



Keeping the Fires Strong

Strategy 2026-2031

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation



Victorian Aboriginal
Community Controlled
Health Organisation

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Cover art by Jade Kennedy.
See inside back cover for details.

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Acknowledgement

VACCHO acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and Communities.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

We proudly represent and walk alongside all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria.

Throughout this document, where the term Aboriginal is used on its own, it is intended with deep respect and inclusivity to embrace Torres Strait Islander peoples as part of our shared and diverse communities.

VACCHO is committed to welcoming and embracing the diversity of cultures, identities, gender, sex, and sexually diverse identities and expressions, experiences, beliefs, and values of all people.

We believe in the right for all people to be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

This work is for the Boorai and the Elders,
and everyone in between.



A letter to the Leaders who will come after us

We write to you as those who have walked a long road, building and sustaining this movement. What began in crisis and urgency must now grow beyond survival. The future is about prevention, early intervention and healing. It's about creating the conditions for our people to thrive, not just endure.

We remind you that our strength lies in our roots. Revisit our history, honour those who came before, and make sure the story of our Communities and our organisations remains visible for generations to come. Keep our Culture and our presence strong in the landscape – in our buildings, in our voices, and in our leadership.

Do not be pulled into becoming like the bureaucracy we must negotiate with. Hold firm, be ambitious, and stay bold. Do not let others put you into boxes, and do not shrink your vision to fit their ways of thinking. Our work is in perpetuity and for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Let every decision you make carry that responsibility.

Remember that strong ACCOs mean strong Communities. Protect the capacity, capability, flexibility and agility of this sector. Build financial strength and independence so the dollars do not dry up, and so that our sector is never beholden. Capture and document our history through stories, time capsules, and living records so that the roots of our movement are never hidden.

Leadership is not a solitary path. Surround yourself with experts and people you trust and know that collective strength is greater than individual effort. Always reflect on the impact of your work on the ground. Be ready to change course, whether in big shifts or small adjustments, to ensure you are truly serving Community.

We have built something strong. Your role is to sustain it, grow it, and keep it true. Be brave. Be resolute. And never lose sight of who we are and why we are here.

With respect and hope for what lies ahead,

VACCHO – 2026

Naming this strategy

For thousands of years, fire has brought our people together. Fire is warmth. Fire is protection. Fire is ceremony. Fire is renewal. Around the fire, stories are shared. Decisions are made. Strength is built.

In this strategy, the fire represents the collective voice of our Members.

Long before VACCHO was formed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were lighting their own fires in health. More than 50 years ago, Community leaders and Elders stood up and said our people deserved something better. They built the first Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. They fought to have our voices heard. They kept the fire burning through determination, courage and Community leadership.

Thirty years ago, those services came together to form VACCHO. Individual fires gathered into a stronger one. A shared fire that could carry our collective voice further. A fire that governments could not ignore.

Our last strategy, On Solid Ground, focused on strengthening that fire. It reinforced the structures that support our sector and protect the work of our Members. This strategy, **'Keeping the Fires Strong'** is about carrying that fire forward.

The central fire is our shared advocacy.

Our insistence on self determination. Our commitment to culturally strong, Community-controlled health services. This fire doesn't belong to VACCHO alone. It belongs to the collective. Our role is to tend the central flame, to protect it and to carry its warmth into new spaces.

Across Victoria, our Members are the firekeepers on the landscape. Each ACCO keeps its own fire burning strong in its Community. Each carries its own knowledge, Culture and way of working. Different places. Different fires. One shared purpose.

The embers are our history. The work of Elders. The courage of those who built the sector. The cultural strength that continues to glow even in challenging times.

The sparks are the opportunities ahead.

Reform. Innovation. Treaty. Growth in impact. They remind us that fire is not static. It moves. It spreads light. It creates possibility.

Above us are the stars that guide our path.

These are our guiding outcomes. They help us navigate toward shared outcomes as we keep our fires burning in many lands across the state. While this strategy sets our direction for the next five years, these guiding outcomes reflect a longer journey for our people and our sector.

This strategy is about keeping the fires strong.

It is about ensuring that short-term pressures do not extinguish long-term vision. It is about carrying our collective voice into places where decisions are made, so that systems shift in ways that honour our people. It's about keeping the flame strong so that it continues to burn for the generations to come.



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Glossary

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VACSAL	Victoria Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd

Message from our Chair and CEO

Carrying the fire forward

VACCHO and our Members work within a system shaped by the ongoing impacts of colonisation, entrenched inequities, and fragmented approaches to health and wellbeing that too often fail to reflect the strengths, knowledge, and leadership of Community.

For Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), these pressures are experienced everyday through growing demand, short-term funding approaches, workforce challenges, and systems that continue to limit self-determination and culturally grounded care.

This Strategy is our response to those pressures. It is grounded in the knowledge that Aboriginal Community-control delivers better outcomes for Community and that lasting change must be led by Aboriginal people, organisations, and Communities themselves.

This Strategy sets the direction for VACCHO over the next five years. It defines what we are seeking to achieve, the shifts we are committed to making, and the priorities that will guide our collective effort.

A note from Aunty Jill

As I step into the final chapter of my time as CEO, I do so with deep gratitude. It has been the honour of my life to serve VACCHO and our Members. I acknowledge the many leaders, past and present, who have walked alongside me and strengthened this movement. The future belongs to the next generation of leaders. My hope is that this strategy gives them strong foundations, clear direction and the confidence to remain bold in the pursuit of self-determination.

The change we seek and the path we'll walk

This Strategy sets out **what** we want to achieve.

How we will go about that will be set out separately in rolling 12-month action plans. These action plans translate the Strategy into practical steps, with regular monitoring and review to ensure we are accountable.

Separating the **what** and the **how** is intentional. We know the environment around us will continue to shift. We want to remain steady in our direction, and responsive in delivery. Our 5-year strategy and annual action plans allow us to adjust our focus and investment without losing sight of our long-term intent.

This Strategy is ultimately about the future we are building together. A future grounded in the strength of Community-control, the wisdom of our Communities, and the leadership of Aboriginal people.



Michael Graham,
VACCHO Chair



Dr. Jill Gallagher AO,
VACCHO CEO

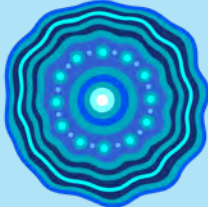
Guiding Outcomes

Our Guiding Outcomes describe our vision for the long-term changes we are working towards for Community.

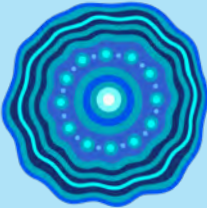
Enduring and intergenerational, they are our guiding stars.

They extend beyond the life of this Strategy, reminding us that our work belongs to a much longer story of self determination and Community control.

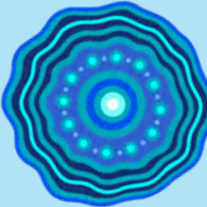
They steady us, inspire us and call us to act with courage and integrity for the long journey ahead.



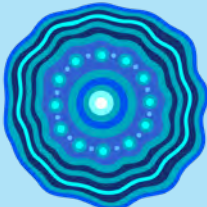
Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person asserts their right to Country, Culture, Kinship and Community.



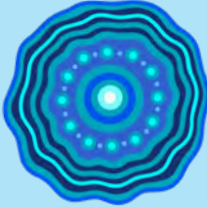
Our people and families are thriving, healthy and well.



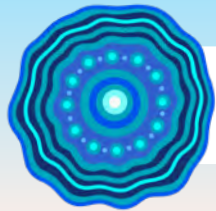
We live free from racism.



Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are independent and self-determined.



Everyone is proud to live on lands with the oldest living and evolving culture in the world.



Guiding Outcomes

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Keeping the Fires Strong 2026 – 2031 *Strategy on a Page*

Our Role

VACCHO leads a collective state-wide voice that shapes the conversation on Aboriginal health and wellbeing. We strengthen and elevate the ACCO sector, so that our Mob lead thriving, self-determined and culturally strong lives.

Our Strategy

Keeping the Fires Strong sets out the **five Priorities** we will pursue in the next five years toward our **Guiding Outcomes**, with **Landmarks** that show us the way. **Annual Action Plans** set out the steps we will take along the path.

Our Priorities



Self-Determined Members



Collective Voice



Asserting our Cultural Rights



Thriving Communities



Solid Ground



Guiding Outcomes

Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person asserts their right to Country, Culture, Kinship and Community.

Our people and families are thriving, healthy and well.

We live free from racism.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are independent and self-determined.

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Measuring our Impact

We will monitor, evaluate and tell the story of our progress toward the **Guiding Outcomes** over the life of this Strategy and beyond.

The new **Outcomes Framework** shows how our Guiding Outcomes connect to our ten **Operational Outcomes**. It also includes indicators and measures that will evolve over time as we develop new strategies to make gains in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

Each year we report on how we're tracking against the Operational Outcomes in our annual Impact Report.

Operational Outcomes

Our knowledge, leadership and advocacy influences legislation, policy, funding reform and public discourse.

Everyone celebrates connection to Country, Culture, Kinship, and Community.

Mainstream services are held to account to deliver equitable and culturally safe services.

Members benefit from a wide range of expert organisational support.

The ACCO workforce is strong and able to meet the needs of our growing Communities.

Excellence and innovation in Aboriginal health and wellbeing are grounded in our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

Our Communities benefit from culturally rich health and wellbeing initiatives.

VACCHO is strong, capable and adaptable to achieve greater impact.

Our people shape and own the stories about what works in our Communities.

VACCHO exercises self-determination.



Our Priorities

Our Priorities set out where we will focus our effort over the next five years. They describe the shifts we must make to strengthen Community-control, influence the broader system and deliver meaningful impact.

These Priorities are interconnected. They position VACCHO to lead with clarity and purpose.

Landmarks chart the path ahead for each Priority. On the following pages you'll see timelines dotted with key changes we expect to achieve in each Priority area over the coming five years and when we expect to achieve them. These landmarks give us confidence that we are moving in the right direction. They help us maintain momentum towards our Guiding Outcomes.



Self-determined Members

By 2031 VACCHO's Members have the capability and freedom to exercise self-determination. ACCO services reach the communities that need them most and provide locally determined, family-centred, culturally rich care.



Collective Voice

By 2031 our collective voice is united, trusted, influential and respected. Governments and others come to us for genuine, sustained partnership.



Asserting Our Cultural Rights

By 2031, we have challenged and guided the transformation of mainstream systems to fully recognise and uphold the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

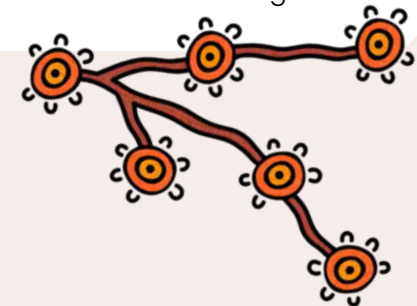
Solid Ground

By 2031, VACCHO has the capability and freedom to exercise self-determination.



Thriving Communities

By 2031, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria experience positive social, emotional, physical and cultural wellbeing.



Priority 1: Self-Determined Members

By 2031 VACCHO's Members have the capability and freedom to exercise self-determination. ACCO services reach the communities that need them most and provide locally determined, family-centred, culturally rich care.

By 2031, Members have the resourcing models they need to be fully self-determining and sustainable. Members define success on their own terms and communicate this confidently to partners, funders and mainstream systems.

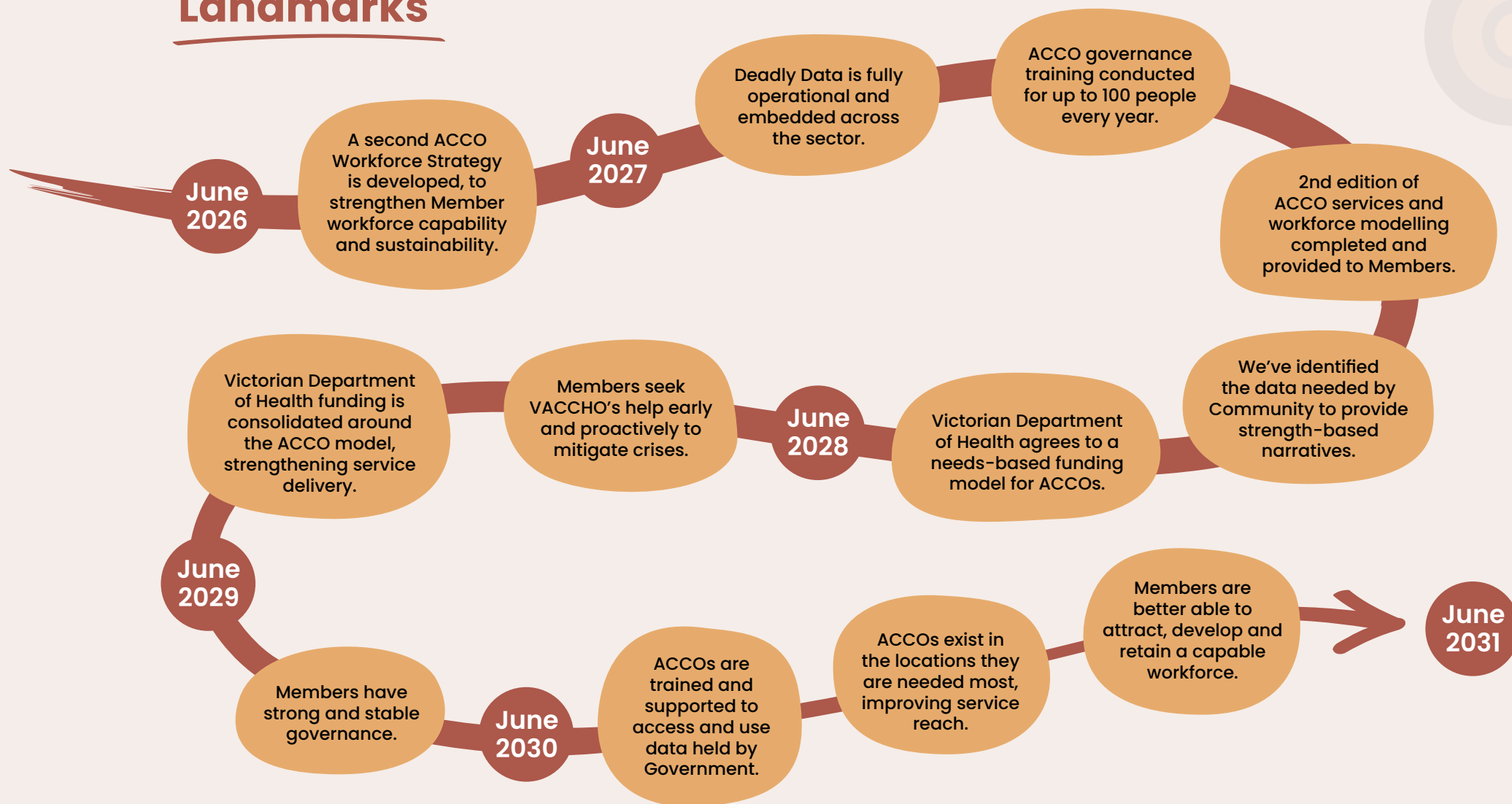
Self-determining funding models and strong data governance and sovereignty give Members control over resources and information. At the same time, stable yet renewing leadership, a pipeline of Board-ready Community members and grow-your-own workforce strategies ensure ACCOs can deliver what is needed.

ACCO coverage reaches the communities that need them most and provide diverse, family-centred, culturally and physically safe care and supports that speak to wellbeing and thriving.



Priority 1: Self-Determined Members

Landmarks



Priority 2: Collective Voice

By 2031 our collective voice is united, trusted, influential and respected. Governments and others come to us for genuine, sustained partnership.

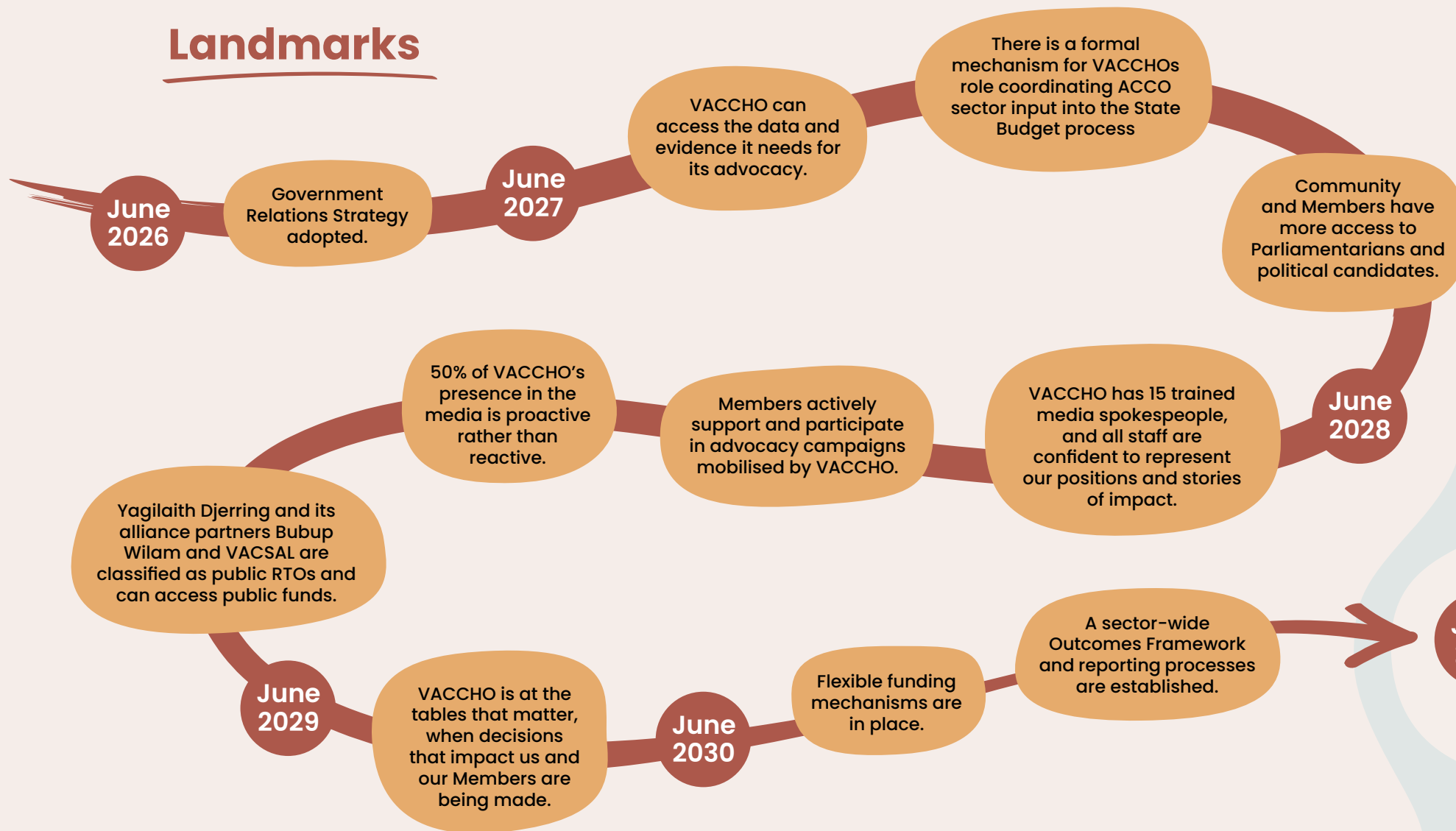
The change we seek spans generations and is achieved by many people working together over time. We work with our Members, their regional structures and other entities to shape and strengthen our positions, make our voices heard and achieve enduring change.

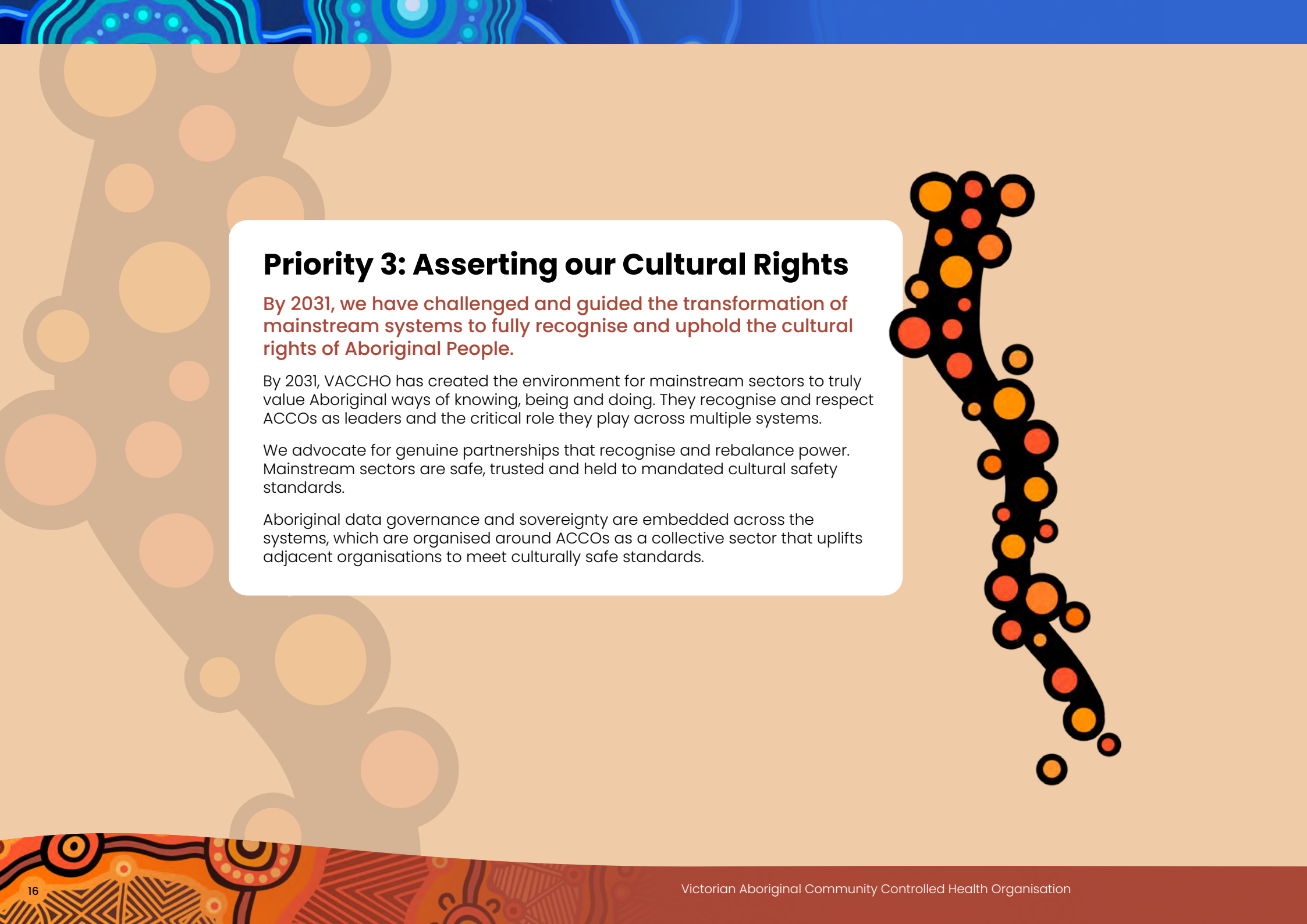
The evidence, reports and stories we produce show what is needed and what works, close the knowledge gap for non-Indigenous Australians, and drive flexible funding models that reflect the priorities and aspirations of our Members and their communities.



Priority 2: Collective Voice

Landmarks





Priority 3: Asserting our Cultural Rights

By 2031, we have challenged and guided the transformation of mainstream systems to fully recognise and uphold the cultural rights of Aboriginal People.

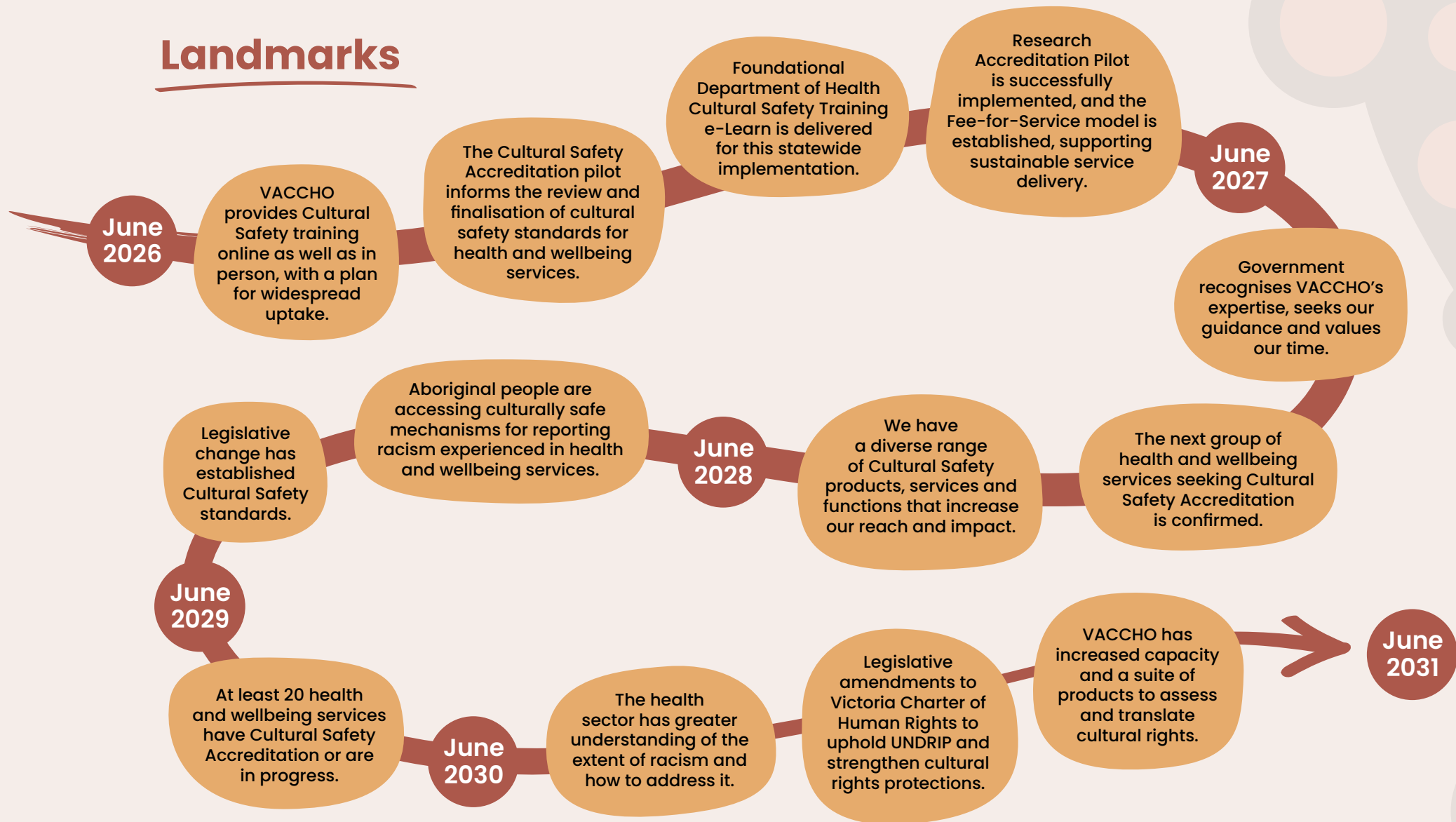
By 2031, VACCHO has created the environment for mainstream sectors to truly value Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. They recognise and respect ACCOs as leaders and the critical role they play across multiple systems.

We advocate for genuine partnerships that recognise and rebalance power. Mainstream sectors are safe, trusted and held to mandated cultural safety standards.

Aboriginal data governance and sovereignty are embedded across the systems, which are organised around ACCOs as a collective sector that uplifts adjacent organisations to meet culturally safe standards.

Priority 3: Asserting our Cultural Rights

Landmarks

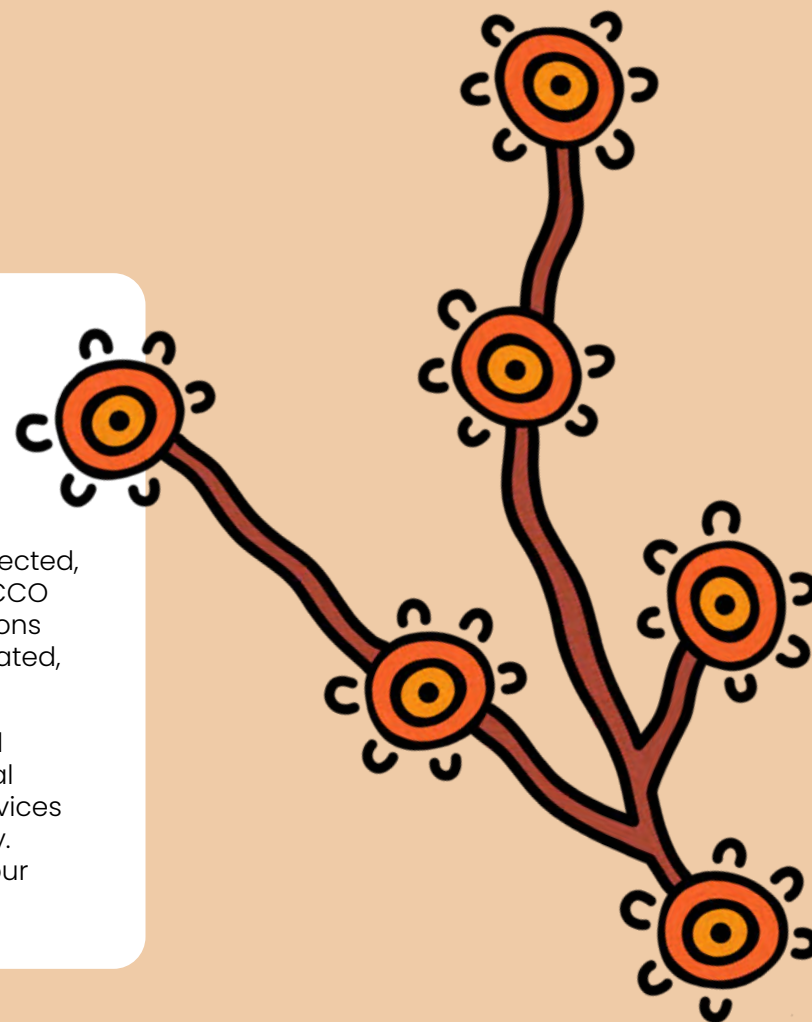


Priority 4: Thriving Communities

By 2031, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria experience positive social, emotional, physical and cultural wellbeing.

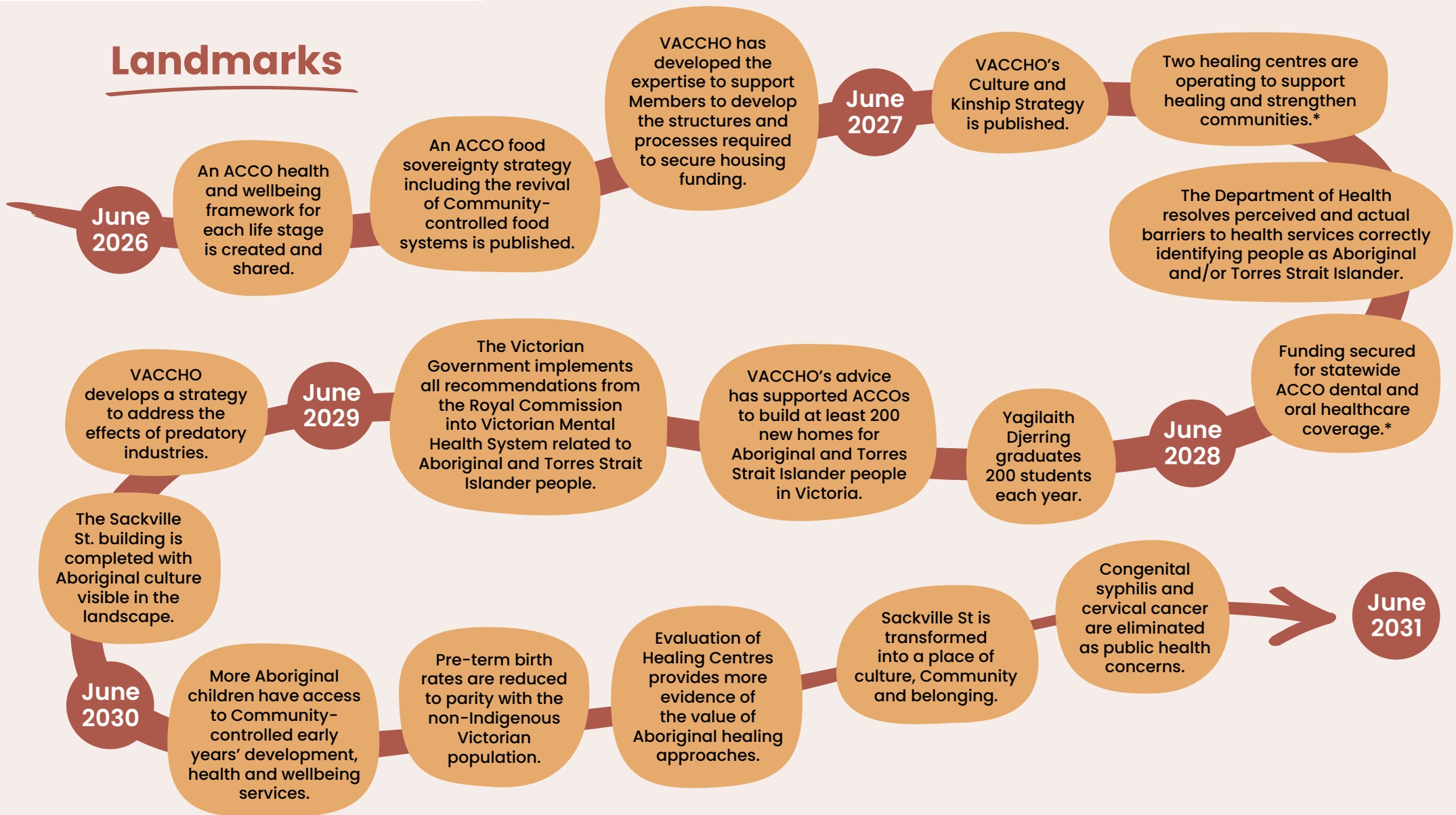
By 2031, Communities across Victoria are strong in culture, connected, thriving, visible and celebrated. Communities have access to ACCO care and support across the life course, with culturally safe options for every health and wellbeing journey, delivered through integrated, family-centred services that are easy to navigate.

Communities have access to Ceremony, teachings and cultural spaces that strengthen identity and belonging. Intergenerational trauma is being healed, people can access the information, services and housing they need and predatory industries are kept at bay. Food security, reduced poverty and fewer daily stressors allow our Communities to thrive.



Priority 4: Thriving Communities

Landmarks



Note: *It is dependent on funding.

Priority 5: Solid Ground

By 2031 VACCHO has the capability and freedom to exercise self-determination.

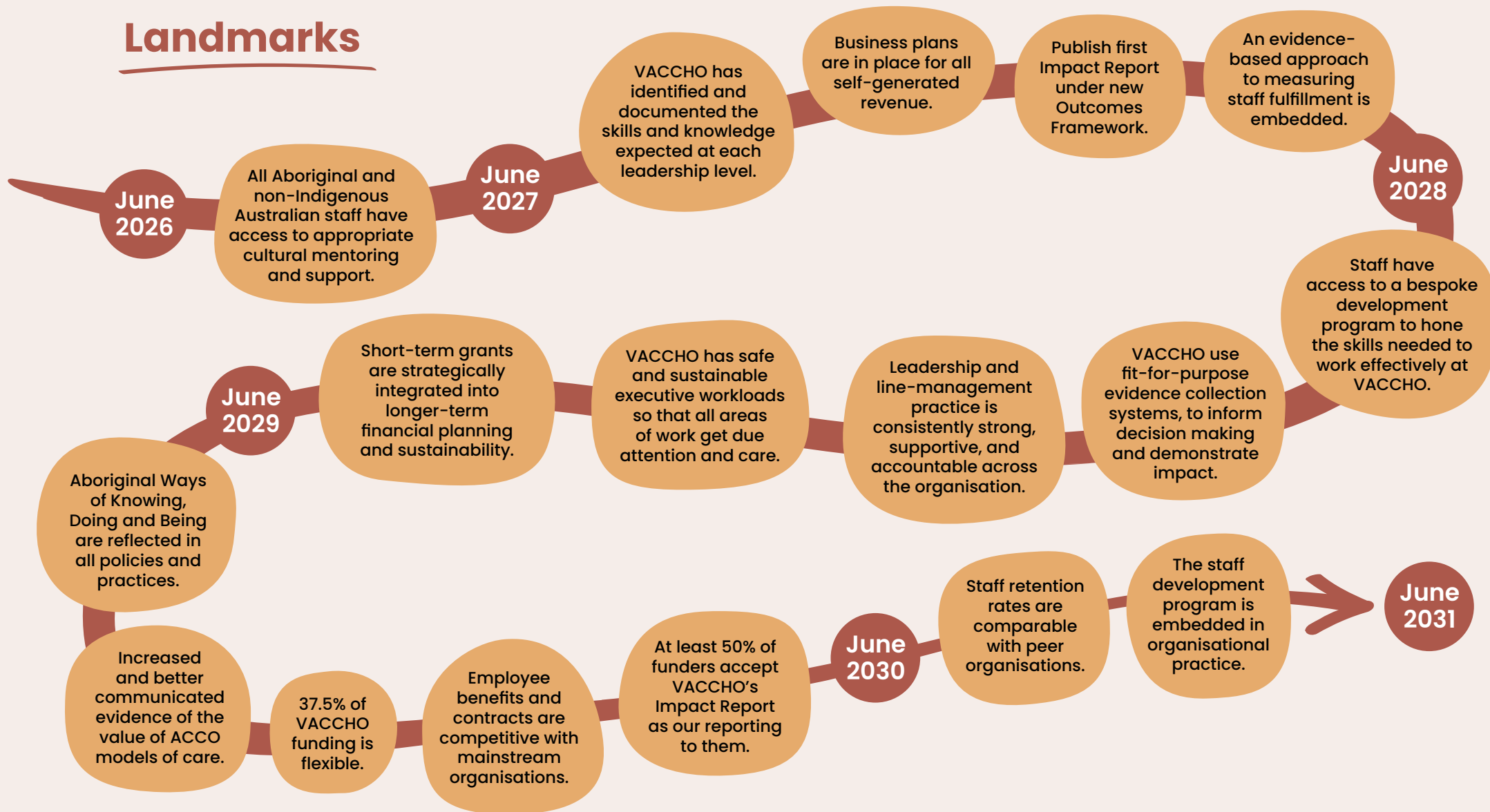
By 2031 VACCHO stands on solid ground, with reliable internal systems that support us to work well and sustainably and have the financial flexibility to make self-determined decisions. VACCHO is an employer of choice, with a capable and healthy workforce, working in collaborative, multidisciplinary teams.

It is clear to all how we measure our impact and make decisions, and everyone can confidently speak to our positions and to cultural safety.



Priority 5: Solid Ground

Landmarks



Our Enablers

Achieving our strategy requires creating the right conditions for change. Our enablers are the essential conditions that shape how we lead, make decisions, work in partnership and deliver on our priorities.

Enablers



Activation at all levels

A shared responsibility for driving impact, where everyone contributes with initiative, ownership and purpose.

What does this look like?

- ➔ Fostering a proactive mindset across Board, Executive, managers and team members, where each person understands their role in advancing our collective priorities.
- ➔ Encouraging initiative and informed decision making at all levels, supported by clear accountabilities and trust.
- ➔ Creating the conditions for active participation, where ideas are surfaced, challenges are addressed early and momentum is sustained through shared effort and drive.
- ➔ Intentionally growing leadership capability across the organisation, including clear, supported pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.



Evidence of what works and what's needed

Evidence to inform decisions, prioritise effort and respond to emerging needs in a timely and deliberate way.

- ➔ Drawing on quantitative data, qualitative insights for learning, accountability and course-correction, supporting honest reflection and adaptive practice across the organisation.
- ➔ Measuring outcomes to understand what is working, what is not and where change is needed and to demonstrate our impact.
- ➔ Upholding Aboriginal Data Sovereignty by ensuring Aboriginal communities govern the collection, access, interpretation and use of data about our people.



Cultural and historical knowledge

Knowledge that helps explain the evolution of our sector, why current systems, relationships and practices exist, and why they continue to matter.

- ➔ Holding and sharing knowledge of VACCHO's history and that of the ACCO sector, including the advocacy movements and collective action that shaped our establishment and growth.
- ➔ Sound decision-making and change informed by an appreciation of historical context and cultural continuity.
- ➔ Strengthening judgment and leadership by grounding change in historical context, reducing unintended consequences and ensuring reform is respectful, deliberate and Community-led.

Enablers



Staunch Mob and active Allies, everywhere

Cultivating Mob and Allies driven by action, accountability and the willingness to use influence in the service of Aboriginal self-determination.

What does this look like?

- Building an internal team who deeply understand and champion Aboriginal self-determination and VACCHO's positions.
- Building networks of active Allies and partnerships who are equipped and willing to amplify VACCHO's voice in mainstream, government and policy spaces, challenge racism, call out unsafe practices and influence systems.



Untied funding

Funding that supports flexibility and autonomy to invest in approaches that meet the needs of Communities.

- Securing flexible and untied funding aligned to Community-led priorities.
- Reducing reliance on tightly prescribed funding while supporting long-term sustainability.
- Appropriate and sustainable funding models that reflect complexities in the ACCO sector.



Time and space

Creating the conditions to think, reflect and govern well, so growth is deliberate and impact is sustained.

- Protecting time for reflection, strategic thinking and governance strengthening, ensuring decisions are considered rather than reactive.
- Designing sustainable workloads, clear delegation and efficient systems that build capability and prevent burnout.
- Actively managing growth so it aligns with purpose, values and long-term sustainability, including mechanisms to pause, prioritise or recalibrate where needed.



Delivering on our strategy

Turning our Strategy into impact requires discipline as well as flexibility.

Each year, VACCHO will undertake detailed planning to translate our Priorities and Landmarks into a focused 12-month Action Plan. These plans will align to the Landmarks while remaining responsive to emerging issues, policy shifts and Community need.

Our approach is one of adaptive rigour. We will remain clear and steady in our direction, while being prepared to adjust sequencing, emphasis and investment as circumstances evolve.

Regular check-ins will provide structured opportunities to track progress against our priorities, review performance data and assess whether the changes we are seeking are taking hold. Where needed, we will refine our plans.

We will continue to communicate with Members on our progress, maintaining transparency and accountability as we work together to advance Aboriginal community-control and improve health and wellbeing for Community.

About the artwork

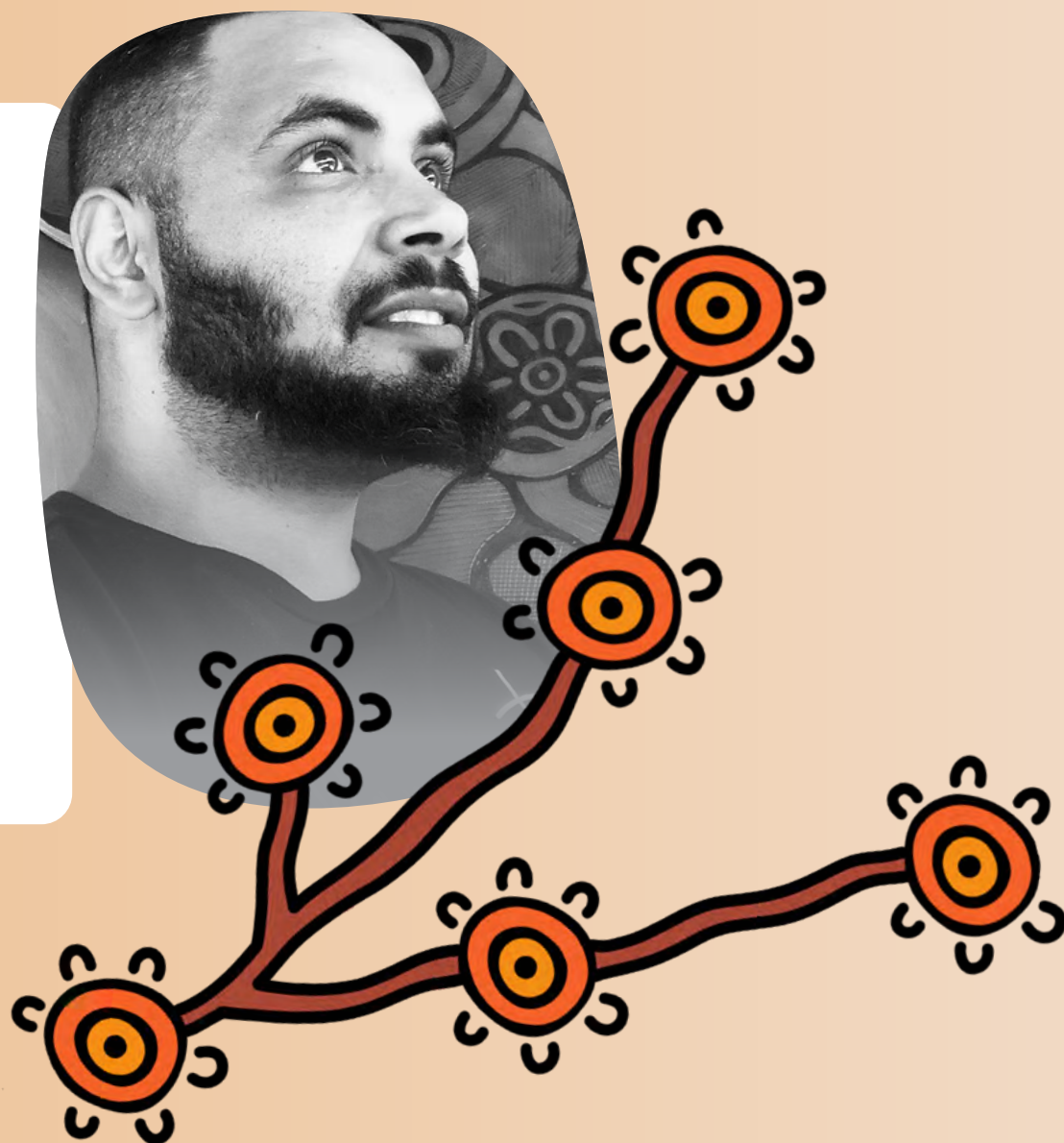
Generational Healing

Jade Kennedy | Mutti Mutti, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi and Noongar

The artwork represents the guiding stars and Ancestral presence in the Dreamtime. This represents the past, where our ancestors passed on the healing and medical treatment of the mind, the body and the spiritual nutriment needed to sustain our natural belonging to the grounded earth, our kinship and cultural practices.

Here in the present, the large fire surrounded by a gathering of collective voices, from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Members. It draws Community to its place of warmth and light. As the respected diverse communities gathering network, speak on health issues and social and emotional wellbeing of Community members, families and generations to emerge.

Inspired by Aunty Jill Gallagher's insight and words.







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