



The Beautiful Shawl Project is a collaborative, Community-led initiative providing safe and empowering breast screening experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women by providing a culturally safe and responsive alternative to traditional screening.

In 2018, a partnership was formed between BreastScreen Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) and VACCHO to trial a cultural screening shawl with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The success of the trial led to The Beautiful Shawl Project where BreastScreen Victoria and VACCHO partner with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across the state to reduce barriers to breast screening.

The Project provides customised screening shawls to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that are culturally appropriate, familiar and beautiful to wear during their breast screen. The shawls, designed by local talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and artists, are gifts to take home after screening.

Implementation model

Breast Screen Victoria's mobile screening service visits over 15 ACCOs once every two years as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project. This implementation model has been developed to support ACCOs and other organisations to implement engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The guiding principles may also support engagement with other under screened communities. All engagement should be community led.

[Read the implementation model here](#)



The Beautiful Shawl Project 2022/2023

Over July 2022 to June 2023, BreastScreen Victoria and VACCHO collaborated with ACCOs to bring cultural screening shawls and accessible breast screens to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

[Check out some of the stats here.](#)



The Beautiful Shawl Project

July 2022 to June 2023

"This time was the first time I've used the shawl and I just felt **really, really safe** and not exposed. It makes it a lot easier to have the tests and everything done."

The Beautiful Shawl Project

July 2022 to June 2023

12 Organisations across 15 sites

Organisations involved

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative | 7. Goranwarabul House |
| 2. Mallee District Aboriginal Service (Midura) | 8. Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative |
| 3. Oonah Health and Community Services Aboriginal Corporation (across 2 sites) | 9. Njerrda Aboriginal Corporation |
| 4. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd | 10. West Gippsland Healthcare Group |
| 5. Bass Coast Health | 11. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (across 3 sites) |
| 6. Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation | 12. Budja Budja Aboriginal Corporation |



The Beautiful Shawl

Implementation model

A partnership between
BreastScreen Victoria
Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation



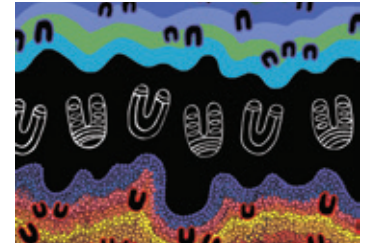
Lynette Briggs, Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.



Bronwyn Ferguson, Gunditjmara, Journey of Hope. Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service.



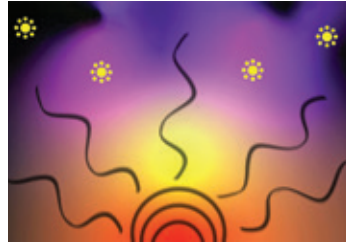
Jenna Bamlett, Yigar, Gunditjmara. Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation.



Rebecca Clayton, Warlpiri. Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative.



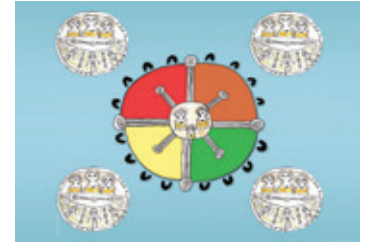
Shylee Corrigan, Yirandali (Queensland), You are Strong. Kirrae Health Service.



Jasmine-Skye Marinos, Arrernte, Kardeeneeyoo Toort-Barram. Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative.



Rebecca Atkinson, Moiradu Tribe of the Bangerang Nation and Kerrupmara of the Gunditjmara Nation. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative.



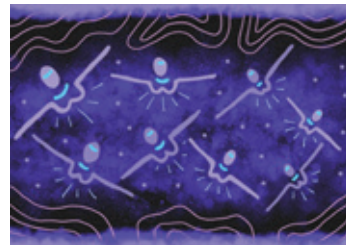
Marilyn Fenton, Gunai Kurnai. Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation (Morwell).



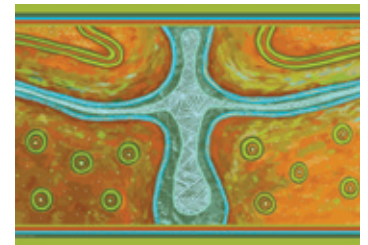
Brenda Farnham, Walbunia, Dhungutti. Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation (Sale).



Tahlia Wise, Wemba Wemba Barkindji Wiradjuri, Connection. Mallee District Aboriginal Services (Kerang).



Sandra Kropinyeri, Wotjibolik, Taungurung, Muthi Muthi, Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri, Wemba Wemba, Women's Dance. Mallee District Aboriginal Services (Swan Hill).



Veronica Harradine, Latji Latji, Protecting Me. Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative.



Simone Spence, Barkindji, Embrace. Mallee District Aboriginal Services (Mildura).



Alkina Edwards, Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba, Mutti Mutti and Wiradjuri. Winyarr Malka, which means Woman Shield. Njernda Aboriginal Corporation.



Trina Dalton-Oogjes, Wadawurrung and Gunditjmara, Women's Journey Together. Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative.



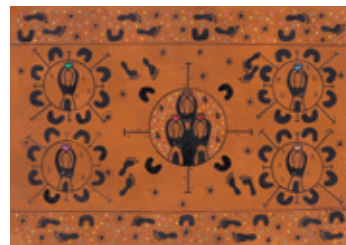
Tanisha Lovett, Gunditjmara and Wotjibaluk, Strong Connections. Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative.



Kylie Taylor, Yorta Yorta, Wotjibaluk country, Titta to Titta. Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-Operative.



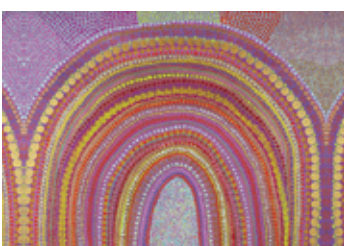
Marilyn Fenton, GunaiKurnai, We are one. Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation (Morwell).



Amanda Morgan, GunaiKurnai, Healing. Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative.



Eileen Gordon (Aunty Lana), GunaiKurnai/Wiradjuri/Yuin & Bidawal country, Hunting on country. Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association.



Lauren Murray, Yiddi Yiddi Nari Nari Barapa Barapa, Journey. Mallee District Aboriginal Services (Swan Hill and Kerang).

Thank you to our talented artists who have brought this project to life.

The front cover includes a selection of artwork from *The Beautiful Shawl Project*.

The Beautiful Shawl

In 2018, a partnership was formed between BreastScreen Victoria (BSV), the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to trial a cultural screening shawl with Aboriginal* women. The success of the trial led to *The Beautiful Shawl Project* where BSV and VACCHO partner with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) across the state to reduce barriers to breast screening. The purpose of the shawl is to increase the cultural safety and comfort of Aboriginal women participating in breast screening, and subsequently, breast screening participation rates of Aboriginal women.



The Beautiful shawl, which features artwork by local Aboriginal artists, is worn during a client's breast screen, and provides coverage to their upper body throughout the screen.

Consultation with Aboriginal women was undertaken to understand the barriers they experience in relation to breast screening. It was found that many understood the importance of breast screening, but experienced feelings of embarrassment and shame around being naked in front of a stranger. Aboriginal women suggested a shawl to cover them during screening.

This project is a community led initiative, driven by the needs of Aboriginal women and steered by Aboriginal organisations. The success of this project can be attributed to two core principles: community led and cultural safety. Therefore, replication of this model by other organisations should also have these values at the heart of their project.

This implementation model has been developed to support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other organisations to implement engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The guiding principles may also support engagement with other underscreened communities. All engagement should be community led.

* There are many terms to describe Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria. This includes First Nations People, Sovereign Nations, Indigenous Australians, Traditional Owners etc. In this document, to be inclusive and respectful, we have chosen to use the term Aboriginal.

Guiding Principles

There are several guiding principles that will support the implementation of a cultural shawl in your community:

1

Community Led: 'With us, not for us'

It is important that your organisation actively engages with your local community to ensure that the development and implementation of the shawl is community driven. This approach is in line with the *Victorian Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan (2017-2027)* domain 'Aboriginal community leadership'. Provide support but ensure that the project is informed and led by the community and their experiences.

2

Engage and remunerate the artist

The artist(s) needs to be remunerated once a piece of artwork has been selected. You will also need to licence the artwork in order to use it on the shawl, and re-licence it if you choose to use it again.

Please follow guidelines from NAVA (National Association of Visual Arts) when commissioning and remunerating the artist.

3

Recommended Shawl pattern

The finished shawl will measure 190cm x 120cm. To ensure comfort whilst being screened, the shawl includes snap studs to adjust the fabric to allow for adjustments around the chest and alter the length of the shawl. Refer to Beautiful Shawls Product Specification (page 7) for more details.

Artist Amanda Morgan during *The Beautiful Shawl Project* visit to Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative in 2022. Shawl artwork 'Healing' by Amanda Morgan, GunaiKurnai.





Nellie Flagg during *The Beautiful Shawl Project* visit to Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative in 2021. Shawl artwork 'Women's Journey Together' by Trina Dalton-Oogjes, Wadawurrung and Gunditjmarra.

4

Cultural Safety for service providers

Providing cultural safety training for all staff, including service providers involved in this program is essential, as this will equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to provide culturally safe and appropriate services to clients. Staff involved in *The Beautiful Shawl Project*, including BreastScreen receptionists, radiographers and health promotion staff were all trained by VACCHO, via VACCHO's Cultural Safety Training Program.

6

Shawls should be gifted, never sold

The purpose of the shawl is to reduce barriers by providing marginalised communities with access to culturally safe services. Therefore, the addition of a cost to the shawl is a barrier to clients' ability to access a service. This program must be a community led initiative which facilitates inclusion, so shawls should never be sold for commercial gain.

5

Connection along the pathway

An experience that is comfortable and supportive throughout the screening pathway can be ensured by involving community throughout the process. This includes the involvement of local staff i.e. nurses or assessment services that are familiar and culturally safe to the client.

7

Acknowledge its origin

VACCHO, VAHS and BSV worked to develop this shawl over the course of several years. If you replicate this shawl, please acknowledge the work of VACCHO, VAHS and BSV using the following statement:

'We acknowledge the work of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and BreastScreen Victoria in developing the Beautiful Shawl.'

Developing a Shawl

Developing a shawl

1. The community could acquire an existing piece of local artwork (to use with written permission from the artist) or enlist a local artist that can create artwork that is representative of the community. Artwork should measure 194cm x 124cm and will need to be transferred to a digital file (at least 1MB in size) by a graphic designer.
2. Find a local fabric printing organisation.
3. Print the artwork onto fabric (recommended fabric: stretch jersey cotton lycra 200GSM). Calculate how much fabric is required based on the number of shawls you need, and the size of each shawl. Refer to the shawl pattern for more detailed instructions (see Beautiful Shawls Product Specification attached).
4. The fabric printer will need to tailor the fabric to create the shawl (allow 8 weeks for printing and sewing of shawls).

Support with Health Promotion and Education

1. Provide information/training sessions to staff from partner organisations or communities that you engage with to build their knowledge of your service, and capacity to engage and educate their clients.
2. Incentives: consider providing gift bags/incentives to encourage clients to attend the service provided by your organisation. If the organisation has capacity, the gift bags/incentives may be included as part of a health day, promoting additional health messages to the community.

Supporting clients through the whole pathway (for a clinical / health service scenario)

In Victoria, approximately 8% of clients who screened throughout *The Beautiful Shawl Project* were called back for further tests. Most women who are called back for further testing do **not** have breast cancer.

1. Develop a relationship with your clinical/health service to understand the pathway.
2. Develop a plan to ensure that clients who are called back for further tests are supported throughout the process.

Understanding how the Shawl impacts your community

Ask for feedback from clients, staff and other community members involved in this project. Develop an evaluation survey, debrief plan or other evaluation tool to ensure you capture feedback from clients, staff, and community.

Budget

Several considerations will need to be made for your budget:

1. Artist and licence fee
2. Cost to print and sew the shawl
3. Cost of providing cultural safety training
4. Budget for health worker training and a health promotion event to increase awareness of breast screening

Beautiful Shawls Product Specification

Artwork Scale prior to sewing 194cm x 124cm

Beautiful Shawls Finished Shawl Size 190cm x 120cm

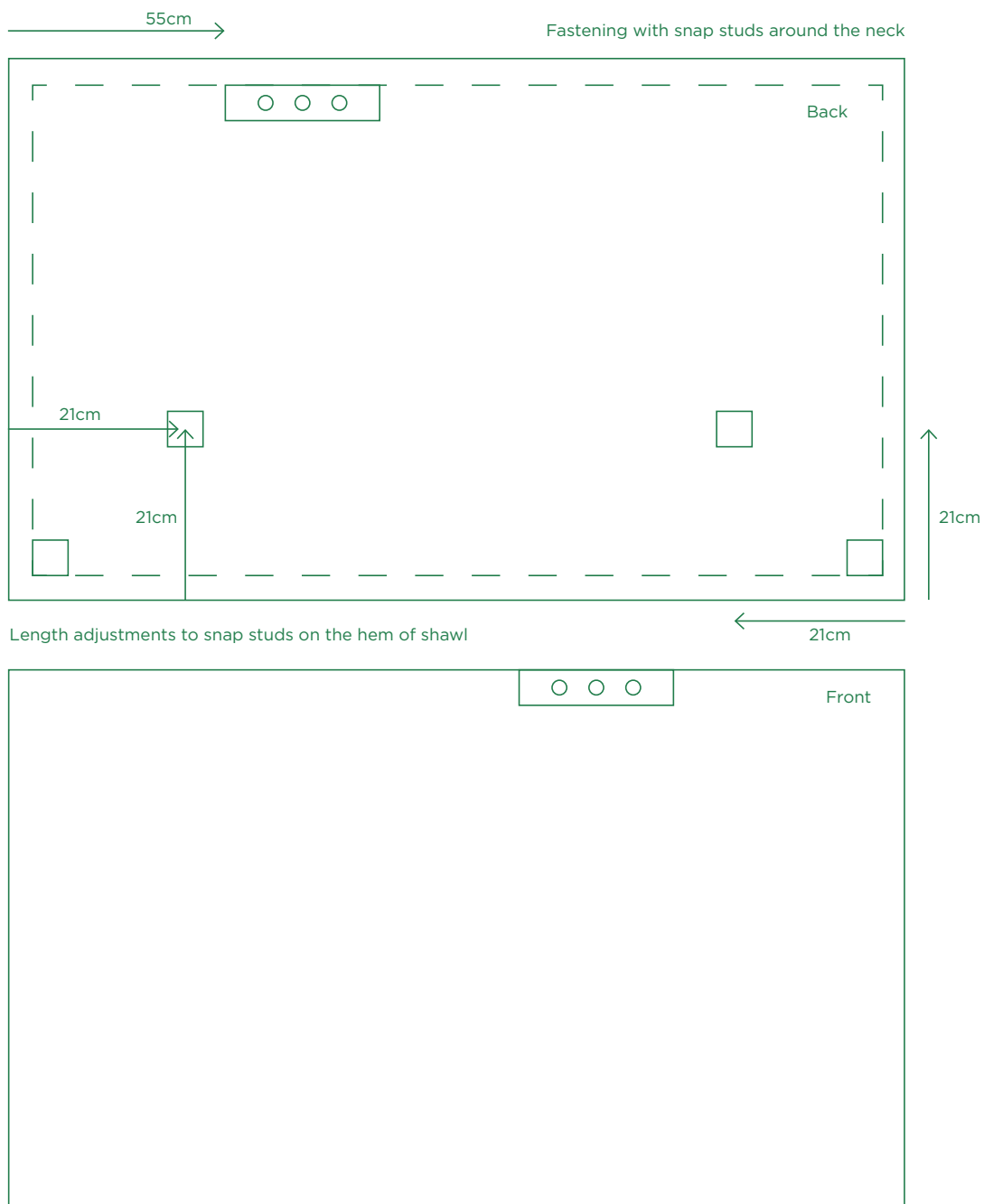
Large panels are cut

Snap studs attached to shawl

edges of shawl are double fold and stitched

Construction notes

- No loose threads
- Stitch tension to match fabric stretch





Vicki Walker (left) and Shelley Atkinson (right) during *The Beautiful Shawl Project* visit to Njernda in 2021. Shawl artwork 'Winyarr Malka', which means Woman Shield by Alkina Edwards, Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba, Mutti Mutti and Wiradjuri.



Video

To watch the documentary, please visit YouTube and search *The Beautiful Shawl Project Documentary*.



Podcast

To listen to the podcast '*The Screen #8 The Beautiful Shawl Project*', subscribe to the podcast from your mobile device (Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Pocket Casts, TuneIn).