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“They all evince a desire to go home when they get to the Melbourne Hospital”: The admission and discharge of Indigenous people to and from the Melbourne Hospital during the mid to late 19th century.

Health was among the topics examined during Victoria’s first formal truth-telling process into historic and ongoing injustices experienced by the state’s Indigenous population. Gunditjmara woman and Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) Dr Jill Gallagher told the Yoorrook Justice Commission that the state’s Indigenous population faced a “system of healthcare marked by colonial control”. The Commission also heard how this system continues to impact the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to this day. This paper seeks to contribute to historical truth-telling by investigating the admission and discharge of Indigenous people, particularly residents of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, to and from the Melbourne Hospital (later the Royal Melbourne Hospital) during the mid to late 19th century. This research sets out to understand how colonial authorities controlled the Victorian Indigenous populations’ access to western medical services. Drawing on the scholarship of patient-oriented histories and Indigenous critical thinking that promotes agency, this paper also aims to highlight instances when Indigenous patients and their family members subverted colonial and institutional authorities and made decisions regarding their own healthcare. This chapter identifies traces of Indigenous patients within settler colonial archives including the Melbourne Hospital Medical Ward Books, reports by the Central Board to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines (later the Board for the Protection of Aborigines) in addition to documents relating to the 1881 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station.