



**VACCA**

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD  
AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture

# **INNOVATING TOGETHER LEAVING NO-ONE BEHIND**

**Muriel Bamblett – CEO VACCA, Chairperson SNAICC**

# We are VACCA

## Largest & oldest Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare service in Australia

### **Workforce**

1200 workforce staff plus and growing with 80% client facing across six regions, 27 offices throughout Victoria.

38-70% Aboriginal staff from Victoria and interstate

350 Aboriginal staff work directly in Family violence across the state

### **Service delivery**

70 support programs, core elements across the regions: homelessness, juvenile justice, prison diversion

13 Residential care homes and one Family Violence cluster facility

Offering sexual assault support services in two regions

Capture and engage the voice of children and young people in everything we do

Leading voice advocacy and lobbying at State and Federal level

# We are VACCA

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## **Guardianship**

Support 800 children in Out of Home Care OOHC

Over 380 children under Guardianship order

## **Internal Innovation and Investment**

Cultural Therapeutic Ways – Practice framework

Research and Evaluation team – Building the Aboriginal Evidence Base

Sophisticated Legal, HR, Communications, Quality Continuous Improvement, IT

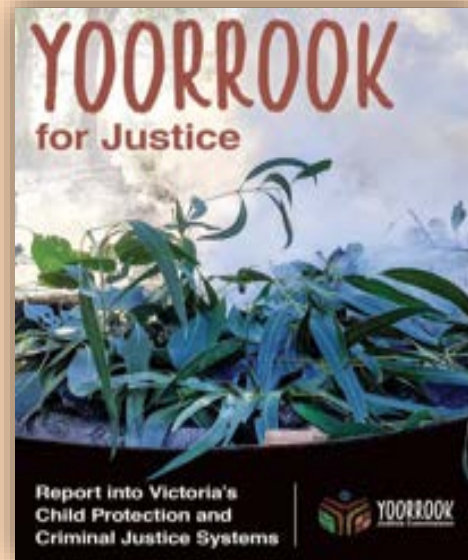
Fundraising and Charity teams

Internal and External training streams



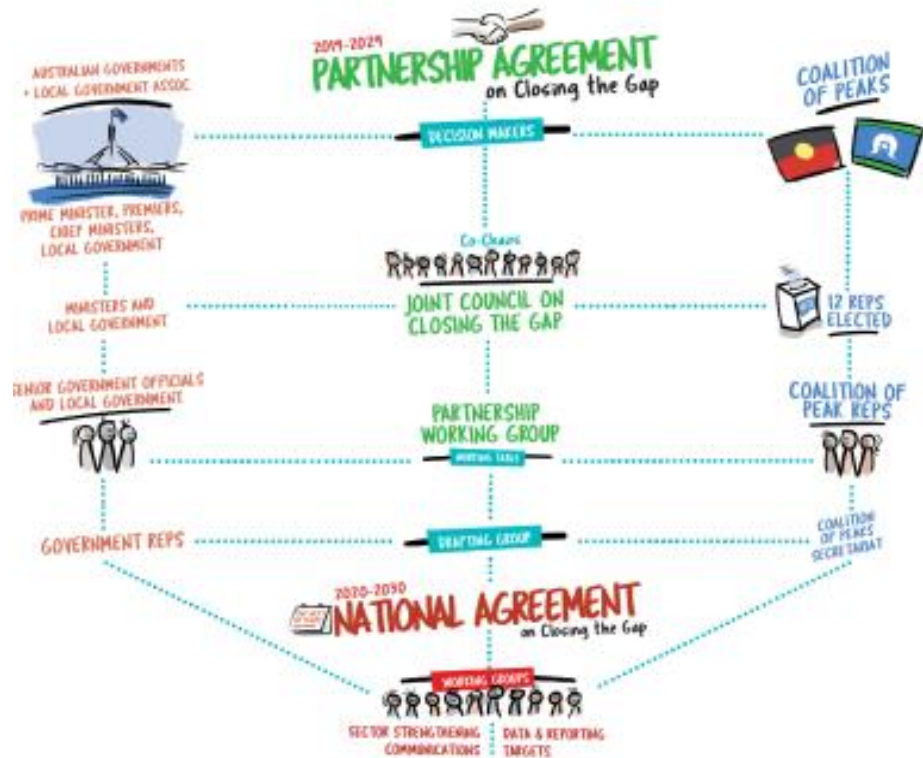


# Currently in Victoria





# National Agreement Close the Gap



# Close the Gap

Parties to the National Agreement on Close the Gap have committed to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of First Nations.



Governments have signed up to and agree to the following transformational elements (clause 59 a-f):

a. Identify and eliminate racism within all institutions of government	b. Embed and practice meaningful cultural safety	c. Deliver services in partnership with First Nations and their organisations and communities	d. Increase accountability through transparent funding allocations	e. Support First Nations' cultures	f. Improve engagement with First Nations
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# Clause 59 commitment to transformational elements

Identify and eliminate	Identify and eliminate racism
Embed and practice	Embed and practice meaningful cultural safety
Deliver	Deliver services in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, communities and people
Increase	Increase accountability through transparent funding allocations
Support	Support Aboriginal cultures
Improve	Improve engagement with Aboriginal services, community and people



# Closing the Gap – a few examples include

- Expenditure reviews across jurisdictions – although limited
- NSW Treasury – Cost benefit analysis of culture
- Transitioning to Community Control – Commonwealth & Qld Health
- Establishment Peak for Housing, Language, new one FDSV
- Re-establishment Peak Education
- Expansion State and Territory peaks for Child Welfare South Aust, ACT & NT in process
- Place Based Partnerships
- Recommissioning DSS Commonwealth
- Independent accountability mechanisms



# VACCA's Journey to Innovation and Self Determination

Aboriginal children need to have access to multitude of programs, supports and services throughout their care journey and into leaving care





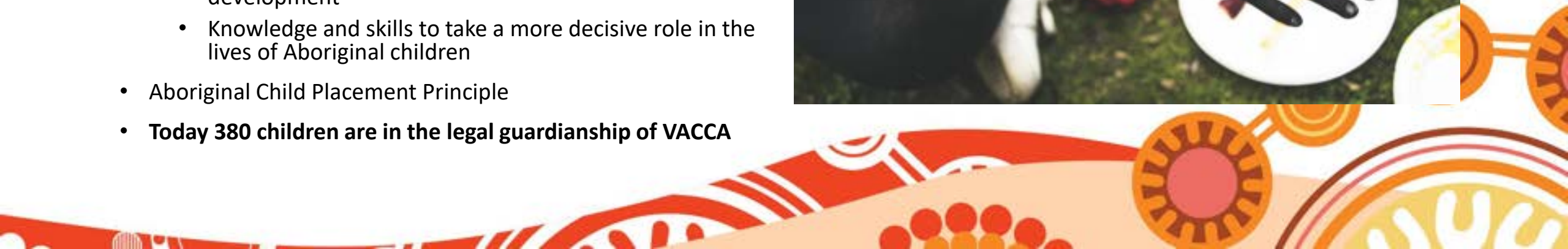
# Transitioning Aboriginal children

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations now have 48% of Victoria's OOHC children transitioned to Aboriginal control.
- Early beginnings with of policy commitment from peak body the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare – Beyond Good Intentions.
- Ministerial commitment in 2017 saw funding for operational and policy implementation and real and meaningful actions in identifying the number of Aboriginal children eligible for transfer in each division and active efforts made to transition. TAC was also overseen by the Steering Committee with significant policy work also undertaken by ACCOs
- The transition guidelines state that DFFH divisions may considered a number of factors in identifying and negotiating cases to transfer including:
  - Best interests of the child
  - Needs of the carer
  - Needs of the child
  - Quality of information and data available about the case - file readiness
  - Willingness of foster carers to transfer to an ACCO
  - Workforce capacity of ACCOs.
- In 1997 VACCA was funded for 27 children today we have over 800 children



# Aboriginal children in Aboriginal Care ACAC or Guardianship

- *“Legislative reform which transfers real authority over children and families to Indigenous communities is widely considered to be important to the long-term empowerment of Indigenous peoples in the area of children’s wellbeing”*
- 2005 legislation to enable transfer of Guardianship
- 2017 advocacy journey to put legislation into practice finally enacted
- Victorian Government commitment transfer authority Aboriginal children
  - Transfer of powers and functions to CEO Aboriginal org
  - Model based on Aboriginal worldview, culture and history
  - Aboriginal professional practice and service development
  - Knowledge and skills to take a more decisive role in the lives of Aboriginal children
- Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
- **Today 380 children are in the legal guardianship of VACCA**



# **NUGEL** (MEANS BELONG IN WOI WURRUNG LANGUAGE)

## **Outcomes and Reunification to parental care**

- **Higher reunification rates** – including a significant number of children who were previously on Care by Secretary Order with non-reunification case plans. The reunification rate for the Department is about 12 percent, **our reunification rate is up as high as 24 percent.**
- **Lower rates** of children transitioning to Long Term Care Order or Care by Secretary Orders.
- Practice approach experienced by children and families as: **“more culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, timely and responsive”.**
- **Increased engagement of families** – including increased participation in decision making.
- Children and young people have **increased contact with their parents, siblings and extended kinship networks.**
- Significant increase in children and young people’s **connection to culture and community.**
- **Increased involvement of parents in Court Processes** – more parents come to court to have their voices heard.
- **Strong partnerships between Nugel and other VACCA programs** which has been integral to achieving these outcomes.



# Community Protecting Boorais:

Taking on Child Protection Investigations - doing it *Our Way*



In 2022, Nugel (VACCA) Project Implementation Working Group came together to rethink the business of ‘investigations.’ We were committed to developing a model that reflected both:

- Statutory responsibilities (our accountability to LAW)
- Cultural/Community responsibilities (our accountability to LORE)

Through this process the vision of “**Community Protecting Boorais**” was formed and reflects the rich history within Aboriginal cultures of Community having responsibility for protecting and growing up children.



# Community Protecting Boorai's Early Outcomes

- Since being authorised with protective intervener powers VACCA has been able to make a difference in preventing Aboriginal children from coming into care.
- In the first 12 months of operation, **only 12 out of a total of 91 children** referred to VACCA for investigation of alleged abuse were placed out of parental care, making **VACCA's removal rate 13% compared to governments 40%.**



# A commitment to shifting relationship of Power/Authority

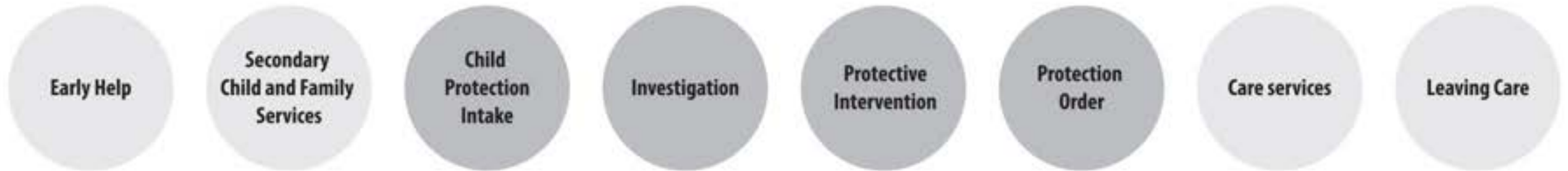




# Aboriginal Organisations moving towards Innovation and Self Determination together



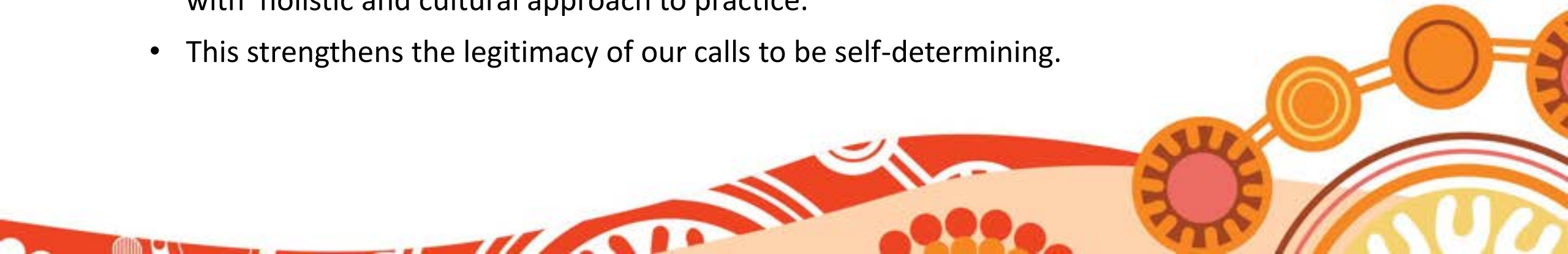
# Aboriginal Community of Care



**State-led Child & Families Service System**

# What we know of Aboriginal organisations

- Historically, much has been done to build Aboriginal people, communities and organisations across this nation, as well as inherent rights as citizens and as nations of peoples who have human rights as First Peoples through agreed conventions.
- We now have environments where we are managing our own resources, have enterprises, organisations with skilled administration and highly functioning service providers delivering across a broad spectrum of services to Aboriginal people across our state.
- As a collective of Aboriginal organisations, we deliver a broad range of programs and services, with holistic and cultural approach to practice.
- This strengthens the legitimacy of our calls to be self-determining.





# The Centrality of Aboriginal organisations

Aboriginal Services display marked differences:

- They carry and express the political aspirations of Aboriginal people as well as professing objectives that seek to alleviate identified disadvantage.
- They play a significant role in community development.
- They bear the indelible mark of kinship and social structure of the communities they serve, which in turn influences their accountability channels especially in relation to this social, and kinship structure.
- Employment practices are different.
- They display the disadvantage that exists amongst Aboriginal people through their inability to provide adequate pay and conditions for their workers;
- They often exist as a sector within a sector that is under-resourced and under-skilled and therefore unable to provide a standard of service that is commensurate with the demands placed on them. This particular disadvantage is more acutely felt given the greater demands for reporting and evaluation and performance management expected from NGOs these days.

# Aboriginal Services display marked differences

It is clear that although we bear the outward appearance of other community service organisations. Aboriginal Services display marked differences, Aboriginal Services:

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- Play a significant role in community development.
- Bear the indelible mark of kinship and social structure of the communities they serve, which in turn influences their accountability channels especially in relation to this social, and kinship structure.
- Employment practices are different.
- Display the disadvantage that exists amongst Aboriginal communities;
- Exist as a sector within a sector that is often under-resourced and under-skilled to deal with the complexity of the issues and
- Therefore unable to provide a standard of service that is commensurate with the demands placed on them.

# Key questions posed to VCOSS recently

In defining Victoria's appetite in furthering self-determination the following questions were posed:

- In the provision of social services what is it that Aboriginal organisations need from government to be self-determining, is it related to additional resources, funding or is it delegated authority or both?
- Where are there opportunities to change systems, legislative, policy, programming and practice?
- What is the relationship between powers of not just government but the instruments of the state – the child protection, police, judiciary etc.?
- What principles will guide relationships, what policies and practices across government will support Aboriginal self-determination?
- What are the accountability measures for delivering on self-determination – already have policies but not implemented?





# In closing

In delivering on the National Agreement on CtG important:

- Identify how the commitments within the National Agreement impact on your work
- Understanding your jurisdiction's Closing the Gap shared decision-making architecture, the processes that need to be followed, and the key organisations to engage with.
- Familiarise yourself with the four Priority Reforms and consider how they can be given effect in your workplace.
- Familiarise yourself with your jurisdiction's implementation plan, the specific commitments made by your government.