

# Media Release

**The Hon Jill Hennessy MP**

Attorney-General

Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety – COVID-19

Minister for Workplace Safety



Tuesday, 28 April 2020

## VICTORIA'S FIRST ABORIGINAL WOMAN MEMBER APPOINTED TO VCAT

The Victorian Government has today announced the appointment of Michelle Gardner as the state's first Aboriginal woman to serve as a member of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Ms Gardner is one of several new appointments and reappointments to VCAT. She joins other new members Mary Cameron, Chris Thwaites and Brook Hely, while Bernadette Steele and Karina Shpigel have been reappointed.

Ms Gardner, who is an Aboriginal woman from the Gunditjmara nation in western Victoria, has held a range of roles in Aboriginal policy and legal organisations during her more than 30-year career.

For seven years she served at the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, leading a team responsible for the conciliation of complaints and public awareness of anti-discrimination law.

She was previously the Aboriginal Programs Manager at the NSW Department of Environment, developing policy to engage Aboriginal communities and implement cultural heritage initiatives.

In 2006, Ms Gardner was appointed as Presiding Tribunal Legal Member at the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal and in 2009 she began presiding over hearings regarding social security and child support at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal.

She also took on a role as Senior Legal Member of the NSW Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal, determining guardianship applications in 2014.

All appointments will commence from today.

### Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

*"Michelle Gardner brings wide range and depth of experience to her new role and this appointment is an important milestone – we must continue to ensure more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in senior positions at our courts and tribunals."*

*"With decades of legal and tribunal experience between them, these new members are perfectly suited to preside over the matters heard at VCAT."*

*"I congratulate all of the appointees and re-appointees and thank them for their contribution to what is considered to be Australia's busiest tribunal."*