



# **The Voice – looking after your social and emotional wellbeing**

**VACCHO's Balit Durn Durn Centre**

The Balit  
Durn Durn  
Centre



## Acknowledgment

We acknowledge all Traditional Owner's ongoing connection to these lands, waterways, and skies. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present. To the giants whose shoulders we stand on today and every day. And we acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

The ongoing impacts stemming from colonisation on the social and political determinants of Aboriginal peoples have been profound. Its impacts continue to reverberate across several generations. In Victoria, colonialism has been especially brutal. Colonial violence has been enduring and takes many forms. From various government policies intent of genocide, and those that led to the Stolen Generations – a form of cultural genocide in itself – to police brutality and the continuing torment of Black deaths in custody, to the trauma that is a product from unchecked, unchallenged racism and discrimination.

Despite all that colonisation has wrought in the last 235 years, our connection to Country, culture and kin remains enduring. It remains strong. Despite dislocation borne from colonial violence, we are healing. We are finding our voice, a voice that was so ruthlessly taken from and denied to our Ancestors. We are telling our stories, sharing our experiences with the belief that society, systems, and structures can learn from us and those who went before us – whose footsteps we follow. The belief that with our advocacy, systems and structures can evolve to place the social and emotional wellbeing model at the core of service design and delivery. A holistic model that recognises our mob's health and wellbeing as being influenced by cultural, historical, political, and social determinants.

## Language

The term 'Aboriginal' in VACCHO documents is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples and 'Aboriginal Victorian' includes all Aboriginal people living in Victoria. The terms 'Community' or 'Communities' in this document refers to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia, representing a wide diversity of cultures, traditions, and experiences.

## Story of the artwork – 'Nyarri Yathuka' (*Now we will no longer be without*)

Kenita-Lee McCartney is an Aboriginal woman from Swan Hill/Balarand. Her bloodlines run through Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri, Wotjiboluk, Neri Neri, and Boon Wurrung Countries. This piece, 'Nyarri Yathuka' (*Now we will no longer be without*), tells the story of bright futures, with Mobs flourishing and thriving. It signifies our path to a brighter future and the healing journey for our mob. With our Communities leading the way to create even brighter and self-determining futures for generations to come. The colours are vibrant and bright, invoking our past and its impacts that helped plant the seeds of resilience that our Mob have sown. The piece tells a story of the journey our Mobs continue on. We are alive. We have survived. We are healing. We are strong. We will thrive.

## A Voice to Parliament – how can this impact on our social and emotional wellbeing?

The Voice Referendum (the Voice) and the ensuing debate have emerged as a pivotal conversation that our nation cannot and should not ignore. Yet, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, it carries an added weight, as it can bring on a surge in experiences of racism. This can include feelings of shame, sleep deprivation, and heightened levels of anxiety and depression.

In some communities, the Voice has inadvertently triggered a division that undermines the dividends of cultural connection. As different viewpoints emerge regarding the best approach to achieving Aboriginal self-determination, empowerment and representation, unity within these communities is being tested.

Disagreements and debates about the Voice have led to strained relationships and a sense of fragmentation. This division undermines collective progress and erodes the sense of cultural cohesion that has always been a source of strength. It is crucial to find common ground, foster open dialogue, and navigate these differences respectfully to ensure that cultural connections remain a unifying force rather than a dividing one.

A quote from Sheree Lowe, Executive Director, The Balit Durn Durn Centre.

*Significant change doesn't come without hard work. The opportunity before us is a direct result of tireless advocacy from our Elders which we will always honour.*

*In the weeks to come leading up to 'the vote' there will be many people who will try to speak to why this is not a good idea. These comments will be hurtful, non-factual, mis-leading and will directly attack our identity as First Nation people.*

*We all have a responsibility to take care of one and other and make a stand against these views.*

*Remember this Vote will recognise the oldest living culture and elevate the wisdom and knowledge of our people who know what is best and what works for our mob.*

## How can mob look after social and emotional wellbeing leading up to the Voice referendum?

**Check in with yourself and others:** We all have good days and bad days. You might notice you or those close to you have:

- withdrawn from their friends or their family
- lash out and get angry or upset easily
- cry or become emotional
- lose interest in activities and things you/they usually love
- changed sleep patterns – this might be sleeping all the time or not being able to get to sleep, or waking up from sleep and then unable to get back to sleep.

Ask your mob, your way, if they are OK.

**Stop scrolling:** We all have times when we need a break from social media. Ask yourself:

- am I seeing posts that make me unhappy or angry?
- do I follow accounts that make me feel like I need to be someone I'm just not?
- am I comparing my life/success/points of view with others?
- Is the way I am using social media affecting my mental health negative way?

Some things to help with scrolling:

- set a time limit on scrolling
- take a social media break
- delete the apps from your phone for a while
- unfollow or snooze/hide accounts that make you feel unhappy or angry
- close comments on posts
- switch your mind off posts by doing something different like taking a walk while listening to your favourite music.

**Yarn to someone you trust and who makes you feel good and helps keep your spirit strong:** Reach out to people you already know who make you feel good such as family, co-workers, community, friends, or neighbours. This can be as simple as being in the same space or having a conversation. Surrounding yourself with supportive and like-minded people makes you feel like you belong and can be a huge support during challenging times. For mob, our connection to culture, country, community, kin and family are critical to our wellness.

**Connect to Country and culture:** Nurturing the connection to Country and culture is a source of strength and healing.

**Seek out support:** Remind yourself that it's OK to feel whatever you're feeling in that moment. Emotional stress is a normal reaction to the pressures of everyday life. Worry, fear, anger, sadness are also all normal emotional responses. They are all part of life. However, if the stress and then distress that underlies these emotions interferes with your ability to do the things you want or need to do, this stress has become unhealthy.

If you are distressed and you or your mob need support, the following services are available to support you.

Service Details		Contact Details/Weblinks
Yarn SafeNStrong, VAHS	24/7 free and confidential counselling service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples operated by VAHS	<a href="https://www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong/">https://www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong/</a> Ph: 1800 959 563
Brother to Brother, Dardi Munwurro	24/7 crisis support line operated by Dardi Munwurro for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to yarn and seek support for any issues that they may be experiencing	<a href="https://www.dardimunwurro.com.au/brother-to-brother/">https://www.dardimunwurro.com.au/brother-to-brother/</a> Ph: 1800 435 799
Beyond Blue	This weblink provides Helpful Contacts for First Nation People seeking mental health support	<a href="https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/helpful-contacts-and-websites">https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/helpful-contacts-and-websites</a>
Headspace Yarn Safe	A weblink and contact details are provided for Headspace. Headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.	<a href="https://headspace.org.au/yarn-safe/">https://headspace.org.au/yarn-safe/</a> Ph: (03) 9027 0100
13YARN [Thirteen YARN]	13YARN [Thirteen YARN] is the first national crisis support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. We offer a confidential one-on-one yarning opportunity with a Lifeline-trained Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter who can provide crisis support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 13YARN empowers our community with the opportunity to yarn without judgement and provide a culturally safe space to speak about their needs, worries or concerns.	<a href="https://www.13yarn.org.au/contact-us-13yarn">https://www.13yarn.org.au/contact-us-13yarn</a>  To speak to a 13YARN Crisis Supporter, call 13 92 76
Department of Health Aboriginal mental health Services	This weblink provides details on Koori Mental Health Liaison Officers, the Koori Mental Health Project at the Royal Children's Hospital and St Vincent Mental Health Acute Inpatient Service.	<a href="https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-services/aboriginal-mental-health-services">https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-services/aboriginal-mental-health-services</a>

## What can all Australians and Global Citizens do to protect the social and emotional wellbeing of mob leading up to the Voice referendum?

**Get informed and be aware:** Educate yourself about Aboriginal history, culture, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Seek out reliable sources of information, engage with Aboriginal-led initiatives, and participate in cultural events to foster understanding and awareness. There is a lot of incorrect information out there. If you don't know, get informed!

**Challenge and call-out racism:** Actively challenge and confront racist attitudes and behaviours, whether they occur in personal interactions, public spaces, or online platforms. Speak up against stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and microaggressions, promoting a culture of respect and inclusion.

**Listen and Learn:** Listen to the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people and communities without judgment or defensiveness. Take the time to learn from their perspectives, stories, and aspirations, recognising the diversity and richness within Aboriginal cultures.

**Support Aboriginal-led Initiatives:** Engage with and support Aboriginal-led organisations, initiatives, and businesses. Attend Indigenous cultural events, purchase from Aboriginal business and enterprise, and contribute to programs that empower Aboriginal people and families.

**Promote Cultural Safety:** Encourage organisations, institutions, and workplaces to prioritise cultural safety and responsiveness by implementing policies, protocols, and training that ensure respect for Aboriginal cultures and the provision of culturally appropriate services.

**Amplify Aboriginal Voices:** Use platforms, both online and offline, to amplify Aboriginal voices and stories. Share and promote Aboriginal art(ists), literature, music, and cultural achievements, helping to counter stereotypes and promote understanding.

### Our work:

The Balit Durn Durn Centre is committed to promoting Aboriginal-led solutions and empowering communities across Victoria. The Centre maintains a focus on the strengths of our mob, shifting away from deficit narratives and positioning Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing as central, legitimate, and vital.

The Balit Durn Durn Centre (The Centre) has advanced critical recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system and pioneered innovative approaches, amplified living experience perspectives, delivered workforce support responsive to needs, fostered meaningful connections, and sparked vital conversations.

Below are some examples of The Centre's work and how we ensure our children and families remain at the forefront of our advocacy, programs and projects.

- The Centre embeds Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing into all its work and advocacy using a decolonial lens.
- The Centre advocates for more funding for prevention and early intervention initiatives that start from a place of wellness and move away from crisis driven care and tertiary end responses.
- The Centre advocates for more funding and better access to culturally strong and safe, Aboriginal and mainstream SEWB services that build on our strengths.
- The Centre continues to support the training, upskilling, education and employment aspirations of our mob via scholarships and training opportunities.
- The Centre involves youth mob throughout all of our work and supports youth mob to grow into leadership roles. We ensure our young people are in meetings, spaces and places to absorb knowledge and grow.
- The Centre is working on key system reform projects that came out of the Royal Commission- the co-design of an intensive SEWB service model for infants, children and families (recommendation 33.4), and the co-design of two on-country healing centres (recommendation 33.1).

**Visit us:**

Website: <https://www.balitdurndurncentre.org.au/>

Instagram: <https://www.balitdurndurncentre.org.au/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/balit-durn-durn>