

Vision for Reconciliation

Merri Health has a vision for Reconciliation where the wellbeing of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Moreland and surrounding areas will be restored through respect, equity and recognition in all aspects of our community.

This Reconciliation Action Plan has been developed to formalise and consolidate Merri's ongoing commitment and achievements to date, from working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, this journey will enable us as an organisation to continue to improve and build on these achievements in the years to come, and identify new opportunities for growth and development.

Merri will work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to;

- Make a positive difference in the lives and health of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Ensure that our organisation is culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Improve service access and cultural appropriateness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Work towards improving health and wellbeing of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Celebrate the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members both past and present, in and around the Northern Metropolitan catchment and across the country.

About Merri Health

Merri Health provides a range of health and welfare services within the City of Moreland and Northern Metropolitan Melbourne. Our organisational vision is to make a positive difference in people's lives by being an innovative and integrated health, community and advocacy service provider.

Merri (formerly known as Moreland Community Health Service Inc.) was formed in 1994 through the merger of Coburg and Brunswick Community Health Centres and the Co-Care Youth Disability Health Service. In 2009, Moreland Community Health Service was rebranded to Merri, to reflect the Merri Creek, which flows through the Moreland area.

'Merri' comes from the Wurundjeri-willam phrase 'merri merri' which means 'very rocky'.

Merri delivers:

- Services for older people
- Services for young people
- Services for families
- Services for children
- Services for people with disabilities and mental illness
- Services for carers
- Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Services for new arrivals
- Services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people
- Dental services.

Reconciliation Action Plan - Background

In 2005, Merri Health began a consultation process with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to recruit a Koorie Community Engagement Officer. This was a newly created position to be based within the Population Health Unit.

The work carried out by the Koorie Community Engagement Officer is linked to both the Merri Integrated Health Promotion and Diversity Plans. Our organisation regularly reports on what outcomes are achieved under these plans, as required by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. The work particularly focuses on improving service access for people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and other population groups who experience higher health inequity.

In early 2014, Merri moved to formalise our existing work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, by creating a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the organisation. The Koorie Community Engagement Officer approached several community members to request their participation in a RAP committee. This committee also included the participation of several staff representatives across the organisation to work towards the goals set out in the RAP. A local Aboriginal artist was commissioned to create a work of art that represents the organisation's journey towards reconciliation. A local Aboriginal Graphic Designer was also commissioned to guide the publication of the RAP booklet, and create a design that tells the story of our Reconciliation journey.

Merri would like to sincerely thank all past and present members of the Merri RAP Steering Committee who have contributed throughout the planning and development process, and in particular would like to thank the representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as without these individuals our Reconciliation work would not be possible.

Key achievements to date

- The organization has employed a Koorie Community Engagement Officer since 2005, to work closely with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in leading initiatives in this space
- A Cultural Awareness Training Program has been implemented across the organization, with Girraway Ganyi Consultancy engaged to deliver Cultural Awareness Training for all Merri staff and volunteers
- 'Asking the Question' training resource has been developed with input from the Koorie Community Engagement Officer in partnership with the Inner North West Primary Care Partnership (INWPCP)
- Merri Health staff regularly consult the Koorie Community Engagement Officer for advice on ways to improve service access and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, staff were successful in recruiting an Aboriginal representative for the Carer Consultative Committee
- The Annual Koorie Carer's Lunch is held each year in Carers' Week and is a well-known and much anticipated event for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- The Koorie Community Engagement Officer has implemented an annual cultural site audit program, to improve cultural safety and friendliness of the physical aspect of our buildings
- The Koorie Community Engagement Officer is involved in several strategic partnerships and networks, across the health sector focused on improving service delivery and referral pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal Community Elders, Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), INWPCP)
- A 'Koorie Conversations' speaker's program has been implemented across the organisation, where the Koorie Community Engagement Officer invites local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community members to talk to Merri staff and raise awareness around the history of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- In 2014, a Reconciliation Action Plan Committee was formed with strong and active representation from the local Aboriginal community. The committee continues to welcome and actively seek new members from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- In 2014, the Koorie Community Engagement Officer will commence a Certificate of Population Health Course. This course has been funded by a 'Koolin Balit - Workforce Development Grant', Department of Health and Human Services
- The Victims Assistance Program consulted with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to design a postcard, encouraging the community to contact the service if they have been a victim of a violent crime
- The Victims Assistance Program is out posting a Victim Support Worker to the Koori Hearing Days and the Koori Court
- The organisation is actively seeking to support Indigenous student placements, with an Aboriginal student placement program undertaken in 2014
- Carer Links North has developed an all-carer and young carers brochure with local Aboriginal families and adults
- Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) in Brunswick is working in partnership with Merri to develop a Memorial Garden on site to pay respect to the lives of local Aboriginal Elders as part of joint initiative via the Koolin Balit funding program
- Merri together with Dianella Community Health and ISIS Primary Care, partnered with the Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation on an Audiology 'Talking Booklet' project to promote ear health within the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) in Fawkner recently had a cultural exchange trip to Alice Springs HIPPY in the Northern Territory
- The Koori Mail Newspaper is available at selected sites for community members and staff to read
- A Merri staff member provides specialist family violence outreach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- The Victim Assistance Program has received funding from the Department of Justice and Regulation to employ an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victim Support Worker.

Reconciliation Action Plan - Key Themes

Celebrate and Acknowledge

Merri Health is committed to celebrating and acknowledging key events in the community and achieves this by:

- Merri celebrates and recognizes significant dates and events such as NAIDOC Week, including the NAIDOC Ball
- Merri acknowledges key dates in the calendar around past history such as National Apology Day, National Sorry Day and Reconciliation week
- 'Koorie Conversations' – Merri invites speakers from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to tell their stories. This provides a valuable insight for staff into the local history, everyday life experiences, barriers and triumphs in the community
- The Annual Koorie Carers' lunch is held each year in National Carers' Week and is a well-known and much anticipated event for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- Merri promotes an internal 'Awareness Calendar' of major community events so that staff understand the significance behind the events.

Organisational change

Merri Health is committed to organisational change and achieves this by:

- Increasing the cultural safety and 'friendliness' of our buildings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Local Aboriginal artwork has been put on display at some of our sites
- Providing orientation for new staff, including an introduction to the work we do to improve service access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- We are working on improving our accuracy in capturing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in the data we collect to ensure we know how many people are using our service, which services they are using, and how many times they use a service over a year. This information will assist staff to make sure we are reaching the expected numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and what services they select or are being referred to
- Updating Merri policies and procedures to reflect best practice and raise cultural awareness with staff. For example, the Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Policy and Procedure.

Staff development and traineeships

Merri Health provides staff development and traineeship opportunities including:

- A supportive recruitment process and encouragement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for positions to increase our numbers of staff employed with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background
- 'Asking the Question' Staff training on intake processes and ensuring we collect information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community status from the community using the service
- A comprehensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness Training Program has been implemented, with at least three sessions run per year
- Work with local educational institutions such as Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston, to engage Aboriginal Health Graduate Students, to support employment pathways for these students and to ensure we have a growing number of health graduates in the health sector. Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is crucial to effectively liaising and building trust with community.

Community Consultation

Merri Health consults with the local community through:

- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on committees and other consultation processes such as the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group and the Carer Consultative Committee. Our organisation respects and acknowledges the time and effort community members contribute by offering their knowledge and skills
- Promoting the success of the consultation or engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in order to encourage other people to get involved
- Consulting internally with the Koorie Community Engagement Officer to provide advice for Merri staff on service improvement strategies
- Promoting our Compliments, Comments and Complaints process widely to capture feedback from the community on our services.

Partnerships and Networks

Merri Health is involved in a number of partnership and networks including:

- The Koorie Community Engagement Officer works closely with the local Aboriginal Liaison Officer's ICAP network to share information and improve referral pathways
- The Koorie Community Engagement Officer has built positive working relationships in the community especially with Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal Community Elders (ACES), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)
- Innovative partnerships/projects – Talking Booklet 'Closing the Health Gap' Project and the Koolin Ballt Aboriginal Community Elders Association Elders Memorial Garden Project.

Service Delivery

Merri Health continues to provide appropriate services by:

- Effectively promoting services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- Linking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to the Merri programs they need
- Referring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to other services where needed or requested
- The Koorie Community Engagement Officer provides advice and support for the development and sourcing of culturally appropriate teaching resources for children and families, using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander themes.

Reconciliation Journey 2015-18



Art Explanation

The water flow represents a site of significance for Aboriginal people, the Merri Creek. 'Merri' means 'rocky' in the Wurundjeri language. The Merri Creek is also symbolised in the Merri Health logo as the flowing 'M'. Merri Health provides a range of health and welfare services within the City of Moreland and Northern Metropolitan Melbourne.

The large circles with the cross symbol in the middle represents health, depicting community coming together to yarn and transfer knowledge and stories.

The smaller circles represent the smaller communities making up a larger community we know as Melbourne.

The medium circles are the various sites/services of Merri Health.

The various teal pathways depict everybody's journey throughout life.

The diamond exhibits the continuity of Aboriginal culture, the diamond was a regularly used design for Melbourne and surrounds and could be found on traditional Possum-Skin Cloaks, Shields etc.

The leaves embody reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, we are different leaves from the same tree.

Artist: Dixon Patten - *Yorta Yorta, Gunnai*

Title: Community Conversations

For a detailed and up to date version of the formal Merri Health Reconciliation Action Plan, please visit the Merri website at www.merrihealth.org.au



Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you



Reconciliation Journey 2015-18