experience in relation to the present, past and future. People who understand how past conflict and trauma has affected their families and communities are able to situate themselves in a larger picture of reality and possibility. It allows them to shift focus from their individual experience to a broader socio-cultural context that has more readily explains their present situation (Wexler 2009).

In other words, for young people experiencing disadvantage, hardship and/or racism being connected to and learning from culture, community and history helps them both to see why and how they have come to experience disadvantage and to understand that the causes of this are not internal or 'their fault' (Wexler 2009). Engaging with culture and community also provides the opportunity for positive role models and experiences of strength, resilience, success and survival to influence their self-identity and self-esteem (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013).

THE VALUE OF CULTURAL STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES AS A MECHANISM FOR STRENGTHENING CULTURE AND WELLBEING

Culture at the centre of government and Aboriginal community controlled health plans

The federal government Department of Health's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 places culture at the centre of priorities aimed at improving Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing (Department of Health and Ageing 2013). The four key principles of the plan include:

o   a health equality and human rights approach;

o   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control and engagement;

o   partnership; and

o   accountability.

In Victoria, the State government Department of Health (DoH) has delivered Koolin Balit, a strategic plan covering the period 2012-2022, to support and improve the health of Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Department of Health 2012). Koolin Balit targets areas where the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people health are largest, including life expectancy and   early childhood. It is emphasised throughout the Plan that culturally appropriate planning and delivery of services are critical to

improving health, and that Aboriginal communities and groups are best placed to inform and lead initiatives in this area (Department of Health 2012).

The centrality of culture to health and wellbeing is also reflected in the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's (VACCHO) strategic plan for 2013-2016. Ensuring that the diverse cultures of Victorian Aboriginal people are reflected in all aspects of its activity is VACCHO's number one goal. Keeping culture central in all aspects of its work, and the programs and services delivered to the community by and through VACCHO, is expected to strengthen and support 'inclusion, understanding and health' of Victorian Aboriginal people (VACCHO 2013).

Australian government and Aboriginal community controlled health plans consistently reflect the belief by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that their health and wellbeing outcomes are intertwined with cultural experience and identity. This has been supported by research that has explored and empirically demonstrated the impact on, and associations between, culture and identity and health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples around the world. This will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Current cultural strengthening programs and initiatives

Reflecting the increasing awareness and strong evidence base as to the critical role that culture plays on the development of identity and improving health and wellbeing, a range of cultural   strengthening initiatives has been developed and led by Aboriginal communities, government and non-government, private and not-for profit organisations. Community development programs that build cohesion within communities, cultivate leadership and assist local Elders both to support cultural diversity and to serve as community advocates have been identified as a key strategies for combatting racism (Paradies, Harris & Anderson 2008). In the following sections we describe and detail a broad range of programs that have focused on cultural strengthening and engagement to improve health and wellbeing in Australian Aboriginal communities.

The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (HealthInfoNet 2014) provides links and details of many cultural strengthening projects across Australia, all of which centre on culture and culturally appropriate and safe service delivery as key supports for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people and communities. The programs listed on the HealthInfoNet are currently underway and, therefore, have not been evaluated. They do, however, provide a valuable source of information and ideas around how Aboriginal culture informs and drives programs that seek to improve health and wellbeing. Examples of Victorian cultural strengthening projects include:

o **Brutha's day out program:** Aboriginal men come together in a culturally safe space to build stronger connections between men from different areas in Victoria. Topics discussed in the program include culture, health, healing, relationships, alcohol, drugs and gambling. The aim is to improve self-esteem, health outcomes and family relationships.

o **Bundji Bundji partnership program:** An outreach support program for young Aboriginal people who have been involved with the youth justice system.

o **Healing program:** A partnership program between Western medicine and Aboriginal culture that seeks to link spirituality with conventional treatments to address cycles of despair and addiction.

o **Healing ways - art with intent:** A collaborative project between the Dax Centre at the University of Melbourne, the Lowitja Institute and Desart exploring the role of art in promoting emotional healing and wellbeing in Aboriginal communities. The program seeks to facilitate discussions around past and present artistic and cultural practice. The program includes development of a symposium, exhibition and online materials.

o **Wathaurong alcohol and other drugs program:** This program provides intensive case management and support for Aboriginal people and families with complex needs through supporting access to culturally appropriate services.

Programs with evidence of effectiveness

In 2013 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a report on a review of actions that have been undertaken to 'close the gap' in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013). In it, connection to culture, community, family and Country is recognised as a key social determinant of Aboriginal health and wellbeing that must be addressed if we are to 'close the gap'. The review, 'What works? A review of actions addressing the social and economic determinants of Indigenous health', examined and summarised the results from a range of evaluations of programs that aimed to strengthen Aboriginal health and wellbeing by supporting and enabling such connection.

The programs reviewed in the report included (but were not limited to) activities such as: healing camps; life skills training; men's and women's gatherings; weekly art groups; youth drop-in centres; family wellbeing services; art and narrative therapy; clinical services; Elder-led trips to Country for young people; leadership support; the use of technology to document and 'map' culture; culture, language and bush skills development; employment skills and support; nurturing respect for Elders; individual and family counselling for specific issues, such as being a member of the Stolen Generations and family violence; and services to support family tracing and reunions.

Key characteristics of programs that had successfully supported connection to culture, community, family and Country include:

o   being delivered by organisations with a clear direction, planning and vision;

o   being locally driven and led and owned by Aboriginal communities working in collaboration with community organisations;

o   building on traditional approaches and activities as pathways from healing;

o   involving Elders in the teaching of traditional culture and skills;

o   drawing on land and Country as a means to heal; and

o   building on the strengths of Aboriginal Australians and cultures to enable healing (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013).

The AIHW report is a recent and valuable source of information that has drawn together the limited numbers of programs that have been formally evaluated with published evidence of their effectiveness. That there remains limited high-quality data on program effectiveness is not unusual, however, as organisations delivering community-based programs often lack the resources and funding required to follow up and evaluate programs rigorously. The best program evaluations include the collection of data throughout the life of the project and evaluation project planning and budgets (Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey 1999; Weiss 1998).

Group and organisations involved in cultural strengthening projects

The programs listed on the HealthInfoNet, and also those reviewed by AIHW (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013), indicate that there are many groups and organisation involved in cultural strengthening projects. In addition, these projects are often developed and implemented through collaborations and partnerships between different types of organisations, such as:

o   charity organisations

o   football clubs

o   government - federal, State and local, often health, justice and environmental related departments

o   research organisations - universities and research centres institutes

o   not-for-profit organisations - e.g. Oxfam

o   arts centres

o   Aboriginal community controlled organisations

o   Aboriginal-specific centres and organisations (not necessarily community controlled)

o   educational institutes and providers

o   health providers and health centres

o   youth centres

o   schools - secondary and primary

o   courts and justice organisations

Successes and effects of cultural strengthening programs

The AIHW report (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013) provides both an excellent overview of the characteristics of programs that have been effective and a small number of case studies detailing those programs. To describe the effects and success of cultural strengthening programs in more detail, and how these have been measured, the following section focuses on papers collected as part of systematic reviews of research on the effectiveness of programs based on cultural knowledge, strengthening and engagement to improve health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people. These systematic reviews are currently being developed by the Onemda VicHealth Group and have not been published at the time of writing.

In the following table are examples of the research-based program evaluations that have been systematically collected by Onemda. The studies selected for inclusion all had a clear description of a culturally focused program that had been implemented and strong evidence of data collection and analysis regarding program effectiveness. The table provides a snapshot of these successful programs, the methods used to evaluate them and their results.

Table 1: Effectiveness of programs that focus on culture and identity to improve health and wellbeing

PROGRAM AND PUBLICATION DETAILS	PROGRAM FOCUS	SUCCESS AND EFFECTS	HOW EFFECTS WERE MEASURED
Keepin ya mob healthy: Aboriginal community participation and Aboriginal Health Worker training in Victoria (Adams & Spratling 2001)	Development of accredited Aboriginal Health Worker program - developed and delivered by Aboriginal people.	Aboriginal Health Workers successfully trained to Certificate III level. Extensive community consultation supported the outcomes.	Qualitative data analysis collected through feedback form. Training completion rates
Use of participatory research and photo-voice to support urban Aboriginal healthy eating (Adams et al. 2012)	Collaboration with an urban Aboriginal community to understand meanings of food and food insecurity, and strengthen responses to this issue.	Indigenous knowledge was a preferred and effective way of promoting understanding about food security and healthy eating responses.	Action research methods.
Improving access to hard-to-reach services: A soft entry approach to drug and alcohol services for rural Australian Aboriginal communities (Allan & Campbell 2011)	Program to increase individual and community control over the delivery of drug and alcohol interventions through access to a human services worker with specialist knowledge.	Substantially increased the number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women accessing drug and alcohol services.	Quantitative and qualitative evaluation.
Growth and empowerment for Indigenous Australians in substance abuse treatment (Berry et al. 2012)	Research on the degree to which service users value the cultural components of substance abuse treatment programs.	Culturally relevant therapeutic activities were perceived as more helpful among Indigenous peoples.	Quantitative survey at baseline and two follow-up time points.

Mibbinbah and spirit healing: Fostering safe, friendly spaces for Indigenous males in Australia (Bulman & Hayes 2011)	Program sought to build the capacity of men, their organisations and their communities to articulate the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal men in ways that are culturally relevant and appropriate. It also sought to build the confidence and trust required to access the resources and services necessary for dealing with the chronic conditions experienced by many of the participants.	Found that safe, well-facilitated spaces foster and further respect while they diminish lateral violence and its consequences.	Participatory action research.
Maternity care with the Women's Business Service at the Mildura Aboriginal Health Service (Campbell & Brown 2004)	The Women's Business Service based at the Mildura Aboriginal Health Service is a program providing personalised care that takes a holistic view of health during pregnancy, and reflects an Indigenous knowledge and approach to health and wellbeing.	Aboriginal women using the program were significantly more positive about many aspects of their care than those attending other rural public maternity services.	Qualitative interview.
A qualitative study of a social and emotional well-being service for a remote Indigenous Australian community: Implications for access, effectiveness, and sustainability (Carey 2013)	Social and emotional wellbeing service to address serious events such as suicides and relationship violence in a remote Aboriginal community.	The evaluation indicated that the service had been experienced by users as an effective local response to serious problems.	Qualitative interview.

Aminina Nud Mulumuluna ('You gotta look after yourself'): Evaluation of the use of traditional art in health promotion for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Davis et al. 2004)	Preventive health resources developed using traditional art and language for Aboriginal people in the west Kimberley region.	The resources were well accepted, fostered health discussions and contributed to the pride and self-esteem of local people. Collaboration and the integration of traditional and modern health knowledge contributed to a contemporary view of Aboriginal health.	Qualitative interview.
Build it and they will come: outcomes from a successful cardiac rehabilitation program at an Aboriginal Medical Service (Dimer et al. 2013)	The program involved weekly exercise and education sessions (through 'yarning') for Aboriginal people with, or at risk of, cardio-vascular disease at an Aboriginal Medical Service.	'Yarning' helped identify and address a range of chronic health issues including medication compliance, risk factor review and chest pain management.	Cardiovascular clinical health indicators measurement (e.g. heart rate, BMI, etc.).
Didgeridoos, songs and boomerangs for asthma management (Eley, Gorman & Gately 2010)	Program undertaken in 2007 and 2009 offered music lessons to Aboriginal children with asthma in a junior school, a senior school, an Aboriginal Medical Service and a community centre. Males were taught the didgeridoo and females singing and clap sticks. Associated activities of painting and boomerang throwing were also offered with the goal of improving asthma and wellbeing outcomes.	Respiratory function improved in males and both males and females reported increased wellbeing. The offering of music lessons is a culturally appropriate and enjoyable intervention to alleviate asthma, and promote general health awareness and engagement with medical services.	Respiratory clinical health measurement and qualitative analysis of feedback.

The Napranum Social and Emotional Wellbeing Week (Hartman et al. 2009)	A week-long intensive outreach project to the Aboriginal community of Napranum in Far North Queensland was undertaken by a Community Forensic Mental Health Service with the aim of developing the capacity for primary and secondary prevention of forensic mental health problems.	This form of community engagement can contribute to the de-stigmatisation of mental illness in Aboriginal communities, increased engagement between communities and mental health service providers, and increased cohesiveness and morale in these communities.	Qualitative interview.
Traditional Indigenous Games promoting physical activity and cultural connectedness in primary schools - Cluster randomised control trial (Kiran & Knights 2010)	Traditional Indigenous Games were introduced to improve physical activity and cultural connectedness among primary school students in the community renewal areas of Townsville in North Queensland.	The Games, delivered in primary schools every week over a period of three months, did not contribute to any statistically significant improvement in physical activity levels or cultural connectedness among the control groups.	A cluster randomised control trial using baseline and post-implementation surveys.
Evaluation of a community-driven preventive youth initiative in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia (Lee et al. 2008)	A community-driven initiative established to prevent substance misuse and increase respect for culture and their Elders among young people in a group of remote Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, the program provided a range of training, recreational and cultural activities.	Community-driven preventive initiatives offer enhanced youth resilience and connectedness in remote Aboriginal communities and alternatives to substance use.	Qualitative interview and pre- and post-analysis of data on youth school attendance, apprehension and substance use rates.

Work In progress: Creative recovery to creative livelihoods (Leenders, Dyer & Saunders 2011)	Creative recovery project is an innovative community-based Arts in Health initiative.	The Arts in Health model is both a culturally appropriate and sustainable model for the meaningful engagement of Aboriginal people living in remote communities experiencing mental health problems. These types of projects offer unique opportunities for social enterprise, utilising creativity as the tool for social inclusion.	Feedback from participants.
Safe Dreaming trail to school: Community participation and Indigenous culture (Morriss, Mann & Byrnes 2000)	The project involved: fostering collaborative links between health, education, local service providers and community members; providing information on community safety and Aboriginal culture; developing a process for positive action on community safety hazards; and encouraging increased understanding and respect for different cultures using art and Dreaming stories as the medium.	Increased understanding for and respect of all Indigenous cultures was enhanced for children and staff at the school. Equally, the Aboriginal artist gained exposure and confidence as she worked with students, teachers, parents and community health nurses. These benefits demonstrate the value of using art to portray a health message.	Feedback from participants.

Appreciative inquiry: A method for measuring the impact of a project on the well-being of an Indigenous community (Murphy Kordyl & Thorne 2004)	Indigenous Youth Arts and Culture Project involved young people from the Aboriginal community working with Elders and professional artists to create contemporary performances of local Dreamtime stories for festivals and events to celebrate and promote Aboriginal culture. The project aimed to support and develop pride, self- esteem, skills, creativity and leadership.	The project fulfilled the aim to support and develop pride, self-esteem, skills, creativity and leadership in the local Aboriginal community. Family and social connectedness, cultural identity, pride and social competence improved.	Appreciative inquiry workshop involving qualitative methods
Empowerment and human rights in addressing violence and improving health in Australian Indigenous communities (Rees et al. 2004)	Indigenous Family Well-being Empowerment program (FWB) FWB aims to increase empowerment, through self-exploration and support, and to enable participants to take greater control over their lives. FWB was also intended to develop community-based skills and capacity in order to complement existing advocacy work, particularly that being undertaken by Aboriginal community-run organisations.	FWB program was successful in developing increased personal capacity, collective action and enhanced motivation to challenge structural barriers to wellbeing in Aboriginal communities.	Qualitative interview.

Evaluation of an Aboriginal health promotion program: A case study from Karalundi (Sputore Gray & Walker 1998)	The Peer Support and Skills Training Program was adapted to suit the needs of Karalundi students. 'It aimed to reduce or delay the uptake of smoking, drinking and other drug use by providing students with positive communication and decision- making skills that would enable them to recognise and resist social influences to use drugs.'	Outcomes for the students included: enhanced self-confidence; greater empowerment of female participants; increased awareness of health and substance use issues; reinforcement of existing positive beliefs about health matters; reduced use of analgesics within the community; and an outlet for student creativity. Volunteers and staff also developed skills in program implementation.	Qualitative interview.
Evaluating Aboriginal empowerment programs: The case of Family Wellbeing (Tsey & Every 2000)	The Family Wellbeing Program focuses on the empowerment and personal development of Aboriginal people through the sharing of stories, discussing relationships and identifying goals for the future. Workshops are held with both adults and children to highlight the various health and social issues experienced by Aboriginal communities and the steps that can be implemented to deal with these issues.	Achievements for participants included: high levels of personal empowerment; enhanced sense of self-worth, resilience, ability to reflect on root causes of problems and problem-solving ability; belief in the mutability of the social environment; modest, but significant, improvements in general sense of wellbeing. Evaluation showed importance of resourcing Aboriginal people to develop their own programs addressing trauma and other issues.	Theory-driven analysis of literature and project documentation; participant observation; and analysis of course participants' personal narratives.

Effectiveness of a participative community singing program to improve health behaviours and increase physical activity in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Sun & Buys 2013)	A one-year community singing program aimed at increasing healthy behaviours, including exercise and social support to improve health and activity behaviours.	The program achieved the following improvements: decreased social isolation; reduced smoking rates; increased participants' social support; greater participation in exercise and art activities.	Pre- and post- quantitative survey analysis.

How Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing informs this area of research: Lessons to learn and apply

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing is a concept and a research framework that has been defined by Karen Martin in a seminal paper published in 2003. In it Martin (2003) highlights that research on Indigenous peoples has been conducted without a proper understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal culture and knowledge. Her framework highlights that research with Indigenous peoples and communities should include:

o   a recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as being both distinctive and vital to our existence and survival;

o   honouring our social mores as an essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when on the lands of other Aboriginal people;

o   an emphasis on social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures; and

o   privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are described as an ontology, epistemology and methodology for Indigenous cultures and life. Martin (2003) defines Indigenous ways of knowing as being:

… specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups… learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging, applying. Ways of Knowing also entails processes that allow it to expand and contract according to social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals, the group and interactions with outsiders. So this incorporates the contexts as well as the processes. It is more than just information or facts, but is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways at certain times.

Ways of being are 'about the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of country and self'. Martin (2003) explains that:

> *Our Ways of Being evolve as contexts change. For instance relations change amongst people at particular times such as movement from one life stage to another, or with a birth or death of a member. Relations amongst Entities are also effected in this same way hence the passion and determination behind protection of the Land, Waterways, Skies and Spirits and all Entities.*

Ways of being are learned and exercised through relations with Country and kin, in particular through Elders, and are described as understanding and establishing one's identity, interest and connections through and by relations with other Aboriginal people. As a result of colonisation Indigenous peoples now engage with those from different Country and kin. Martin (2003) explains that:

> *in these circumstances we draw upon what we know and have been taught from our Elders and family members as proper forms of conduct. Through this, our Ways of Being shape our Ways of Doing.*

Martin (2003) describes Indigenous ways of doing as:

> *... a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. These are seen in our: languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation and social control. Again these are life stage, gender and role specific... Our Ways of Doing express our individual and group identities, and our individual and group roles... we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing).*

Both the reviews undertaken by the AIHW and the papers systematically collected for review by Onemda demonstrate that programs focused on cultural engagement and strengthening vary widely. This is because the issues that are considered important - and how best to utilise and incorporate cultural ways of knowing, being and doing - and how programs should be implemented and evaluated, varies between communities.

This reflects and emphasises that Aboriginal communities from around Australia are culturally, linguistically, socio-economically and historically diverse and, as such, there is no 'best practice' cultural strengthening program. However, while the focus, delivery and evaluation of programs do vary widely there are some key lessons to be learned from these evaluations. Two of these key concepts supporting the development of programs that have effectively incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing being and doing are outlined below.

Community informed, engaged and controlled: Reviews of evidence arising from evaluations of programs that seek to improve health and wellbeing through connection to culture, community, family and Country show that programs informed and led by local Aboriginal communities are the most effective. To achieve this, local Aboriginal people must be consulted with and engaged in the process of design, implementation and evaluation of programs that seek to build health and wellbeing through cultural strengthening. Only they can provide the cultural knowledge and information needed to develop culturally relevant, appropriate and safe programs for their community. Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing vary between communities, and this reflects the need for programs to be locally informed and adapted to the needs and culture of individual communities.

Many of the evaluations used qualitative interview and participatory action research approaches that allow Aboriginal participants to describe in their own words and in their own way their experience of a program and their views on what the program has achieved and why. Privileging Aboriginal voices, knowledges and practices in the process of program development is critical to developing programs that are relevant to communities, that individuals want to engage in and that both individuals and communities can benefit from.

Capacity and sustainability: The programs reviewed and discussed above highlight that organisations and initiatives that have been effective have built capacity within communities to support local Aboriginal people to inform, lead and engage with the programs. They also show that Aboriginal individuals and communities demonstrate excellent capacity to drive improved health outcomes when supported by the necessary resources that programs provide. Thus, the concept of capacity building is critical to ensuring that program effects can be sustained over time, which is an important issue to consider in the development of cultural strengthening programs.

Planning how programs can continue beyond the funding timeframes also needs to be considered if a program seeks to be sustainable and to continue. The AIHW report found that even programs that have shown effectiveness, after clearly demonstrating health and wellbeing benefits, have had their funding cut (Osborne, Baum & Brown 2013). Many of the programs reviewed link up with other services and organisations, and also focus on forging links between Elders and young people. Supporting the building of links between both members of the Aboriginal community and different organisations working with Aboriginal people can support program sustainability. As described by Martin (2003) Indigenous ways of knowing and being are learned from kin and Elders so programs that support increased and improved connection of Aboriginal people within their communities provide a greater opportunity to learn and to benefit from Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Programs and the resources they provide also allow Aboriginal people and communities to showcase their capability, knowledge, strength, talents, achievements and community contributions. Several programs built on initiatives that began organically within communities or were based on ideas arising from community members. It is important to reflect on the fact that capacity and program sustainability can build more readily from an already strong and positive base. As such, program funders, developers and researchers should not make assumptions that Aboriginal communities or individuals are lacking the capacity needed to develop and implement culturally focused health and wellbeing programs. Any program that seeks to improve health and wellbeing through Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing must be based on a deep, respectful and informed understanding of local Aboriginal community needs, priorities and preferences.

APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES

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The success of the principles embedded within the Yarra Ranges Cultural Framework for Reconciliation in applying Indigenous Ways of Knowing into a range of Yarra Ranges Council processes, strategies and initiatives can clearly be seen by the following examples. The concept of Indigenous Ways of Knowing continues to grow within Council as service areas realise the benefits of such an approach to the organisation and community.

Yarra Ranges Council has embraced this theoretical cultural development framework to inform a range of community arts projects, programs and initiatives. Examples of this include:

1. **The Meeting Place Garden:** The Meeting Place Garden at Healesville, where the opportunities for the story of the local community in current space and time to be written and told have been created. Creative metaphors capture the timeless existence of Aboriginal occupation and acknowledge the current diversity of Indigenous community in celebration.

The Ceremonial Smoking Pit at the Meeting Place Garden, Healesville

The Mullum Mullum Gathering Place Indigenous Dance Group (above) and local dancers (below) performing at the Meeting Place Garden, Healesville

Smoking Ceremony at the Meeting Place Garden, Healesville: Wurundjeri Elder Alan Wandin with Aunty Dot Peters and Indigenous Advisory Committee Chairperson Robynne White at the launch of the Yarra Ranges Reconciliation Strategy and Action Plan

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

2.   Welcome Baby to Country:

The Welcome Baby to Country Ceremonies where local Elders from diverse Indigenous language backgrounds, including local traditional owners, participated in a cultural ceremony that welcomed babies and young children to Country and community. Steeped in rich ceremony, young children and babies were presented to the local Elders who placed an ochre mark on their face. The youngsters then placed a hand print on the painting below as a record of the experience. The project focuses on creating the space for new cultural practice, cultural community connection and potential contemporary ceremony within community to emerge. This program was led by the Indigenous community with strong support from Inspiro and Yarra Ranges Council.


The local artwork with the hand prints from the Welcome Baby to Country ceremony.

Healesville Cultural Strengthening Project

3.   Healesville Cultural Strengthening Project: The Healesville Cultural Strengthening Project and its reconciliation model, where non-Indigenous friends of participants are encouraged to participate. It provides an environment for young people and the community to grow together, valuing each other and respecting each other's culture through new cultural practice and traditional language reclamation.
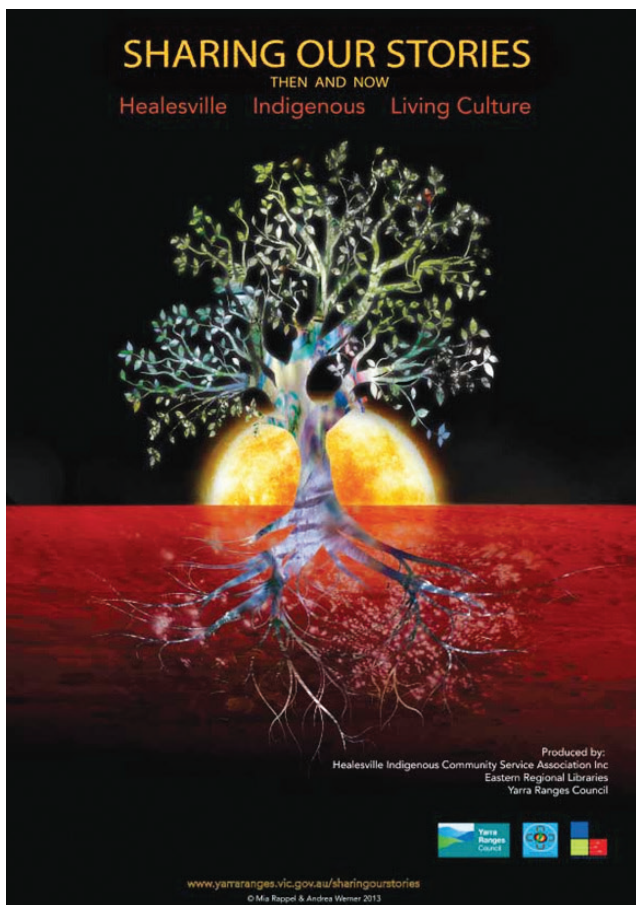
The Sharing Our Stories poster

4.   Sharing Our Stories DVD: The Sharing Our Stories DVD and the creative interpretive display explores the living history and culture of the Healesville Indigenous Community and tells the story of the coming of Europeans and the impact of colonisation. It incorporates the legendary Coranderrk Aboriginal Mission that became home for Aboriginal people across Victoria. The DVD discusses past history including Bunjil the creator, Coranderrk and the ancestors, through to the current vibrant cultural space in Healesville as the community continues to build and reshape its culture through honouring traditions and following cultural values.

The interpretive arts display is a creative and connected interpretation of important spiritual totems and cultural icons of the Wurundjeri people. As in the Meeting Place Garden, each pillar has a common theme of the flowing Yarra River – connecting history and contemporary culture. Highlighted on each pillar are the leaves of the beautiful and enduring Manna Gum, representing Wurundjeri Country, the land where it grows, and the people whose traditions continue to survive.

Bunjil the Eagle is featured on each pillar as the spiritual Totem, creator and protector of the land of the Wurundjeri people. Integrated in the pillars are animals, insects and plants common to the area, including the platypus, monitor lizard and yabby.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

Indigenous artists Rex Murray and Graeme Patterson (Mandy Nicholson absent) with the Sharing Our Stories cultural and spiritual interpretive art works

"I was so proud to be a Wurundjeri woman at that moment", said Wurundjeri Women, Brooke Collins, at the launch of the Sharing Our Stories DVD November 2013. Sharing Our Stories can be viewed at: www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Community/Reconciliation.

5. **Wurun Child and Family Place:** The Wurun Child and Family Place is an Early Years Precinct partnership initiative based in Healesville involving a number of early years, health and family services within a Reconciliation model. The precinct also includes an Indigenous occasional childcare program. The model reflects an underlying commitment by all the precinct service providers to the core Indigenous cultural values of Respect, Caring and Sharing, and is inclusive of all cultures.

Woiwurrung language resource cards and resources

6. **The Woiwurrung Language Resource for Early Years:** The Woiwurrung Language Resource for Early Years contains language teaching resources, including language cards and accompanying audio CD created by Mandy Nicholson, Indigenous Artist and Woiwurrung Language Specialist.

Yarra Ranges Council in partnership with HICSA and the Wurun Child and Family Place identified a need for a language resource to respond to the strong interest from early year's services and schools. Learning Indigenous language can enhance children's understanding and respect for Indigenous culture.

As language is an essential part of a culture, this resource plays a role in strengthening community knowledge and use of the Woiwurrung language. The project builds on the work of local Wurundjeri Elders in bringing the language of the Wurundjeri people to a broader regional audience. The project will enable local children of all backgrounds to grow and develop with a strong sense of connection to local Indigenous history and culture.

Wurundjeri Elders Bill Nicholson and David Wandin explaining elements of Indigenous land management to Council staff

7.   Yarra Ranges Narrap Team Bushland Project: The Wurundjeri Narrap Team are a traditional environmental land-care management team. Yarra Ranges Council has engaged the Team in the management of three Council reserves. The project is a collaborative and reciprocal exchange of traditional and contemporary technological land management practices between the Wurundjeri Council and Yarra Ranges Council, and its contractors, that includes educating and adopting Indigenous land management knowledge within Council's land management team and contractors.

8.   The Return of the Fire Stick Project: Currently in scoping phase at the time of writing, the Return of the Fire Stick Project aims to re-establish Indigenous fire-stick land management knowledge and practices within the Victorian Aboriginal population and to monitor and evaluate its effects on culture, environment and public safety.

Research notes the earliest Europeans described the land they encountered, such as that on the Mornington Peninsula, as 'gentleman's parkland' – broad areas of land covered with large trees and grass, void of middle story. These 'gentleman's parklands' were actively managed using fire to promote particular flora and fauna that the Aboriginal people utilised for food and cultural purposes. The project proposes to re-build this knowledge and apply it as a highly efficient fuel reduction practice to reduce the extreme threat of bushfire within the Yarra Ranges.

Professor Mick Dodson presenting at the Integrating Indigenous Knowledge, Connecting Community to Country symposium at Healesville, June 2015

9.   Reconciliation Week 2015 Event: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Connecting Community to Country: The 2015 Reconciliation Week Event featured Professor Mick Dodson speaking on the application of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Professor Dodson spoke to a wide audience on the importance of looking at the world around us through the Indigenous lens to experience the feeling of connection to Country and to each other and bring that way of being into our everyday lives.

Professor Dodson acknowledged the Indigenous Ways of Knowing approach taken by Yarra Ranges Council in developing Reconciliation initiatives, and their application within the organisation as innovative, and noted the leadership this offers within the local government sector.

Professor Dodson named the Yarra Ranges Council Reconciliation Policy and the Background Paper (www. yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Lists/Policy-directory/Reconciliation-strategy) on Reconciliation as cutting edge and best practice examples of the integration of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and identified a need to promote the process used by Council and the Indigenous Advisory Committee nationally. Other presenters on the day provided examples of how the integration of Indigenous Ways of Knowing can be embraced in mainstream agencies.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

From left: Yarra Ranges Indigenous Advisory Committee Chairperson Robynne White, Prof Mick Dodson with Yarra Ranges youth worker Tiffany Kuiper

The forum panel from left: Prof Mick Dodson, Brooke Collins, Rose Solomon, Jamie Thomas, Anne Jenkins, Cr Fiona McAllister and Garry Detez

10.   **NAIDOC Ball and Awards Night:** The premier event on the Eastern Metro Region Indigenous calendar is the NAIDOC Ball and Awards Night – it is attended by around 320 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Guests enjoyed cultural performances and presentations from local Elders. The Ball is well supported by a range of sponsors including Yarra Ranges Council. Yarra Ranges also offers significant support for the event through leadership in the organising committee. The EMR NAIDOC Ball provides the safe space for the regional Indigenous community to come together in recognising significant local achievements while celebrating local Indigenous identity, history and culture.

The Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) Aboriginal choir

Local Elders Anne Jenkins and Aunty Doseena Fergie with Sarah Ong (centre)


Aunty Janet Turpie Johnstone (right) presenting the 2015 EMR NAIDOC Arts Award to Aunty Irene Norman

Local NAIDOC Master of Ceremonies and Swinburne academic Andrew Peters

11.   Yarra Ranges Cultural Centres. Indigenous arts and cultural programing: The Yarra Ranges Council Arts, Culture and Heritage area has a strong focus on providing quality Indigenous performances and exhibitions. The programming undertaken by Arts, Culture and Heritage provides the residents of Yarra Ranges with a rich Indigenous cultural experience with 2015 attractions including:

- Archie Roach

- Dan Sultan

- Dewayne Eversmith

- Myths and Legends of West Arnhem Land

- Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country
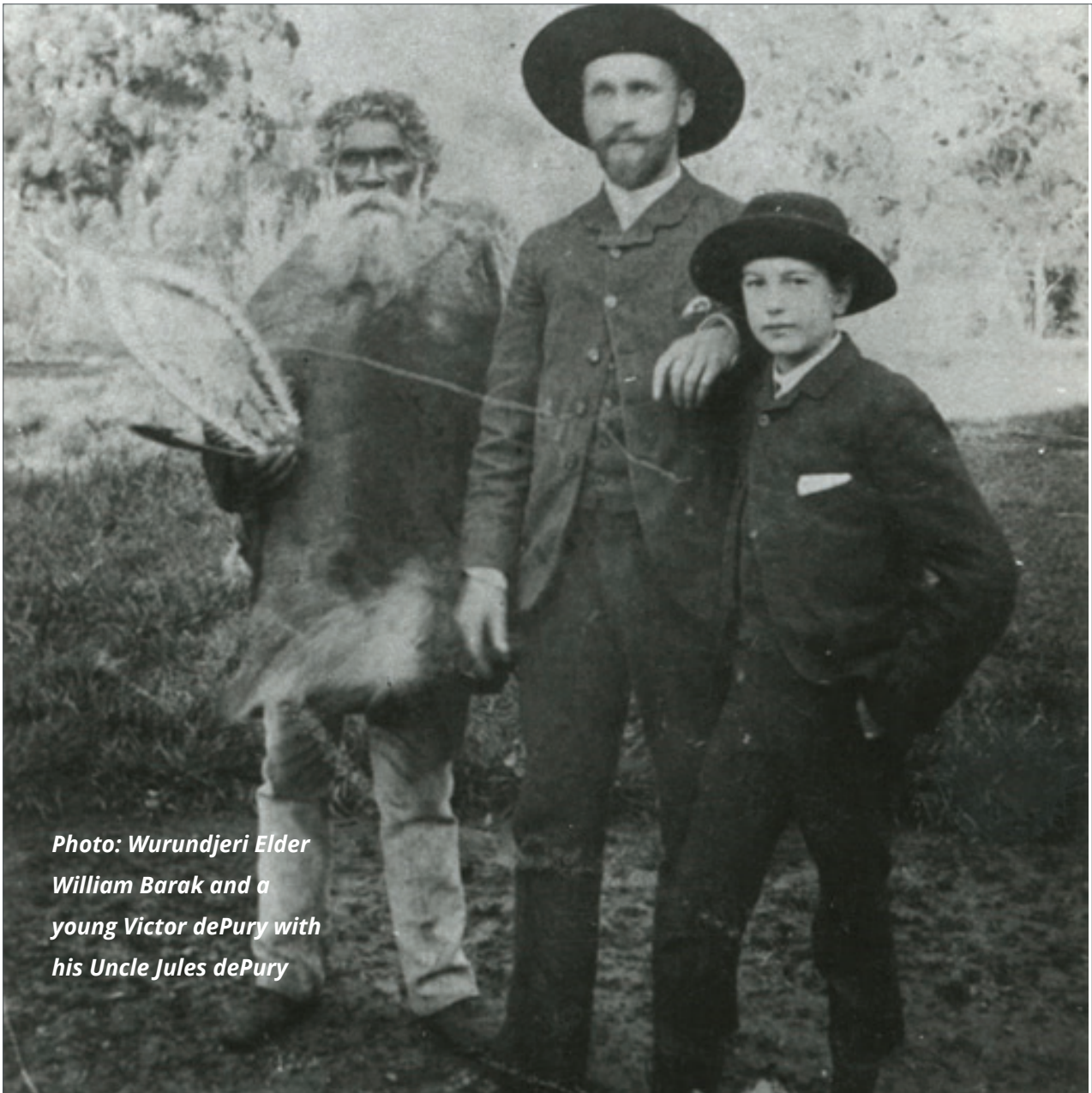
Photo: Wurundjeri Elder William Barak and a young Victor dePury with his Uncle Jules dePury

12.   Oil, Paint and Ochre: The Regional Museum has put together a significant exhibition titled Oil, Paint and Ochre. The Exhibition ran from August till November 2015. Set in the mid 1800's against a backdrop of the rise and demise of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station near Healesville, and the establishment of the wine industry in the Yarra Valley, a unique relationship developed between a Wurundjeri leader and a winemaking family.

The interaction between famous Aboriginal leader William Barak and Swiss wine-makers, the de Pury family, was inextricably tied to the country on which it took place, where descendants of both sides still live today. But it also has a national meaning as a story that explores the complexity of first-generation negotiation between Aboriginal and European people in Australia. Oil, Paint and Ochre tells this cross-cultural story through art, the diaries of the de Purys, letters, photographs and other artefacts. This is their story.

Wurundjeri Elders, Aboriginal community members, local residents and Council Staff at the reburial of the Wurundjeri artefacts near the Scarred tree (pictured) along the Olinda Creek in Lilydale.

13.   The Olinda Creek Walking Trail   The Yarra Ranges Parks & Bushland team work with the Wurundjeri community and local Friends and Landcare Groups in reserves throughout the municipality in recognising cultural sites of significance.

In 2009 a scarred tree was discovered along the Olinda Creek Reserve as part of the   development of the Olinda Creek Trail. The importance of this find prompted the development of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan, the first of its kind at Yarra Ranges Council, designed to protect the Indigenous heritage and cultural values of the site.

A ceremony for the reburying of 28 stone tool artefacts at the scar tree occurred in November 2015 along the Olinda Creek in Lilydale. The Olinda Creek was formerly known as Gnurt-Billeworrun to Wurundjeri people. This referred to the hunting of wild duck that used to occur in the swampland now known as Mooroolbark, Montrose and Lilydale.

Wurundjeri representatives from the three clans welcomed Council staff, other Indigenous community members and the Mount Evelyn History Group in an event that connected land management to Indigenous culture and history.

Wurundjeri and Council land management discussions included changes to the land and ecology since European settlement and how the Wurundjeri people keep their culture alive in this case by planting future trees suitable for scarring such as Manna and Red Gums along the creek.

THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: CONNECTIONS
CULTURE, COUNTRY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH

APPENDIX 3: YARRA RANGES COUNCIL INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: OUR STORY – THE TREE OF LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE AND THE RECONCILIATION MODEL

An issue emerging from Western-based research has been how data and information is represented. Research of Indigenous communities has often presented information in a way Indigenous peoples have not understood, or they have been unable to see themselves in the research. The IAC placed considerable weight on presenting the key Reconciliation themes of Cultural Strengthening and Indigenous Ways of Knowing in a way that honors traditional representations of Indigenous knowledge.

The IAC identified the following as themes for action:

Health, Healing and Spirit

Improve Indigenous Health and Wellbeing through recognising and acknowledging the legacy of cultural loss through engaging in healing and reclaiming cultural practice and identity

Participation

Increase Indigenous voices in Contemporary Society and Community Life

Service Access

Improve service access including access to Council services for Indigenous families

Cultural Strengthening and Heritage

Publicly acknowledge and respect Indigenous culture and heritage in Yarra Ranges

The Tree of Life and Knowledge was developed to represent the over-arching cultural values, the cultural strengthening approach, themes for action, and cultural element of the Reconciliation Policy and Reconciliation Framework for Action. It acknowledges that we do live in a Western society and incorporates Western concepts such as service access and participation in a manner that can resonate with the Indigenous community.

The Tree of Life and Knowledge was painted by local Indigenous artist, Safina Stewart.

This integration of both Western and Indigenous Ways of Knowing is a powerful Reconciliation tool when developing Reconciliation policy and strategy. It is accepted this will provide a strong foundation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to continue to grow together, value each other and respect each other's culture and that we are one community.

Based on traditional themes, Yarra Ranges Council and the IAC use a metaphoric story based on a Manna Gum to represent the shared approach that we take to our history, and the importance of cultural values and expression in building wellbeing.

The Tree of Life and Knowledge is a symbolic representation of the way Council and the IAC interpret our Indigenous community's 'Being' in Yarra Ranges. The information encoded in our tree provides a synthesis of Western and Indigenous Ways of Knowing in our contemporary urban society. It connects our past, present and future.

The tree signifies our whole community as a singular entity. It is representative of our social dynamic that we are all one, all one community.

In recognition of the Country our community lives on, our tree is a Manna Gum. The Manna Gum is an important Wurundjeri symbol and our tree acknowledges and respects the traditional people of this land. The Manna Gum is also a tree that endures.

Our tree grows in this land of the Wurundjeri people. The land is the mother of life. The roots of our tree incorporate the core cultural elements: Family and Kinship; Spirituality; Language; Land and Country; and Art and cultural practice.

These are the elements that support the tree and they flow up from the ground as our cultural life-blood through the tree to its very tips.

The main part of the tree trunk is Indigenous Ways of Knowing. In this time of post-colonisation, the term 'Indigenous Ways of Knowing' refers to and acknowledges the way Indigenous people in our contemporary urban environment relate our culture to our way of life. Some local Elders refer to this as living in two worlds.

The second part of the tree trunk represents Strengthening and Cultural Heritage. This refers to the role that cultural development has in the continuation of a strong Indigenous community. The term Heritage refers to Council's role in the protection and preservation of cultural heritage values through planning, policy and strategic development processes.

Health, Healing and Spirit refers to our sense of Being in this time and space. The physical health of our Indigenous community is less than that of our non-Indigenous brothers and sisters. Healing the wounds of the past enables our community to look forward to a positive future. Healing also needs to happen within our Indigenous community as it redefines its identity through strong cultural connections in this diverse urban environment. Spirit refers to the strong connections to the earth, water, sky and community. It also connects us to the seen and unseen spirits of ancestors, totems and creator spirits, the spirit of the plants and trees, to the animals, water and the rocks, to everything that exists.

The smaller branches of Participation and Access are representative of Council's way of knowing. Access and Participation are the entry points through which Council can assist 'Closing the Gap' as a Western organisation.

The leaves are a representation of our community, the people. The leaves on our tree are different colours reflecting the diversity within our community.

As leaves die they fall to the ground providing nutrients to the tree, aiding renewal and sustainability. It also provides the connection back to more traditional times, to when our ancestors, who are now spirits providing guidance to us, walked the earth . This also represents the cycle of life across the ages.

Our Manna Gum is always in flower, signifying the beauty of nature and a harmonious existence that is in tune with it. The flowers produce seeds that create new trees and so the ancient lineage of our life cycle continues.

The sun as the giver of life shines on our leaves, on our community. Our community photosynthesises this sunlight into an energy that inspires vibrancy and vitality. This eternal energy source is the same that shone on our Elders across time and unites the past and the present as one timeless space.

Our community leaves also take in carbon dioxide turning it into oxygen. Oxygen, along with sunlight, is the force sustaining all life. The metamorphosis of carbon dioxide into oxygen represents our community's strength, courage, resilience and capacity to change and survive, despite overwhelming challenges.

The whole tree is enshrined in a circle of Respect, Caring and Sharing. Respect, Caring and Sharing is our culture.

APPENDIX 4: PROJECT FINDINGS SUMMARY

Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing

Project finding 1: It's not so much about difference in perceptions of reality or which world one resides in. It's about extending the sense of what reality is so it's multi-dimensional, sentient beyond the visible. Essentially, this is about acknowledging the existence of information beyond that experienced by the five senses. It is a central and essential part of the Indigenous cultural space. This fundamental tenet of culture needs to be understood by the corporate, government and service sectors if they wish to deliver effective services in 'Closing the Gap'. But what is it we are listening to? We're listening to the wisdom of the past as it emerges through Deep Listening, through Mirrim ngarn ga, whispering in our ears, the voices of the ancestors. Receiving and processing information and knowledge beyond the five senses is very much part of the life of our urban Indigenous community.

Project finding 2: It is apparent that Healesville offers particular Indigenous Australians an authentic connection to Country that is unique. The uniqueness can be described as energy difficult to understand from the non-Indigenous or five sense perspectives, but is available to all when viewed through the Indigenous lens with concepts of Country, the non-separation of land, nature and people. It is the land, people, culture connection that provides Healesville with its unique gravitational pull. The pull can be felt by many as a unique resonance with an energy of place and as a notion of 'there's something here for me' that can be more easily understood through the lens of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

The urban Indigenous identity

Project finding 3: Despite the challenges of living an existence immersed in a dominant Western society, the Aboriginality or cultural identity of Indigenous people living in urban communities is no less authentic than those living in remote communities. The connection to culture is a deeply personal matter and it's up to each individual to determine the nature of that connection.

Project finding 4: The identity of Indigenous peoples living in urban communities is as determined by the connection to culture as those living elsewhere. As all Indigenous communities are different, it is the nature or the intricacies of the culture of a particular place that is variable, it is not the connection to it.

Project finding 5: As children in traditional times grew, their cultural learning experiences would grow with them. Elders share in a way that matches children's readiness. This is the same for contemporary urban Indigenous children.

Evaluation and research

Project finding 6: In our technological driven corporate research world the temptation is to move everything at a fast pace. Traditional and contemporary culture teaches us and those that would engage in Indigenous research to stop, centre themselves and listen open-heartedly to all that is said and unsaid. Herein lies a fundamental difference in research and evaluation of Western and Indigenous cultural programming. The normal quantitative and qualitative approaches to research and evaluation completely misses the essential 'cultural gold nuggets' as they fail to register on evaluation surveys.

Project finding 7: There are many examples of inappropriate Indigenous research that emphasises, how we go about acquiring knowledge in Indigenous communities is just as critical for the elimination of health disparities – if not more so – as the actual knowledge that is gained about a particular health problem. An important negative impact of inappropriate research methods, no matter how laudable the intent of the researchers, is that they can reduce the validity and reliability of research findings, thus minimising the utility of the conclusions and wasting the time of participants.

Project finding 8: A key element identified in collecting and analysing data is the need to consider the impact of the 'Telling' and the 'Listening' and to be aware of how this can contribute to a community's growth, as this is a traditional way of information transmission. This has the capacity to impact on the ongoing growth of local Indigenous culture, particularly in urban areas as campfire story- telling and listening remains popular.

Project finding 9: Privileging the Indigenous voices – making visible the knowledge, and practices in the process of Indigenous participants, their families and community, to describe in their own words and in their own way of their experience of a program and their views on what the program has achieved or not achieved and why – is an effective and culturally appropriate way of evaluating the effectiveness or impact of cultural strengthening programming.

Project Finding 10: Culturally appropriate evaluation and research cannot exist without the presence of the ancestors, the Elders and community.

The Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation

Project finding 11: ACCOs such as HICSA provide the essential social, physical and culturally appropriate space that acts as a central place for culture to renew itself within a broader urban non-Indigenous community.

Project finding 12: To experience positive health and wellbeing, Indigenous communities require positive cultural experiences that help develop a positive self-identity. Cultural strengthening programs delivered by ACCOs such as HICSA provide urban Indigenous communities the opportunity for positive cultural experiences.

Role of local government

Project finding 13: Local governments can play a key role in 'Closing the Gap' on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous urban communities through supporting Indigenous community organisations. As ACCOs such as HICSA provide the essential social and physical culturally appropriate space that acts as a central place for culture to renew itself, an investment in an ACCO's sustainability and capacity is an effective investment in the health and wellbeing of the Indigenous community itself.

Impact of Cultural Strengthening Programs – the health/culture connection

Project finding 14: Cultural strengthening initiatives and other services offered by HICSA and other ACCOs are effective mechanisms for building and reinforcing positive notions of Indigenous identity. These programs offer urban Indigenous families and community an authentic connection to local Indigenous culture. These activities are effective in improving the health and wellbeing of the urban Indigenous community through positive reinforcement of identity and cultural participation.

The urban connection to Country

Project finding 15: Where an urban Indigenous community establishes itself, centred on shared communication and participation, a unique Indigenous community identity and a connection to that place, of that Country, that is spiritual in nature, naturally emerges. The nature of this connection does not require the surrender of original Country links or seek to replace 'belonging' to distant traditional lands.

Project finding 16: As elsewhere, local urban traditional owner groups can provide key linkages to Country for those living off their traditional lands and for all Australians.

Racism and Reconciliation

Project finding 17: The Reconciliation programming model provides many benefits to participants, schools, families and the wider community. Most importantly, it creates a stronger connection between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, providing an environment for young people and the community to grow together, valuing each other and respecting each other's culture. The model has the capacity to build a united community that recognises the special place and culture of Indigenous peoples as first Australians, and values their participation in all aspects of community, supporting equal life chances for all.

Project finding 18: Existing in a non-Indigenous paradigm, urban ACCOs are the interface where the non-Indigenous and Indigenous service sector and communities can interact. Through this interface, Western and Indigenous culture and influences flow. Given their immersion in a Western community, ACCOs such as HICSA are, therefore, able to exert an awareness of and make visible Indigenous culture and history to the broader non-Indigenous community. ACCOs therefore have a key role in breaking down notions of stigma and racism, influencing community identity and adding richness to the community social space.