

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

ABN 28 642 080 520

Our vision is a world

where all mental health consumers stand proud, live a life with choices honoured, rights upheld, and these principles are embedded in all aspects of society.



VMIAC works across Victoria and acknowledges, and pays respect to the past and present Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of thousands of years of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We acknowledge that this land was never ceded, and we support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

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ABOUT VMIAC

We are the peak Victorian non-government organisation for people with lived experience of mental health issues or emotional distress. Our membership comprises individuals with lived experience, and associate members who are allies.

VMIAC receives funding from the Commonwealth and Victorian State Governments. The Victorian State Department of Health provides the bulk of our funding to enable us to undertake most of our work. The Commonwealth Department of Social Services provides funding to deliver an advocacy service to people who live in rural and regional Victoria.

Our Vision

A world where all mental health consumers stand proud, live a life with choices honoured, rights upheld and these principles are embedded in all aspects of society. VMIAC aims to achieve our vision by:

- Honouring mental health consumer diversity
- Providing advocacy for mental health consumers
- Advancing mental health consumer workforce and leadership
- Delivering information and training to the community
- Enabling mental health consumer driven education and research
- Developing strategic partnerships

Our Guiding Principles

VMIAC's work is premised on the following beliefs:

- People's experiences are respected and valued
- People are experts in their own lives
- People have a right to self determination
- People have capacity to make genuine choices,
- People should be safe, respected, valued, and informed free from coercion
- People's diversity is embraced

WHO WE ARE

The Committee of Management governs and aligns VMIAC with its strategic directions, and is supported by VMIAC staff.

Committee of Management 2022/2023

Chair

James Horton (resigned December 2022)

Tricia Szirom (Acting Chair January–April 2023,
Chair May 2023–current)

Deputy Chair

Elvis Martin

Treasurer

Ali Pain (resigned January 2023)

Caron Byrne CA

Secretary

Tom Wood

Ordinary Members

- Anna Snowden
- Katie Larson
- (Anu) Anubhav Dhingra
- Linda Stenson
- (Prue) Prunella Howell-Jay
- Lyn Macleod
- Hannah Friebe
- Ian Watts
- Emily Unity
- Bianca Childs

Staff 2022/2023

Alex (until August 2022), Alycia, Anaru, Bertie, Blossom (until January 2023), Brian, Bryony (until April 2023), Chantelle, Clare, Craig, Diana, Erandathie (until January 2023), Fiona (until September 2022), Francesca, Frankie, Gabriel, Hannah, Hiwan (until June 2023), Janel, John, Kate, Kirsty, Libby, Lingam (until April 2023), Lisa, Liz (until January 2023), Lizzy, Loren, Matthew, Melinda, Melissa, Narelle, Nicky, Piume, Robin (until November 2022), Romy, Sharon (until March 2023), Shellie, Shweta, Tash, TJ, Tom.

CHAIR'S REPORT

The past year has continued to bring many changes both within VMIAC and in the environment in which we operate.



Tricia Szirom
VMIAC Chair (from May 2023)
Image: Tricia Szirom

During the year we had a number of changes on the Committee of Management (CoM) including the resignations of both the Chair (James Horton) and the Deputy Chair (Elvis Martin). This left a huge gap of skills and expertise. Tricia Szirom stepped in as Acting Chair from January 2023 and then took on the formal role in May.

We also had a number of vacancies for Ordinary Members which were filled by keen and capable new members:

- Anna Snowden
- Katie Larson
- (Anu) Anubhav Dhingra
- Linda Stenson
- (Prue) Prunella Howell-Jay

Who joined previously elected members:

- Lyn Macleod
- Hannah Friebe
- Ian Watts
- Emily Unity
- Bianca Childs

A recent skills and experience audit of the current members of the CoM shows that the team has high level skills and experience in people management, project management, peer leadership, and workforce development. Sector knowledge is an asset when we are thinking about networks and potential collaborations and we have a number of CoM members who are well connected in the sector and aware of the current issues.

Given the increased need to undertake consumer research and evaluate our work it is reassuring that we have significant experience and skills in these areas. This will contribute to ways in which we measure the value of the work we do and the outcomes we achieve.

In terms of diversity, we do well on LGBTIQ+ representation. However the CoM does not have representation from First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people living in rural and remote areas. This is a challenge for us to address.

Perhaps the most exciting and relevant skill set is in strategic thinking and planning, which is fabulous given the role of the CoM in planning for the future of the organisation. It has certainly been a benefit in the development of our new Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

Of course, it is not essential that everyone on the CoM has all of the skills needed; however, it is important that we all have skills in finance and governance as that is where our legal responsibility lies. This is a challenge for future membership. One set of skills that we need to increase is that of fundraising and/or income generation. It is important as we move forward that we broaden our funding base and this set of skills would assist us to look to business and philanthropic trusts for additional funding.

Strategic Plan 2023-2026

During the first months of 2023, the CoM and senior staff members commenced work on a new strategic plan. Our previous Strategic Plan was completed prior to the release of the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The environment in which we operate now is thus very different.

The development of the Strategic Plan commenced with a scan of the environment where we interviewed people who hold influential decision-making positions in the sector and asked them what they thought were the key issues and opportunities for VMIAC over the next 3-5 years. Alongside this, we held consultations with members to ensure the plan is consistent with the concerns of the broad consumer movement.

The key messages from those conversations included the need for greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; stronger involvement of membership; partnerships and collaboration with appropriate organisations; consideration of the current and future environment and setting the plan within that context; and a stronger voice for consumers and their rights in the sector.

The five Strategic Directions have now been agreed and will be launched in October 2023. The next step is to operationalise these Strategic Directions for implementation over the next three years. They provide a roadmap for our future.

Key Initiatives

VMIAC's first Strategic Direction is 'Leadership Grounded in Experience', where we take a strong role in championing human rights and fighting for systemic transformation.

The CoM has committed resources to advocate for the Royal Commission's Recommendation 29, which proposes the establishment of a new non-government agency, overseen by a skills-based board that is chaired by, and consisting of a majority of people with lived experience to:

- deliver accredited training and resources;
- develop and deliver mental health and wellbeing services led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress; and
- facilitate co-location, shared resourcing, learning opportunities and the creation of new partnerships and networks.

While considerable groundwork was undertaken by the previous CoM to found this entity, the Department of Health has not established the Board and the state government has not funded the agency.

Appointment of a Campaign Manager has ensured that Recommendation 29 remains a priority for VMIAC in partnership with Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC).

This Is How We Do It is an organisational development project designed to identify the features of a thriving lived experience organisation. VMIAC's sustainability and capacity to thrive asks us to create an 'aware' and proactive workplace that enables and empowers the lived experience workforce (in paid and unpaid roles). While there will be similarities to other workplaces that integrate wellbeing, trauma-informed, and productivity paradigms, there are likely to be some unique features of organisation and governance development at VMIAC.

The key objectives for the project are to:

- create a safe, creative, and productive lived experience organisation in which our lived experience workforce thrives;
- evolve a responsible governance model best suited to a lived experience (advocacy) organisation and peak consumer body;
- strengthen lived experience consumer leadership within VMIAC; and
- document and share the lessons we learn through a conscious focus on the intersection between lived experience, trauma-informed approaches, and organisation design and development.

Partnerships and collaboration

VMIAC has worked collaboratively with a number of organisations; this year we have strengthened many of these relationships and are now exploring the concept of partnerships which involve different commitments. We continue to work closely with SHARC and Tandem, and have taken the initiative to strengthen ties with key mental health non-government organisations. This has led to the support for our Recommendation 29 campaign.

One particular initiative in this area is with Foundation House, which focuses on the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers. We are currently exploring opportunities to partner with them on this critical issue.

Future Forward

The next year provides an opportunity to stabilise the organization. With a full team of staff and CoM, we will be equipped to build on the significant work that has been undertaken over the past few years. A major challenge is finding an office location that will allow the team to work effectively and productively, and welcome in our members and partners in new ways.

Finally it is important to thank the staff and many volunteers who are progressing the work of VMIAC. Our dedicated CEO is managing a team of skilled and resourceful staff who demonstrate commitment to the consumer movement on a daily basis and our CoM is developing the team approach that will assist the organisation to thrive and drive a transformation in the sector.



Elvis Martin, Maggie Toko, James Horton, and Ali Pain at the VMIAC AGM 2022. Image: VMIAC/Hannah Tucker.

CEO'S REPORT

A busy and productive year for VMIAC, with the growth of our membership and team of staff.



Craig Wallace
VMIAC CEO

Image: VMIAC/Hannah Tucker

It has been a very busy and productive year for VMIAC. We have seen our membership grow by 58% and I extend a very warm welcome to our new members, as well as big thanks to those continuing with their membership.

Our staff have continued excelling in work funded by State and Federal Governments. We have begun, or continued collaboration and advocacy with entities including the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health, the Interim Regional Bodies, the Statewide Trauma Service and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals. This year we commenced a campaign for the establishment of 'Our Agency', aligned with Recommendation 29 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System which alarmingly was not funded in the 2023/2024 state budget despite critical preparation completed in partnership with Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC).

Alongside our membership growth, we have seen the Consumer Register grow by 73.5%, enabling the voice and advocacy of consumer lived experience to be in many different places in the reform of Victoria's mental health system. Members and consumers have also significantly contributed to our 2023-2026 Strategic Planning process.

Importantly, VMIAC is on a journey with a Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The RAP is a critical step for the organisation and we are proud to be on this path. As part of our related advocacy, we have supported five campaigns seeking justice for First Nation peoples and/or people of colour.

In November 2022, we relocated our office from Brunswick East to the old Prahran Mission building. We are enjoying being co-located with Uniting VicTas and other like-minded tenants although there is a task ahead of us to look for a more permanent home.

Our work in this new home has been brilliantly supported by a Corporate Services and administration team as well as a Communications team who have maintained VMIAC's strong presence on social media and in our regular newsletter.

We have a growing Lived and Living Experience Workforce (LLEW) team who have been working collaboratively with LLEW Development Program partner agencies. The LLEW team has been funded to provide training, supervision, practice supports, and to develop an evidence base to realise an authorised, supported and sustainable consumer LLEW.

The team has strengthened VMIAC's connections to consumer LLEW across the state and has an important program of work continuing into next year.

VMIAC's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) team continues to provide advocacy support through two programs: NDIS Appeals and NDIS Information & Support. The Information & Support team provides short-term advocacy support to people who live with psychosocial disabilities and are participants of the NDIS or are attempting to apply for NDIS funding.

The NDIS Appeals team primarily supports participants/consumers with two distinct issues in the AAT appeals space, including contesting decisions made by the NDIA in relation to funded supports and 'Access not Met' decisions made by the NDIA primarily in relation to psychosocial disability. In the past year we have seen a continuously increasing demand for advocacy support in the NDIS Appeals space.

As well as these programs, the NDIS team has made or contributed to multiple NDIS submissions this year, ensuring that the voices of consumer lived experience are heard.

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) program wrapped up at the end of the financial year after undertaking critical work in supporting consumers who identified as having psychosocial disability to make submissions to the DRC. In addition, a successful grant application was made to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to fund a new project called Navigating My Way which will commence in the new financial year.

The Research team pursued an ambitious program of research and engagement during 2022/2023 to promote lived experience-led research agendas,

partnerships, and projects across the mental health sector, and to support VMIAC policy and advocacy with high-quality evidence. This team ran, partnered, collaborated on, and supported a range of innovative consultations and research projects across the year to increase the influence of the lived experience-led research agenda in Victoria.

During the first half of 2023, the Research team completed the final round of consulting with researchers and other people with lived experience for VMIAC's first Lived Experience-Led Research Strategy: Our Questions, Our Voices, Our Way. The Research Strategy is closely aligned with VMIAC's new Strategic Plan, 2023-2026.

We sadly saw the end of our very successful CHECK-IN program which was initially funded due to COVID-19 lockdowns and had its funding extended for a further 12 months to 30 June 2023. The practice wisdom generated in this program continues to inspire us and our ways of being alongside people in their journeys.

Over the course of the year we have welcomed new staff and said farewell to others. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff who have contributed so much to VMIAC and of course extend those thanks to all members of VMIAC's Committee of Management (CoM) who play a critical role in the governance of the organisation. In particular and on a very personal note, I am enormously grateful for the support of James Horton and Tricia Szirom, both of whom have been Chairs of the CoM this year.

To all members, supporters, allies and partners of VMIAC, thank you for your contributions this year. We are stronger because of you and we look forward to continuing our work together.

ADVOCACY

A state-wide individual and systemic advocacy service for people with lived experience.

The VMIAC General Advocacy Program is a statewide advocacy service. We work directly with consumers and are consumer directed in our approach. Our small team of 2.6 FTE lived experience advocates work with people across Victoria who are over the age of 18 and who self-identify as having mental health issues, trauma or distress.

The Advocacy team continues to provide both individual and systemic advocacy for consumers, ensuring their voices are heard across a multitude of platforms.

Some of the recurring themes continue to be as follows:

- Lack of adequate collaboration with consumers by mental health services, in relation to treatment plans or preferences. In particular, issues around medication management continue to be a consistent theme, with consumers reporting lack of consideration of previous history and potential harm, and no explanation of what medication they are taking or any potential side effects.
- Mental health services being coercive, e.g. threatening to put consumers on treatment orders unless consumers comply with their treatment plan.
- Stigma within service delivery and the community associated with particular diagnoses.
- Difficulty navigating or accessing complaints systems for health services, with services often having inauthentic engagement in the process.
- Complaints outcomes not matching the needs of consumers, e.g. restorative outcomes are often not desired or unsuccessful, and there

are limited options for accountability and compensation.

- The ongoing challenges facing both consumers and advocates in the fractured and difficult-to-navigate nature of support services with eligibility criteria which do not allow for continuity or 'wrap-around' assistance. The lack of continuity is serving to retraumatise people who are having to repeat stories and relive traumas in the process.
- Additional barriers such as significant wait times to access immediate support and ongoing support services, as well as identifying available services to provide ongoing support, as there is a clear lack of adequate services available.
- Lack of options for viable and safe services in regional Victoria, for example where a service has been unsafe for a consumer.

This year in the General Advocacy program we have had a keen focus on building more relationships and visibility in regional Victoria.

An Example of Our Work

Norma¹ lives in regional Victoria, on the outskirts of a country town. At the time of engaging the VMIAC advocacy service, Norma was housebound and facing a rental eviction. She was blacklisted from taxi companies and had no relationship with services other than the local council for meals and cleaning. Norma has a life-long history of psychosocial disability and self-identifies as having very low functional capacity. She acknowledged that she found regulating difficult which meant that she screams at service providers she speaks to, due to a belief that they are all plotting against her. Norma has limited formal supports and no informal supports.

Norma engaged VMIAC through self-referral from a web search. She had been cut off from all services due to her struggles regulating her emotions, which are as being verbally abusive to staff.

A VMIAC Advocate kept in contact with Norma through e-mail and phone calls. Norma frequently struggled to regulate during these interactions, believing that the Advocate was to be blamed for her isolation and impending homelessness. Despite this, Norma and the Advocate were able to form a plan and an agreement to navigate periods of difficulty regulating. After about six total hours of phone and e-mail conversations, Norma thanked the Advocate for “sticking around,” and together began taking steps to address Norma’s circumstances including:

- removal from the local taxi companies’ blacklist;
- removal from the local church services’ blacklist;
- applying for the Victorian housing register;
- successfully engaging with housing services; and
- securing brokerage.

The Advocate was the intermediary for all these steps, due to Norma’s view that services were all conspiring against her and were attempting to push her out onto the street.

The Advocate spent approximately three hours on the phone with Norma in 20-minute blocks over five weeks. Norma and workers from other services periodically consulted the Advocate in order to establish ways of working together. Norma and the Advocacy team together succeeded in achieving goals that previously been unsolvable.

1 “Norma” is a pseudonym.

ENGAGEMENT

Developing VMIAC's first Reconciliation Action Plan and uplifting lived experience through member engagement and the Consumer Register.

The Engagement Team is a small but creative team led by Chantelle Higgs. We deliver community and member events, lead the development of VMIAC's First Reconciliation Action Plan, and undertake assertive engagement with people who have not been historically represented in VMIAC's membership. The team also works with consumers and the Department of Health to embed lived experience into the Victorian mental health system reform via the Consumer Register.

Over the last year we have been inspired by the ongoing courage of our members to speak truth to power, including to VMIAC as the peak body for consumers.

Reconciliation Action Plan

VMIAC is developing a Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and is at the beginning of our efforts to contribute to the reconciliation movement. We are using this time to scope and develop relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. We are formulating a vision for reconciliation, using our sphere of influence to support the Balit Murrup vision¹ to attain the highest standards of social emotional wellbeing and mental health for Victorian Aboriginal people, families, and communities.

In this spirit of listening and reflecting on VMIAC's position, we've supported the efforts of First Nations peoples for justice by actively supporting these campaigns:

- Poccum's Law (a blueprint to fix Victoria's discriminatory bail laws);

- Raise the Age (changing the age of criminal responsibility in Victoria and nationally);
- Ending overrepresentation in Youth Justice;
- Allies for Uluru in support of Voice, Treaty, Truth; and
- Supporting the Yes Campaign in the lead up to the 2023 Referendum.

The VMIAC RAP is essential to initiating and continuing healing conversations. We hope to complete the VMIAC RAP in 2023/2024.

Membership: Who Are We?

This year, VMIAC's membership grew by 58% to 1,048 members. Of our members, 90% are individual members and 10% are associates (supporters with no voting rights).

We ask members to share with us how they identify, if they wish to, so we can strive to represent the wider Victorian community. Currently, in our membership:

- 1.8% identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person;
- 12.4% identify as a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background;
- 2.9% are aged between 18 and 25 years old;
- 8.4% live in a regional or remote area; and
- 27.8% identify as LGBTIQ+.

VMIAC acknowledges the intersectionality between these identities and forms of lived experience.

¹ health.vic.gov.au/publications/balit-murrup-aboriginal-social-emotional-wellbeing-framework-2017-2027

Member and Community Engagement

Our activities are intended to promote community connection and create opportunities for consumers to learn about their rights in the Victorian mental health system. We aim to build community within and outside the reform. Sometimes we got it right, sometimes we didn't. Over the last 12 months our members have voiced concerns about what and whom VMIAC stands for, and where we are headed.

The team ran regular activities throughout the year, including meetings for existing members, and assertive engagement efforts to introduce VMIAC to new members. These activities are often carried out in collaboration with partner organisations. Events include:

- launching the Courageous Conversations series with a panel discussion on 'Unity in Diversity' at the VMIAC 2022 AGM;
- gathering community members together in an end of year celebration at the Footscray Arts Centre in December 2022;
- partnering with Wayapa Wurruk to deliver wellness practice workshops based on Aboriginal wisdom for VMIAC members quarterly throughout 2022/2023;
- collaborating with the Centre of Multicultural Youth to organise wellbeing activities for young people of colour in Ballarat and Noble Park;
- partnering with the NDIS team to consult with participants of the NDIS on behalf of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission; and
- participating in the October 2022 Lake Esmond Mental Health Expo organised by the Ballarat Mental Health Collective.



VMIAC and Tandem stall at the Lake Esmond Mental Health Expo.

Image: VMIAC

Consumer Register

It is our privilege to work alongside the consumer community, who are courageous, tenacious, and generous with their expertise.

Reform activities following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system continued at a rapid pace this year. Whilst this underlined the Victorian Government's commitment to reform, this fast-evolving environment often challenged our ability to uphold the consumer values we hold dear. We would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Consumer Register for not only their expertise, but also for their feedback on their experience with us, the Department of Health and other parties involved in the reform activities.

In 2022/2023, the team has advised, recruited, and coordinated payments for 33 distinct Department of Health projects. A total of \$126,397 was disbursed to 145 participants, including those who are not members of the Consumer Register.

This year, the Consumer Register grew by 73.5% compared to the previous year, to 144 people. Consumers tell us that:

- 2% identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person;
- 21% identify as a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background;
- 14% are aged between 18 and 25 years old;
- 17% live in a regional or remote area; and
- 35% identify as LGBTIQ+.

As with members, we acknowledge intersectionality between these identities and forms of lived experience.

The team continues to adopt assertive engagement to ensure that the Consumer Register reflects the wider Victorian community. In projects that require specific lived experience or service use, we worked together with relevant specialist organisations relevant, such as those that work with young people, or with LGBTIQ+ communities.

The Consumer Register community are offered capacity and skills development training at no charge. This year three training courses were organised:

1. Foundations of Consumer Perspectives, delivered by Athena Consumer Workforce Consulting (attended by 8 consumers);
2. Human Rights and Mental Health Services, delivered by Lionheart Consulting (attended by 9 consumers); and
3. Co-design Principles, developed and delivered in partnership with the Human Centered Design Hub of the Department of Health (attended by 28 consumers).



Community members participating in Wayapa at the End of Year Celebration in Footscray. Image: VMIAC

LLEW

An exciting new team that provides training, supervision, and practice support for the lived and living workforce.

The Lived and Living Experience Workforce (LLEW) Program is an exciting new program area within VMIAC. This program is funded by the Department of Health to provide training, supervision and practice supports, as well as to develop an evidence base to build an authoritative, supported, and sustainable lived and living experience workforce.

The LLEW Program is led by Program Manager Tash Gore following the departure of the Consumer Workforce Liaison in March 2023. A Communities of Practice Coordinator was recruited this year. Four more team members with specialist skills in workforce, training, and project management will join the team in 2023/2024.

The LLEW team leads the following initiatives:

- Developing an introductory training program for the consumer workforce in line with the recommendations of the Our Future Final Report¹;
- Delivering eCPR, Hearing Voices and Alternatives to Suicide training;
- Delivering Consumer Perspective Supervision Training in conjunction with Inside Out and Associates;
- Supporting the development of a Community of Practice for consumer consultants within clinical mental health services;
- Developing a bank of discipline-specific position descriptions;
- Exploring the micro-credentialling of our Consumers Leading in Governance program; and
- Offering LLEW research grants.

The LLEW team are also planning networking events for the consumer workforce in 2024. Increasing connection is a shared valued and driving force for the members of the team.

Achievements in 2022/2023

Throughout 2023, the LLEW team has strengthened VMIAC's connection to consumer workers across the state. We have established advisory and co-design groups, and are using the feedback and knowledge gained from consumer workers to guide our work. The team also collaborated with the Policy and Research team to engage with, and identify consumer worker priorities.

The LLEW team have also represented VMIAC in the following initiatives:

- Consumer Perspective Supervision Expression of Interest Assessment Panel;
- Steering Group for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Digital Experience, and
- Statewide Consumer Consultant Council.

We are thankful for the ongoing relationships and collaborative partnerships we have with our partner agencies, including Tandem, Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC), Harm Reduction Victoria, Centre for Mental Health Learning (CMHL), Centre for Mental Health Nursing (CMHN), Mental Health Victoria, and The Bouverie Centre. Our shared experience is growing the knowledge, skills, and leadership capabilities of lived and living experience workers across multiple disciplines.

¹ sharc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Our-Future-Final-Report.pdf

NDIS

Providing advocacy support to consumers and NDIS participants through NDIS Appeals, NDIS Information & Support, and DRC.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) team continues to provide advocacy support through two programs: NDIS Appeals and NDIS Information & Support. The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) program wrapped up at the end of its funding cycle on 30 June 2023.

Led by Kirsty Pleiter, and by Hannah Tucker in an acting capacity in May to August 2023, the NDIS team comprises people with lived experience resourced through federal and state funding.

NDIS Appeals Program

The NDIS Appeals Program supports consumers with two distinct issues in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) space, including contesting decisions made by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) in relation to funded supports and 'Access not Met' decisions.

In 2022/23 we continue to see increased demand for advocacy support in the NDIS Appeals space. We have responded by offering short-term advocacy and guidance that works alongside our long-term advocacy support. This financial year, the team assisted 25 people seeking appeals advocacy support. Reviewing these enquiries and ensuring that proper processes are followed had been a major undertaking. This work included phone calls, emails, meetings, reviewing documentation, consultations, and referrals to other services where required.

This year, the government focused on clearing up AAT backlog cases, including bringing in an Independent Expert Review (IER) process intended to improve the external review experience for participants whilst decreasing the number of cases that are required to reach the AAT.

This process led to VMIAC receiving a larger number of enquiries from consumers ineligible to go through the alternative process due to the complex nature of their appeals. Access cases were also ineligible to go through the IER process, therefore leading to an increase in support for contesting 'Access not Met' decisions.

While there is funding available for participants to receive free legal support through their appeals process, demand far outweighed available support. This led to an unfair power dynamic where participants did not have legal assistance through the AAT process, while the NDIA continued to have external and internal legal representation.

Consequently, VMIAC advocates faced more intensive workloads, representing clients at the AAT for a greater amount of time in complex cases. Despite this, the advocates have worked tirelessly to produce favourable outcomes for their clients. This includes supporting people with a psychosocial disability to successfully appeal decisions around their access to the NDIS, as well as supporting NDIS participants to successfully appeal decisions relating to the inclusion of desperately needed funding and supports within their NDIS plans.

In December 2022, the Federal Government announced that it would be replacing the AAT with a new administrative body. The Appeals team provided a response to the government's Administrative Reviews Reform Issues Paper focusing on the importance of lived experience & qualifications, accessibility, supported decision making, and the importance of participants having access to advocates.

NDIS Information and Support Program

Unfortunately, the NDIS can be an inaccessible and complex system for people to navigate. This can be increasingly difficult for people living with psychosocial disabilities and mental health challenges. The NDIS Information and Support Program provides short-term advocacy support by providing information, guidance, and linkages to allow people to understand their rights and allow them the opportunity to self-advocate for their needs.

The Information and Support team is small and consists of only 2.2 FTE positions; we do not have the required capacity to meet the high demand that exists within the community for our services. With our limited funding we were able to assist 44 people. Due to the multifaceted nature of each enquiry, reasons for referral and outcomes are varied and multiple.

The scope of advocacy support provided by the team includes:

- Providing support to allow consumers and participants to build their confidence in self-advocacy.
- Assisting participants to prepare for planning meetings.
- NDIS Access Requests, including referrals to psychosocial access programs where appropriate/available.
- Supporting participants to link with Local Area Coordinators and National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Planners/Delegates
- Assisting participants to review decisions made by the NDIA.
- Supporting participants to submit complaints about service providers.
- Providing information and guidance on how to utilise plans and funded supports.
- Linkages to mainstream and community supports.

There have been several key issues surrounding the NDIS that have continued to impact the livelihood and wellbeing of participants and consumers throughout the year, with new barriers continually emerging. The common themes we see through our enquiries includes:

- Access requests being declined for people with psychosocial disabilities due to not having enough evidence or not having tried 'all available treatments'
- Inappropriate or insufficient funding for supports
- Lack of access to appropriately trained support coordinators with experience working with people with psychosocial disabilities.
- Limited access to service providers in rural and regional areas.
- Requested supports being declined by the NDIA with little, to no, justification.
- The NDIA's interpretation of 'reasonable and necessary'
- Participants who reside in Supported Residential Services (SRS) facilities open to exploitation.
- The NDIA refusing to view a person holistically and instead only funded their listed disabilities.

DRC Program

Established in April 2019, the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission; DRC) provided an opportunity for consumers to address the harms and barriers they have experienced, have a say in their future treatment, and hold systems, services, and individuals to account.

VMIAC's DRC advocates supported consumers with their submissions to the DRC up until the deadline of 30 December 2022. The advocates received 112 enquiries and working alongside almost 50% of those consumers who enquired on an ongoing basis. They spent over 430 hours hearing consumer stories, and transcribed over 20 hours of audio into written text. The VMIAC DRC team also released over 15 newsletters, publications and social media posts to keep consumers informed about changes in the DRC space.

The DRC Final Report with 222 recommendations will be published on 29 September 2023.

Own Motion Enquiry

The NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission reached out to VMIAC to hold a session with participants on their experience engaging with platform providers. The NDIS Information & Support team held a focus group on 26 April 2023 with a representative from the Quality & Safeguards Commission. The focus group focused on both the positives and the negatives of engaging with platform providers when choosing support workers, and how this can allow for participants to exercise their choice and control whilst acknowledging that safeguarding mechanisms need to be in place.

POLICY & RESEARCH

Prioritising lived experience-led policy expertise and research that empowers the lived experience community.

This has been a very busy year for the Policy & Research team, as we continue to raise issues around the implementation of the Royal Commission reforms. The team is led by Gabriel Aleksandrs and staffed by Policy Officer Alycia O'Keefe and Research Advisor Dr Nicky Guerin, who joined the team in January 2023.

Policy Submissions

This year, VMIAC produced 12 organisational submissions on a range of reform topics, including:

- the State and Federal budget;
- the Draft National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy;
- review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS);
- the Disability Royal Commission (DRC);
- the development of the Victorian Strategy to Reduce Seclusion and Restraint; and
- the independent review into the Compulsory Treatment Criteria and Alignment with Decision-making Laws.

We also provided consumer-led policy expertise to government ministers, policymakers, the mental health service sector, accreditation bodies, and the wider mental health community. Our goal is to build a culture where consumer rights-oriented policy recommendations are communicated and systemically embedded. One example of this work was an invitation to provide advice on the development of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act, which resulted in substantive feedback to the Government on human rights implications of the Draft and significant consumer advocacy being taken directly to Government.

We recommend those interested in reading our policy submission view these documents which are all available on our website.

VMIAC has also tightened our policy workplan with other state consumer peaks to collaboratively lift a National Consumer voice. We have undertaken joint action as a member of the National Consumer Peak Alliance regarding the Commonwealth Better Access reform, as well as undertaken joint systemic advocacy on the process around the development of the National Consumer Peak.

We thank consumers who have participated in our workshops and consultations, who have shared case stories and personal experiences to build our understanding of what some of the solutions might be to gaps and deficiencies of the current system and the reform environment.

Collaborative Policy Development

We welcome collaboration with community organisations such as disability organisations, First Nations Community Controlled Organisations, LGBTIQA+ peaks, culturally and linguistically diverse and people of colour led organisations, to raise issues specific to consumers with intersecting needs. Over the last year and bolstered by the work of the Engagement team, the Policy & Research team has concentrated on building systemic advocacy to amplify the voices of historically under-represented communities in VMIAC. We have developed systemic advocacy platforms, including:

- ensuring mobile voting teams and in-reach postal voting programs are available to people in residential mental health settings;
- calls for Action on the DRC's Recommendations on restrictive practices;

- calls for a standalone mental health attribute to be added as an additional protection as part of Anti-Vilification law reform; and
- supporting campaigns by the Smart Justice for Young People coalition.

Looking Ahead

The team had successfully secured funding from the Department of Health to undertake a project related to the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022. This project aims to develop consumer resources and education on the Act in close consultation with consumers and in partnership with the Mental Health Consumer Legal Centre. A new Project Coordinator will join the team in 2023/2024.

We look forward to working more closely with our community as we implement consultations, surveys, focus groups, and networking to shape responses to other reforms on the horizon, and policy submissions.

We will continue to:

- support the rationale for the Mental Health Royal Commission Recommendation 29 campaign for Our Agency;
- support approaches to consumer representation at a National level as a member of the National Consumer Alliance;
- play a role in the grassroots community, non-profit, and health and human services sector building on mutually beneficial policy relationships.

We have enjoyed and learnt much from allies and teachers in organisations such as the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Mental Health Legal

Centre, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Victorian Transcultural Mental Health and the Victorian Council of Social Service among others.

Highlights

Invitation in August 2022 to provide advice on the development of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act.

VMIAC wrote to the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment regarding their Australian visit and Victorian Mental Health Facilities.

VMIAC responded to the Administrative Reviews Reform Issues Paper 2023 public consultation on the new system for federal administrative review to replace the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

VMIAC consultations and submission to the Independent Review into the Compulsory Treatment Criteria and Alignment with Decision-making Laws (May 2023)

VMIAC's Submission in response to the Victorian Department of Health's Discussion Paper on the Draft Strategy Towards the Elimination of Seclusion and Restraint.

VMIAC's Lived Experience-Led Research Strategy

During the first half of 2023, the Research team completed the final round of consulting with researchers and people with lived experience for VMIAC's first Lived Experience-Led Research Strategy: Our Questions, Our Voices, Our Way. The Research Strategy is closely aligned with VMIAC's new Strategic Plan, 2023-2026 and outlines how we prioritise research that empowers and emboldens people with lived experience, improves our mental health services, and makes a difference in our communities.

The Strategy also sets out how we work to influence mental health policy, challenge current research practices, and change people's lives by putting people with lived experience at the centre of investigating the issues that affect us. The Research Strategy grew out of VMIAC's principles, ethics, and commitment to human rights, social change, and innovation. We are committed to increasing access for diverse people with varied experiences to high-quality, lived experience-led research evidence.

Our programs outlined in the strategy include:

- research advocacy and partnerships;
- program evaluation;
- research support and endorsement;
- translating research into action;
- sharing research knowledge; and
- engaging lived experience voices in research.

Upholding our Human Rights in the Mental Health System

From January to June 2023, the team interviewed and surveyed 82 people with lived experience of seclusion and/or restraint in the public mental health system. The team also collaborated with Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation (VACCHO) to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had experienced restrictive practices.

Feedback and recommendations from consumers were distilled into VMIAC's public submission on the Victorian Department of Health's Strategy Toward the Elimination of Seclusion and Restraint, and the next edition of the VMIAC Seclusion and Restraint Report.

VMIAC is represented on the External Working Group for the Elimination of Seclusion and Restraint Strategy, and VMIAC continues to call for the immediate elimination of seclusion and restraint and for health-led (not police-led) responses to mental health emergencies.

Enhancing the Effectiveness and Wellbeing of the Lived Experience Workforce

The team co-produced a scoping literature review commissioned through the Bouverie Centre at La Trobe University to develop organisational practice aimed at enhancing Lived Experience Workforce effectiveness and wellbeing.

The review looked at qualities that contribute to effective community-run organisations, including consumer mental health organisations. It has been shared with Victorian government funders and submitted for publication. Recommendations from the review included:

- Expanding consumer training and leadership;
- Embedding partnerships with consumer-run organisations in the sector; and
- Increasing community awareness of consumer principles and the role of lived experience in sector reform.

Strengthening Lived Experience-Led Research Agendas

As part of building research collaboration, we began work on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the newly established Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health. The MoU will guide our partnership with the Centre in its commitment to put lived experience at the centre of mental health research and research translation. We also advised the Collaborative Centre's Research team on embedding lived experience perspectives in the Centre's Research Strategy.

The Research team strengthened our connections with lived experience researchers in universities, other peak lived experience bodies (including Tandem, SHARC, Satellite Foundation, and Foundation House), networks across Victorian community-run organisations and mental health services including Deaf Victoria, Victorian Transcultural Mental Health, Mind Australia, and LGBTIQ+ organisations.

Sharing VMIAC Research Online

In 2023, the team developed a Research section on the VMIAC website at vmiac.org.au/research-intro to share the Research Strategy, our partnerships, and a list of current lived experience-led research opportunities for consumers, as well as our criteria for supporting or partnering in research projects

that are aligned with VMIAC priorities.

As part of promoting awareness of lived experience-led research principles and approaches, we also developed a Lived Experience-led Research Toolkit containing resources for people with lived experience who are interested in being involved in research.

Looking forward to 2023/2024

The next year promises to be a busy time for the Research team. We look forward to continuing to engage with lived experience researchers, VMIAC members, and the broader consumer community as we work to:

- implement the Lived Experience-Led Research Strategy;
- prioritise First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with diverse sexualities and genders, neurodiverse people, and people with a disability in all VMIAC's lived experience-led research programs;
- run Lived Experience Voices in Research Forums to identify shared and emerging lived experience research priorities;
- strengthen and expand our partnerships and collaborations;
- produce VMIAC's Seclusion Report #4; and
- establish VMIAC's Program Evaluation Framework to report on lived experience-led program outcomes across the organisation.

OUR AGENCY

Victoria is missing its Consumer Leadership Agency. Here is what VMIAC is doing about it.

When the Royal Commission was underway, our community told them loudly and clearly that for Victoria to achieve transformation of the mental health system, consumer lived experience needs to be both leading and at the centre of change.

Recommendation 29 made by the Royal Commission was the creation of a consumer leadership agency. As a foundational component of a redesigned system, this new agency — an Australian first — is intended to bring consumer leadership and consumer-led approaches to the fore. Because it is to be governed by a consumer-led board and is all about embedding consumer leadership across the system, we in the consumer movement have been calling it “Our Agency.”

Across this year, VMIAC and the Self-Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) jointly led the Our Agency project. We engaged with consumers across Victoria to explore aspirations for Our Agency, its core elements, and design features. We identified that Our Agency would fill an important gap and add real value by:

- fostering new consumer-created initiatives for healing and support — testing new ideas and expanding effective peer-led approaches so that peer-led options are a genuine part of the service mix;
- building a stronger and connected consumer lived experience workforce - enabled with new fit for purpose training and development opportunities and workforce networks to strengthen collective skills and build consistent ways of working;
- nurturing consumer leaders and advisers who are influential in sector governance and equipping them with purpose-built training and

connections to peers so that they aren’t isolated and working in silos;

- starting sector and community partnerships that can create transformation - by contributing to the implementation of major reform initiatives (like the Safe Places and Crisis Respite services called for in Rec 9) and working closely with agencies and services on consumer involvement;
- developing, sharing and growing best practice approaches - through community designed initiatives, helping organisations to embed lived experience and building communities of practice;
- offering bespoke training for consumer leaders, peer workforce and for organisations - including for services and agencies that want to build their proficiency in genuine lived experience involvement; and
- being a sector backbone and offering co-location services that provide back-of-house support for new consumer-led organisations and services to start, grow and develop.

We also worked closely with the Department’s Lived Experience Branch to inform and shape establishment of Our Agency.

Concerningly, Our Agency was not funded by the Victorian Government in the 23/24 budget. This was a huge disappointment. While Our Agency remains missing from the rapidly changing mental health landscape, consumer leadership is at risk of being sidelined and important opportunities are being missed.

To highlight the critical importance of getting Our Agency up and running, we commenced a campaign steered by a dedicated group of consumer leaders.

Focused on building awareness of Our Agency, the role it is intended to play and the importance of it being funded, the campaign has attracted strong initial support from our community and mental health sector allies.



Why do we need Our Agency? Why it's important?

Our Agency will connect and grow consumer-led initiatives, provide training and resources for consumer-leadership, develop consumer-led support services, and embed consumer-led approaches across the mental health sector.

How you can help:

We are calling on Premier, Jacinta Allan; Treasurer, Tim Pallas; and Minister for Mental Health, Ingrid Stitt to fund Our Agency and establish its board immediately.

You can help by adding your name to our open letter and by letting us know why consumer lived experience leadership is important to you.

Sign the letter by visiting ouragency.good.do/Funding/SignTheLetter or scanning the QR code.



CHECK-IN

An innovative peer-led self-advocacy program that evolved from our peer support work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Artwork of Hope. Image: Shelley Batten.



During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, VMIAC established CHECK-IN, an innovative self-advocacy program that is peer created, supported, and evaluated.

The program recognised the need for cultural responsiveness within peer-led services and strived for the continual recognition and challenging of power structures. CHECK-IN's commitment to these principles was essential to its success and the positive experience community members reported.

Across three years, from 2020 to 2023, the CHECK-IN program drew upon evidence-based models such as Intentional Peer Support, Narrative Therapy, and Creative Arts Therapy. It remained committed to a consumer approach which encouraged accessibility through alternative forms of communication.

It honoured methods outside the biomedical model by including activities which prioritised arts-making, letter-writing and storytelling.

The Evolution of CHECK-IN

The CHECK-IN program received initial funding for one year in 2020, and supported consumers through pandemic-related restrictions, initially through two Project Officers who used their lived experience alongside anti-oppressive justice-doing principles and peer-led therapies.

CHECK-IN then received further funding until June 2023 in recognition of its success in supporting consumers as we emerged from the pandemic and looked to recover.

In 2022/2023 the CHECK-IN program altered in form and intention. When it was conceptualised, CHECK-IN aimed to support consumers experiencing Victoria's pandemic public health measures. This year, we focused on sustaining and growing the community of consumer self-advocates. This is based on what the community has told us over two years — that self advocacy is occurring whilst cultural change occurs in services, and self-advocates can and want to learn about the strategies and wins of fellow self-advocates.

Our work then turned to opening spaces for consumers to grow knowledge, skills, and peer connections, enabling the community to facilitate events and activities for others. Community members were paid for their expertise, in alignment with VMIAC's commitment to valuing lived and living experience.

We created opportunity for connection, co-reflection, and learning through arts and culture excursions, lunches, nature walks, and other activities to support wellbeing.

These gatherings were catalysts for organic discussions around mental health, self-advocacy, and service use.

We were constantly in awe and appreciative of the wisdom that filled these spaces, and the shared commitment for a very different future of how mental health is talked about, thought about, and responded to.

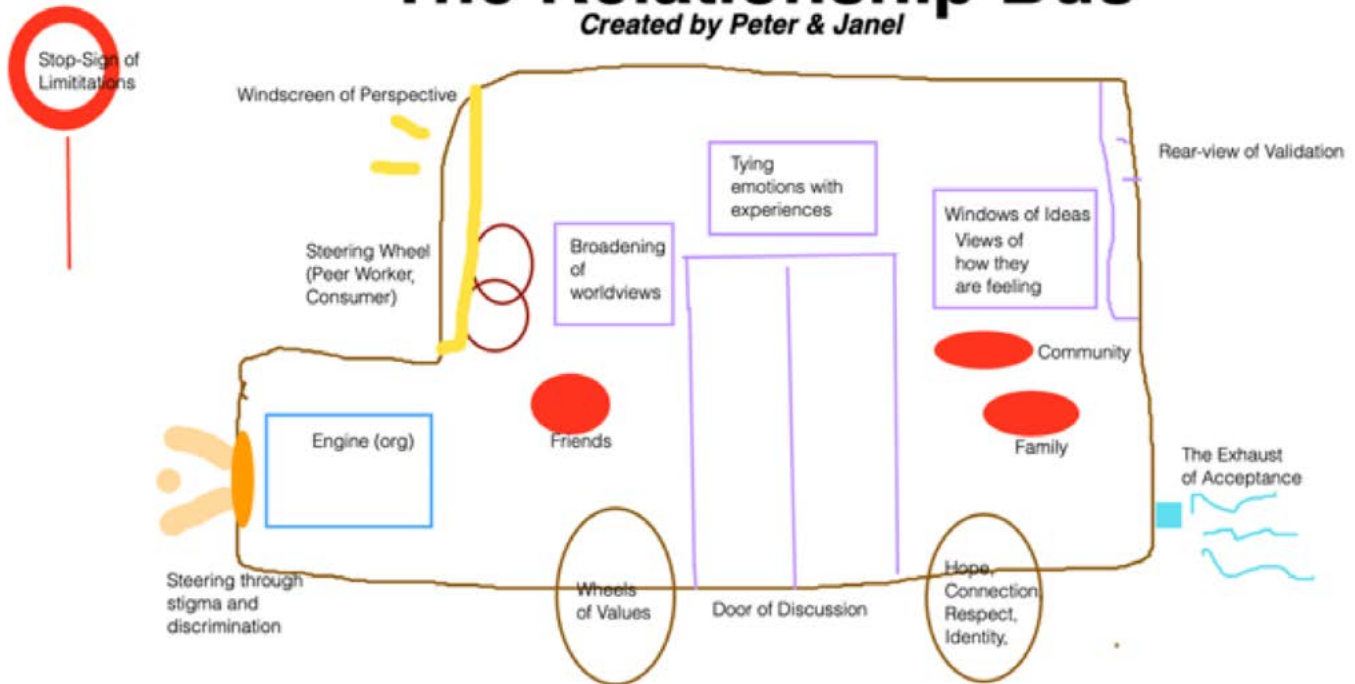
CHECK-IN as Change Agents in the Reform Environment

CHECK-IN was established at a crucial moment in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's reform agenda, when mental health services were responding to recommendations around strengthening and supporting the lived and living experience workforce. CHECK-IN came to the attention of peer workers and mental health services in 2021.

Noticing interest in the program by peer workers and community health services, we ran sessions for this part of our community. For some, this was because the reform environment meant there was an increased number of peer worker roles, but not necessarily opportunities or resources for co-reflection about how this change was being experienced by those using their lived and living experience in the workplace.

“The Relationship Bus”

Created by Peter & Janel



For community health services, this may have been because they were moving to introduce lived and living experience workers into their services in anticipation of the Royal Commission Recommendations.

Through its design, development, and delivery of consistent peer responses, CHECK-IN sought to bridge gaps in lived and living experience workforce support, training, and approaches, as identified by the Royal Commission.

CHECK-IN drew from feedback from peer workers and VMIAC members to continuously revise and improve the program throughout its life-cycle. This effort established CHECK-IN as a novel peer support model for both the consumer community and the lived and living experience workforce.

CHECK-IN's Legacy

Despite our efforts, VMIAC was unable to secure funding for CHECK-IN beyond 30 June 2023.

At CHECK-IN's final social meet-up, community members reflected on their disappointment with the program's closure. One participant shared a sense of sadness because they have not had support like CHECK-IN before. Another participant, who had been a co-facilitator, shared how their experience with the program had motivated them to establish their own peer group, because they saw the end of the program as creating a gap in community support.

To ensure the wisdom of the CHECK-IN team and its participants lives on, a Practice Wisdom toolkit will be released in 2023/24. The learning contained in the toolkit will also be embedded across VMIAC's programs and services.

“Programs like this need funding in order to sustain what will be the future of social and community connection, led by us, shaped by us, sustained by us. We were always inspired by our connection to Country, connection to ourselves, and connection to each other. Although we weren’t First nation led, we were always considering how we could conduct our program in support of First nations ways of being, knowing and doing.”

“Check-In personifies a space where practice skills fuse with humanity and care.”

“The Check-in group is a very safe space to learn new skills and share experiences with like-minded people. The lived experience within the group is brilliant.”

“People’s experiences are not pathologised the way they often are in support groups run by clinicians. In this regard, peer-led support groups are far superior to those run by ‘mental health professionals’.”

“It’s a link for people to be heard and seen. To self-advocate with support and practice those skills. It embodies the values of VMIAC. It has been experienced by many and cherished by staff.”

ENDING SECLUSION & RESTRAINT

There is no place for seclusion and restraint – recognised traumatic human rights breaches – in the mental health system.

Seclusion and restraint are recognised to be traumatic human rights breaches. They carry the risk of serious physical injury, even death. They have no place in a safe, therapeutic, rights-based health system. Plans are underway to eliminate seclusion and restraint from Victoria's mental health system by 2031, but our position is that the elimination timeframe is far too long.

In July 2022 VMIAC published its third Seclusion Report, bringing light to the extent and experiences of people who have been subject to these harmful practices over the 2020 – 2021 period.

The findings of this report are alarming:

- In 2020/2021, more than half of all adult mental health services **increased** their use of restraint;
- Victorian mental health services use seclusion more often than the average mental health service in Australia;
- Consumers are more likely to be secluded or restrained if they are:
 - male;
 - aged between 25–34 years; or
 - are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

A key objective of the Seclusion Reports is to provide clear information to Victorian consumers about the seclusion and restraint practices. The reports are also an advocacy tool, helping to make more visible the serious issue of restrictive practices, and the relative performance of different public mental health services.

There is little transparency or accountability for the use of seclusion and restraint practices in the mental health system. Data concerning these

practices are not made publicly available. We hope to see service providers and regulatory bodies take on the responsibility for producing reports like this and sharing the information more transparently.

The fourth Seclusion Report will be released in the 2023/2024 financial year. VMIAC's Seclusion Reports can be downloaded at vmiac.org.au/research-intro/ending-seclusion-restraint.

Report author Indigo Daya presenting the findings of the third VMIAC Seclusion Report in Melbourne.
Image: VMIAC/Robin Litvins-Salter



TREASURER'S REPORT

The 2022/23 financial year has seen the consolidation of some important changes for VMIAC.

Whilst continuing its navigation of a 'COVID-normal' operating environment, VMIAC has continued to provide consumer consultations, advocacy and other Programs whilst enabling staff to effectively and largely work from home. A new location has brought the consolidation of the new team under CEO Craig Wallace, whilst the year has also consolidated a new and energised Committee of Management.

VMIAC's financial operations have resulted in an audited surplus of \$611K reflected in the Statement of Profit and Loss report for the year ended 30 June 2023. The following comments are notable:

- Pleasingly, the annual surplus from operations has reduced since last year, reflecting improved productivity and service delivery post-COVID.
- VMIAC's revenues continue to increase as Mental Health remains both a State and National priority.
- Employee Benefits Expenses have increased year-on-year as VMIAC fills vacant roles and works towards filling all budgeted positions into the future.
- Direct Program Expenses continue to increase year-on-year, reflecting greater focus on service delivery to Consumers.

VMIAC's Balance Sheet indicates:

- A continued healthy cash position with audited Cash & Equivalents at 30th June 2023 of \$6.6M. This is up approximately \$1.5M versus the same time last year (being \$0.9M of additional Income Received in Advance, plus \$0.6M of 2023 surplus).

- Lease Liabilities have reduced to zero as VMIAC relocated from East Brunswick to Prahran during the financial year.
- VMIAC's Retained Earnings have increased from \$1.8M to \$2.5M reflecting the inclusion of the 2023 surplus.

Financial areas of focus for the coming year will include:

1. Maximising the use of and return on VMIAC's cash reserves.
2. Planning for and managing VMIAC's Retained Earnings for the maximum benefit of our Consumers and Community
3. VMIAC's Risk Management profile and minimising all aspects of organisational risk, and
4. Prioritising focussed Program & Project reviews to analyse progress and ensure maximum impact and full utilisation of our budgets.



Caron Byrne C.A.

VMIAC Treasurer

8 November 2023

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council

ABN 28 642 080 520

Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2023

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VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue from ordinary activities	2	4,492,089	4,251,277
Employee benefits expense		(3,156,287)	(2,640,776)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(1,106)	(8,689)
Amortisation of right of use asset - leased offices		(23,135)	(34,703)
Finance costs		(151)	(4,136)
Consultants fees		(96,716)	(136,678)
Direct program expenses		(195,675)	(114,210)
Rent and rates		(42,761)	(6,622)
Other expenses from ordinary activities		<u>(365,231)</u>	<u>(352,595)</u>
Surplus before income tax expense		611,027	952,868
Income tax expense	1(h)	-	-
Other comprehensive income (net of tax)		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total comprehensive income after income tax expense for the year		<u><u>611,027</u></u>	<u><u>952,868</u></u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	3	6,561,529	4,957,934
Trade and other receivables	4	85,918	76,659
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		<u>6,647,447</u>	<u>5,034,593</u>
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	5	19,049	99,028
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		<u>19,049</u>	<u>99,028</u>
TOTAL ASSETS		<u>6,666,496</u>	<u>5,133,621</u>
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	6	407,844	448,014
Income in advance	7	3,498,855	2,482,381
Provisions	8	158,149	137,713
Lease liability	9	-	38,068
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>4,064,848</u>	<u>3,106,176</u>
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Income in advance	7	144,026	142,840
Provisions	8	402	714
Lease liability	9	-	37,698
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>144,428</u>	<u>181,252</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES		<u>4,209,276</u>	<u>3,287,428</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>2,457,220</u>	<u>1,846,193</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS			
Retained Surplus		2,457,220	1,846,193
TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS		<u>2,457,220</u>	<u>1,846,193</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

	Retained Earnings	Total
	\$	\$
Balance at 1 July 2021	893,325	893,325
Surplus attributable to the entity	952,868	952,868
Other comprehensive income	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Balance at 30 June 2022	1,846,193	1,846,193
Surplus attributable to the entity	611,027	611,027
Other comprehensive income	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Balance at 30 June 2023	<u><u>2,457,220</u></u>	<u><u>2,457,220</u></u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES			
Receipts from government and sponsors		5,200,531	5,430,099
Other grants, donations and sundry income received		269,042	511,684
Payments to suppliers and employees		(3,867,415)	(3,160,683)
Interest received		<u>24,573</u>	<u>764</u>
Net cash provided by operating activities	10	<u>1,626,731</u>	<u>2,781,864</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES			
Payments for purchase of plant and equipment		-	(6,200)
Proceeds on sale of assets		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Net cash (used in)/(used in) investing activities		<u>-</u>	<u>(6,200)</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES			
Repayment of lease liabilities		<u>(23,136)</u>	<u>(40,918)</u>
Net cash used in investing activities		<u>(23,136)</u>	<u>(40,918)</u>
Net increase in cash held		1,603,595	2,734,746
Cash at the beginning of the year		<u>4,957,934</u>	<u>2,223,188</u>
Cash at the end of the year	3	<u><u>6,561,529</u></u>	<u><u>4,957,934</u></u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

Note 1: Statement of Significant Accounting Policies

Financial Reporting Framework

The Committee has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity because it is unlikely there are users of these financial statements who are not in a position to require the preparation of reports tailored to their information needs.

Accordingly, these financial statements have been prepared to satisfy the Committee's reporting requirements under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. The Association is a not-for-profit entity for financial reporting purposes under Australian Accounting Standards.

Statement of Compliance

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the mandatory Australian Accounting Standards applicable to entities reporting under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. These special purpose financial statements comply with all the recognition and measurement requirements in Australian Accounting Standards except for those specified in AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers* and AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities* as in accounting for income, recognition of all grant income has been deferred until the related expenses are incurred without assessing whether there are enforceable performance obligations to transfer a good or service to a third party which are sufficiently specific to know when the performance obligation has been satisfied. Refer to Note 1(f) Revenue below.

Basis of Preparation

The financial statements, except for the cash flow information, have been prepared on an accrual basis and are based on historical costs unless otherwise stated in the notes. The material accounting policies adopted in the preparation of these financial statements are presented below and have been consistently applied unless stated otherwise. The amounts presented in the financial statements have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

a. Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents includes cash on hand, deposits held at call with banks, and other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less.

b. Property, Plant and Equipment

Leasehold improvements and office equipment are carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation or amortisation.

The depreciable amount of all property, plant and equipment is depreciated over the useful lives of the assets to the Association commencing from the time the asset is held ready for use. Leasehold Improvements are amortised over the shorter of either the unexpired period of the lease or the estimated useful lives of the improvements.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

Note 1: Statement of Significant Accounting Policies (cont.)

c. Employee Entitlements

Short-term employee benefits

Provision is made for the Association's obligation for short-term employee benefits. Short-term employee benefits are benefits (other than termination benefits) that are expected to be settled wholly before 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service, including wages, salaries and sick leave. Short-term employee benefits are measured at the (undiscounted) amounts expected to be paid when the obligation is settled.

The Association's obligations for short-term employee benefits such as wages, salaries and sick leave are recognised as part of current trade and other payables in the statement of financial position.

Other long-term employee benefits

Provision is made for employees' long service leave and annual leave entitlements not expected to be settled wholly within 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service. Other long-term employee benefits are measured at the present value of the expected future payments to be made to employees. Expected future payments incorporate anticipated future wage and salary levels, durations of service and employee departures and are discounted at rates determined by reference to market yields at the end of the reporting period on government bonds that have maturity dates that approximate the terms of the obligations. Upon the remeasurement of obligations for other long-term employee benefits, the net change in the obligation is recognised in profit or loss as part of employee benefits expense.

The Association's obligations for long-term employee benefits are presented as non-current provisions in its statement of financial position, except where the Association does not have an unconditional right to defer settlement for at least 12 months after the end of the reporting period, in which case the obligations are presented as current provisions.

d. Provisions

Provisions are recognised when the Association has a legal or constructive obligation, as a result of past events, for which it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will result and that outflow can be reliably measured. Provisions are measured at the best estimate of the amounts required to settle the obligation at the end of the reporting period.

e. Impairment of Assets

At the end of each reporting period, the Association reviews the carrying values of its tangible and intangible assets to determine whether there is an indication that those assets have been impaired. If such an indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset, being the higher of the asset's fair value less costs to sell and value in use, is compared to the asset's carrying amount. Any excess of the asset's carrying value over its recoverable amount is recognised in the statements of profit or loss and other comprehensive income.

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

Note 1: Statement of Significant Accounting Policies (cont.)

f. Revenue

Revenue is measured at the fair value of the consideration received or receivable after taking into account any discounts.

Grant Income

All grant income has been deferred upon receipt and not recognised as revenue until the related expenses are incurred, without assessing whether enforceable performance obligations exist. This does not comply with AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers* or AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities*. This policy has been adopted to ensure grant income from all sources is consistently recognised.

Interest Revenue

Interest revenue is recognised using the effective interest rate method, which for floating rate financial assets is the rate inherent in the instrument.

Donations

Donation income is recognised when the Association obtains control over the funds which is generally at the time of receipt.

All revenue is stated net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST).

g. Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Revenues, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of GST, except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Receivables and payable are stated inclusive of the amount of GST receivable or payable. The net amount of GST recoverable from, or payable to, the ATO is included with other receivables or payables in the assets and liabilities statement.

h. Income Tax

The Association is exempt from paying income tax by virtue of Section 50-45 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act, 1997*. Accordingly, tax effect accounting has not been adopted.

i. The Company as Lessee

At inception of a contract, the Association assesses if the contract contains or is a lease. If there is a lease present, a right-of-use asset and a corresponding lease liability is recognised by the Association where the Association is a lessee. However, all contracts that are classified as short-term leases (lease with remaining lease term of 12 months or less) and leases of low value assets are recognised as an operating expense on a straight-line basis over the term of the lease. Initially the lease liability is measured at the present value of the lease payments still to be paid at commencement date. The lease payments are discounted at the interest rate implicit in the lease. If this rate cannot be readily determined, the Association uses the incremental borrowing rate.

Lease payments included in the measurement of the lease liability are as follows:

- fixed lease payments less any lease incentives;
- variable lease payments that depend on an index or rate, initially measured using the index or rate at the commencement date;
- the amount expected to be payable by the lessee under residual value guarantees;
- the exercise price of purchase options, if the lessee is reasonably certain to exercise the options;
- lease payments under extension options if lessee is reasonably certain to exercise the options; and
- payments of penalties for terminating the lease if the lease term reflects the exercise of an option to terminate the lease.

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

Note 1: Statement of Significant Accounting Policies (cont.)

i. The Company as Lessee (cont.)

The right-of-use assets comprise the initial measurement of the corresponding lease liability as mentioned above, any lease payments made at or before the commencement date as well as any initial direct costs. The subsequent measurement of the right-of-use assets is at cost less accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Right-of-use assets are depreciated over the lease term or useful life of the underlying asset whichever is the shortest.

Where a lease transfers ownership of the underlying asset or the cost of the right-of-use asset reflects that the Association anticipates exercising a purchase option, the specific asset is depreciated over the useful life of the underlying asset.

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Note 2: Revenue from ordinary activities		
Operating grants	4,193,298	3,738,901
Other income	275,404	511,684
Interest received	23,387	692
	<u>4,492,089</u>	<u>4,251,277</u>
Note 3: Cash and cash equivalents		
Petty cash	531	490
Cash at bank	6,416,972	4,814,604
Term deposit held for restricted purposes - VMIAC Awards - Estate of DJ Western	144,026	142,840
	<u>6,561,529</u>	<u>4,957,934</u>
Note 4: Trade and other receivables		
Trade and sundry receivables	79,313	70,072
Rental bond	5,000	5,000
Prepaid expenses	1,605	1,587
	<u>85,918</u>	<u>76,659</u>

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Note 5: Property, plant and equipment		
Furniture and equipment - as cost	58,397	124,706
Less accumulated depreciation	(46,016)	(113,383)
	<u>12,381</u>	<u>11,323</u>
Motor vehicles - as cost	30,893	30,893
Less accumulated depreciation	(24,225)	(22,686)
	<u>6,668</u>	<u>8,207</u>
Leasehold improvements - at cost	-	57,705
Less accumulated depreciation	-	(47,611)
	<u>-</u>	<u>10,094</u>
Right of use asset - premises at 1/22 Aintree Street Brunswick East	-	177,055
Less accumulated amortisation	-	(107,651)
	<u>-</u>	<u>69,404</u>
Total property, plant and equipment	<u>19,049</u>	<u>99,028</u>
Note 6: Trade and other payables		
<i>Current</i>		
Trade creditors and other accruals	109,297	87,745
Payroll liabilities payable	55,901	91,192
GST liability	242,646	269,077
	<u>407,844</u>	<u>448,014</u>
Note 7: Income in advance		
<i>Current</i>		
Unspent grant funds - Commonwealth and State	<u>3,498,855</u>	<u>2,482,381</u>
<i>Non-Current</i>		
VMIAC Awards Trust - Estate of DJ Western	<u>144,026</u>	<u>142,840</u>
Note 8: Provisions		
<i>Current</i>		
Employee entitlements - annual leave	132,453	107,752
Employee entitlements - time in lieu	13,321	15,239
Employee entitlements - long service leave	12,375	14,722
	<u>158,149</u>	<u>137,713</u>
<i>Non-Current</i>		
Employee entitlements - long service leave	<u>402</u>	<u>714</u>

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Note 9: Lease Liability		
<i>Current</i>		
Lease liabilities	-	38,068
<i>Non-current</i>		
Lease liabilities	-	37,698

During 2021 the Company entered into a lease for office premises at 1/22 Aintree Street Brunswick East. The lease was terminated in February 2023.

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Note 10: Reconciliation of cash flow from operations with surplus ordinary activities after income tax		
Surplus after income tax expense	611,027	952,868
<i>Non-cash flows in surplus:</i>		
- Depreciation and amortisation	24,241	43,392
- Interest	(6,362)	4,136
- Loss on disposal of non-current assets	9,470	-
<i>Changes in assets and liabilities:</i>		
- Decrease in trade and sundry receivables	(9,259)	(66,373)
- Decrease/increase trade and other payables	(40,170)	260,791
- Increase in income in advance	1,017,660	1,566,763
- Increase in provisions	20,124	20,287
Net cash provided by operating activities	1,626,731	2,781,864

Note 11: Related Party Transactions

Related party transactions during the financial year were as follows:

The following committee members of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council were engaged to provide strategic planning services at the discounted rates noted below:

	\$
- Tricia Sziron	8,000
- Bianca Child	2,140
- Elvis Martin	1,000
- Tom Wood	1,450
- Hannah Friebe	1,750
- Anna Sowden	750
	15,090

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
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STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 JUNE 2023

The Committee has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

In the opinion of the committee of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc.:

- a) the financial statements and notes of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc. are in accordance with the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act (Vic) 2012* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*:
- i. giving a true and fair view of its financial position as at 30 June 2023 and of its performance for the financial year ended on that date; and
 - ii. complying with the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013* ; and
- b) there are reasonable grounds to believe that Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc. will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:



Signed

Dated: 08/11/2023



Signed

Dated: 08/11/2023

VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL
ABN 28 642 080 520

**AUDITOR'S INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION UNDER SECTION
60-40 OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS COMMISSION ACT 2012**

In accordance with the requirements of section 60-40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*, as auditor for the audit of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc. for the year ended 30 June 2023, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- i. no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and
- ii. no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.



Sean Denham

Dated: 9 November 2023
Sean Denham & Associates
Suite 1, 707 Mt Alexander Road
Moonee Ponds VIC 3039



SEAN DENHAM
A A S S O C I A T E S

**INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF
VICTORIAN MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS COUNCIL**

Opinion

I have audited the accompanying financial report, of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc., which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023, statement of changes in equity, statement of cashflows and the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year then ended, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and the certification by members of the committee.

In my opinion, the accompanying financial report of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc. has been prepared in accordance with Div 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 (ACNC Act)* including:

- a) giving a true and fair view of the Association's financial position as at 30 June 2023 and of its financial performance for the year then ended; and
- b) complies with Australian Accounting Standards to the extent described in Note 1 to the financial statements, and the requirements of the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic)* and Div 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013*.

Basis for Opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of my report. I am independent of the association in accordance with the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic)* and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to my audit of the financial report in Australia. I have also fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Emphasis of Matter - Basis of Accounting

We draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report has been prepared for the purpose of fulfilling the association's reporting responsibilities under the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic)* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose. My opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Responsibility of the Committee for the Financial Report

The committee of the association are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and have determined that the basis of preparation described in Note 1 of the financial report is appropriate to meet the requirements of the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic)* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* and the needs of the members. The committee's responsibility also includes such internal control as the committee determine is necessary to enable the preparation of a financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the committee are responsible for assessing the association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the committee either intend to liquidate the association or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibility for the Audit of the Financial Report

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes my opinion.

Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards, I exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. I also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the association's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the committee.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of responsible entities' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the association's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. My conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my auditor's report. However, future events or conditions that may cause the to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.



Sean Denham

Dated: 9 November 2023
Suite 1, 707 Mt Alexander Road
Moonee Ponds VIC 3039



VMIAC acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

We would also like to express our appreciation for our members and acknowledge all our volunteers and partner organisations. Thank you for your continued support.



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