

# Media Release

**The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP**

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Minister for Ambulance Services



Friday, 3 May 2024

## HEALTHIER TEETH FOR VICTORIA'S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

First Nations Victorians of all ages can now access culturally safe fluoride varnish services with dental assistants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners now registered to provide the important treatment.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today announced these trained professionals can now apply fluoride varnish to people of all ages in their communities, having previously been restricted to children aged between three and 17 years old.

Set to improve oral health outcomes, the fluoride varnish is applied to the surface of teeth to slow, stop, and prevent tooth decay and spare teeth the pain of a cavity forming.

Tooth decay is a preventable chronic oral disease and is widespread among Victorian children, with Aboriginal children more likely to have tooth decay than non-Aboriginal children.

The Aboriginal Health Practitioner-led fluoride varnish program was launched in 2022 to combat tooth decay in Aboriginal communities by training non-dental professionals to administer fluoride varnish, so that more people can benefit from this highly effective treatment.

In September 2023, the Allan Labor Government announced \$650,000 worth of grants to fund training for participating Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations staff on how to administer fluoride varnish.

Training on how to apply this varnish was provided by Dental Health Services Victoria in partnership with RMIT University, with the next cohort of Aboriginal Health Practitioners beginning their training next week.

In efforts to improve Aboriginal oral health, the Labor Government also supported a pilot fluoride varnish program at Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative for more than 500 Aboriginal children across the Loddon Mallee region to receive twice yearly fluoride varnish applications in addition to oral health promotion in the community.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

*"We know community-led responses work and can save lives – this change will help remove barriers that can limit good oral health for many Aboriginal adults and help boost overall health outcomes."*

*"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners make a huge contribution to the Victorian health system and the communities they serve - we're proud to be supporting their work."*

### Quotes attributable to Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Acting CEO Jim O'Shea

*"VACCHO pays tribute to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations for their immense dedication and for being at the forefront, delivering culturally safe health services and embracing a holistic approach to care."*

*"Through shared commitment and action, this initiative is empowering Aboriginal Health Practitioners to champion positive health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria."*

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