Understanding the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)
A partnership between the Victorian Government and Koori Community

Who can I contact for more information?
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What is the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement and how did it begin?
The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) is a formal agreement between the Victorian Government and the Koori community to work together to improve Koori justice outcomes. The first AJA was the Victorian Government’s direct response to the 1997 National Ministerial Summit, which reviewed the implementation of recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The AJA1 ran from 2000 to 2006 and laid the foundation for improved Koori justice outcomes in Victoria by developing robust partnerships and infrastructure, and putting in place a range of Koori justice initiatives.

How has the AJA evolved over time?
Each phase of the AJA builds on the one before it. The second AJA (2006 to 2012) focused on preventing the progression of young Kooris into the system, reducing re-offending, and changing the justice system to be more responsive and inclusive in its approach to Kooris. It also saw the development of a strong and effective Koori community justice system. In 2012, an independent evaluation established that the AJA2 significantly improved justice outcomes for Kooris in Victoria, and that the partnership structures have set a strong foundation for current achievements. There were lower numbers of Aboriginal people in prison, fewer offenders and fewer offences committed than expected (based on 2001-06 trends).

In 2013, the Victorian Government and the Koori community signed the third phase of the AJA (AJA3). AJA3 continues the work to improve Koori justice outcomes and reduce over-representation in the criminal justice system. It also has an increased focus on improving the safety of Koori families and communities, to be achieved through:

- Preventing and reducing the further progression of young Kooris into the criminal justice system
- Maximising diversion particularly for Koori women
- Reducing re-offending across the justice system
- Reducing conflict, violence and victimisation and improving support for victims
- Addressing issues which drive contact with the justice system such as alcohol and drugs, mental health issues, unstable housing and unemployment
- Continuing to strengthen the Koori community-government partnership in addressing Koori-specific issues
- Building on cultural strength within the Koori community as a foundation for lasting change, and
- Continuing a place-based approach, strengthening community justice responses and improving community safety at the local level.

What is the AJA trying to achieve?
The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework sets — for the first time in Australia — a generational target for closing the gap in justice outcomes, which for AJA3 is:

By 2031, to close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth and adult justice supervision.

AJA3 is the third phase of a long-term change strategy to be rolled out in stages over a generation until the gap is closed. There are 82 actions that form the basis of the AJA3 Action Plan, to be implemented over a five-year period.

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What is the Koori Shield?
The Koori Shield represents the Koori community and the country. It is made from a wooden frame, and the shield is made from a maple leaf. The shield is made in Koori culture and design, and it is used to celebrate Koori culture. It is also used to symbolise Koori identity and pride.

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How can I be involved?
You can support the AJA3 by:

- Getting in touch with your RAJAC to find out more about their work in your community
- Participating in and promoting community forums and other RAJAC activities
- Raising awareness by displaying this brochure at your workplace or local community organisation.

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The Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) is the peak body for overseeing the development, implementation and monitoring of the AJA. It brings together senior representatives of the Victorian Government and members of the Koori community, and meets three times a year in metropolitan and regional locations throughout Victoria.

The **Koori Caucus** comprises the Koori community members of the AJF. The Koori Caucus meets six weeks prior to and the day before each AJF to shape the agenda, discuss key issues of interest and concern, share ideas and solve problems.

The nine **Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJACs)** bring together key Koori community members and justice agencies in each region. The RAJACs are crucial to the delivery of the AJA on the ground through the development of regional justice plans. An elected Koori Chairperson leads each RAJAC.

The nine RAJACs and represents it on the AJF.

The **Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committees (LAJACs)** bring together local Koori community members and justice representatives in selected locations experiencing poor justice outcomes. The LAJACs develop and guide responses to local justice issues, with representation at the AJF through the RAJACs.

### Examples of AJA programs and initiatives

- **Prevention and early intervention**
  - Frontline Youth Initiatives and Community Initiative Grant Programs
  - Koori Early School Leaver Program and Youth Employment Service
  - Koori Youth Justice Workers

- **Diversion**
  - Court diversion and support programs
  - Diversion: Police Victoria Police Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers
  - Koori Youth Cautioning Program

- **Sentencing**
  - Koori Liaison Officers
  - County Koori Court
  - Magistrates Koori Court
  - Children’s Koori Courts

- **Custodial**
  - Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers
  - Koori Justice Mental Health Strategy
  - Cultural strengthening programs
  - Koori REACH program

- **Non-custodial**
  - Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place
  - Indigenous Community Corrections Officers
  - Koori Offender Support and Mentoring Program
  - Local Justice Workers

### What are the principles guiding AJA3?

All signatories to the AJA3 have agreed to:

1. Acknowledge diversity and the strength of connection by Koories to culture, family and country.
2. Acknowledge the impacts of dispossession.
3. Respect and honour the strength and resilience of Koori families.
4. Agree that Koories are entitled to equitable justice outcomes.
5. Be honest, transparent and accountable.
6. Ensure that arrest and imprisonment are sanctions of last resort.
7. Strengthen community justice responses.
8. Support partnerships built on genuine engagement and inclusion.
10. Strive for best practice.
11. Ensure that services meet the needs of Koories.

### AJA3 at a glance

**Vision**

To have a Koori community, as part of the broader Victorian community, living free from racism and discrimination, enjoying the same access to human, civil and legal rights, and experiencing the same justice outcomes through a justice system free of inequalities.

**Aim**

To minimise Koori over-representation in the criminal justice system by improving accessibility, utilisation and efficacy of justice-related programs and services, in partnership with the Koori community.

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**Target:** By 2031, to close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth and adult justice supervision.

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**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

- **Objective 1** Crime prevention and early intervention
- **Objective 2** Diversion and alternatives to imprisonment
- **Objective 3** Reduce re-offending
- **Objective 4** Reduce conflict, violence and victimisation
- **Objective 5** Responsive and inclusive services
- **Objective 6** Strengthen community justice responses and improve community safety

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**CULTURAL STRENGTH**

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**THE PARTNERSHIP**

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**Community**

Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committees

Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees

Koori Caucus

Aboriginal Justice Forum

Government portfolio

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**Partner ships structures of the AJA**

The partnership structures of the AJA bring together Koori community and Victorian Government stakeholders across local, regional and state-wide levels.