

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Jobs and Industry
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Minister for Women



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FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROGRAM NOW OPEN

The Allan Labor Government's leadership program designed by and for First Nations women is now open for applications.

Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins has announced that applications for the Elevating Connections, Healing Ourselves (ECHO) Program are now open – providing culturally safe training to build on women's strengths and support their leadership aspirations.

More than 48 First Nations women have participated in ECHO since its launch in 2021. Alumnae from previous years have gone on to undertake a Fulbright scholarship, secured a place in the Jo Fisher Future Board Scholarship program, opened their own businesses and take on managerial positions.

This year, 14 First Nations women will participate in the program, led by Karen Milward, a Yorta Yorta consultant, and Dr Kerry Arabena, Chair of Indigenous Health and Director of Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit at the University of Melbourne.

First Nations women are significantly under-represented in senior leadership roles. They face systemic and structural barriers to leadership and recognition, including race-based discrimination and the ongoing effects of colonisation.

ECHO enables women to identify these barriers and utilise their skills and connections to address them.

An evaluation of the program found that ECHO, due to its specific focus on the needs of First Nations women and co-design element, had higher impacts in the short and long term and provided participants with a higher degree of cultural and psychological safety, compared to mainstream programs.

The program is one of the Labor Government's initiatives designed to address barriers to women's advancement and increase opportunities for rural and diverse women.

Applications for the ECHO Program close on Monday 22 July. For more information about ECHO, visit vic.gov.au/victorian-first-nations-womens-leadership-program.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins

"First Nations women already hold critical roles in their families, communities and organisations, so they should also be represented in leadership roles and other positions of influence, right across our state."

"ECHO helps First Nations women advance in leadership positions, create networks and gain experiences they may need to progress their careers, navigate employment pathways, and build skills and financial security."