



## **VACCA Child FIRST**

### **An Intake, Assessment and Referral Service for Aboriginal children and families in the North and West Region**

#### **Introduction**

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011, VACCA presented the Inquiry panel with a proposal about Aboriginal Child FIRST in the North and West region<sup>1</sup>. At this time, the panel asked VACCA to provide added information about governance arrangements for VACCA's Aboriginal Child FIRST proposal.

We have outlined below the three principles underpinning the proposal and our understandings about governance across the Child FIRST system. We have also mapped our proposal against the framework for public sector governance.

While there are many definitions of governance, we draw the panel's attention to this definition:

*Governance is about upholding the purpose and efforts of an organization  
while protecting what makes the organization special<sup>2</sup>*

This definition recognises the importance of holding onto the heart of the organisation while ensuring that operations are effectively conducted. VACCA's Aboriginal Child FIRST service will deliver the same service outcomes as other Child FIRST services, however its operation will be firmly based within an Aboriginal organisation delivering effective, efficient services and better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

#### **Principles underpinning VACCA's Child FIRST Proposal**

Our proposal for an Aboriginal Child FIRST in the North and West region is built on three principles

1. Self determination – That is, the commitment to decisions about Aboriginal people being made by Aboriginal people
2. The principle of Aboriginal services first - That is, wherever possible, services for Aboriginal people are delivered by Aboriginal organisations.
3. Self Management – That is, Aboriginal services are responsible for service delivery to Aboriginal families, thereby understanding issues, targeting responses and advocating solutions.

In the North and West region, Child FIRST services are currently delivered for Aboriginal families through mainstream CSOs who operate Child FIRST. This arrangement is not consistent with the above principles. We believe that VACCA is in a strong position to deliver the Child FIRST service to Aboriginal families in the North and West region of Melbourne.

<sup>1</sup> Presentation included in Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> SNAICC [2005] *Footprints to where we are: A resource manual for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services* September, 2005



## Governance

At present, Child FIRST for Aboriginal families operates from four organisations that deliver Child FIRST as part of a suite of services. These Child FIRST sites are focused on a geographical basis as follows

- For Nillumbik, Banyule, Yarra, Whittlesea and Darebin, Child FIRST is delivered by Children's Protection Society.
- For Brimbank and Melton, Child FIRST is delivered by MacKillop Family Services.
- For Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Hobsons Bay, Child FIRST is delivered by Anglicare Victoria.
- For Hume and Moreland, Child FIRST is delivered by Orana Uniting Care – (to be delivered by Kildonan as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011)

We propose that VACCA becomes the fifth Child FIRST site in the North and West region, delivering a Child FIRST service to Aboriginal families across the region. Governance, service standards and accountability, operating procedures and partnerships with other Child FIRST organisations will be consistent with mainstream organisations operating Child FIRST services.

For each of the organisations delivering Child FIRST, including VACCA, governance responsibilities operate at three key levels

- Each organisation has internal governance and lines of responsibility to the organisation's CEO and Board.
- Each organisation is part of the Child FIRST alliance executive group for the North and West region and this group has governance responsibilities for the effective delivery of the Child FIRST service across the region.
- Each organisation has accountability to the Department of Human Services about resource allocation and service demand.

Key to the good governance of Child FIRST in the North and West are the partnerships across the region. VACCA is strongly committed to these partnerships and will continue to have an ongoing role as a member of each of the four North and West Child FIRST alliances. This is illustrated in Diagram1.



### **Service Description**

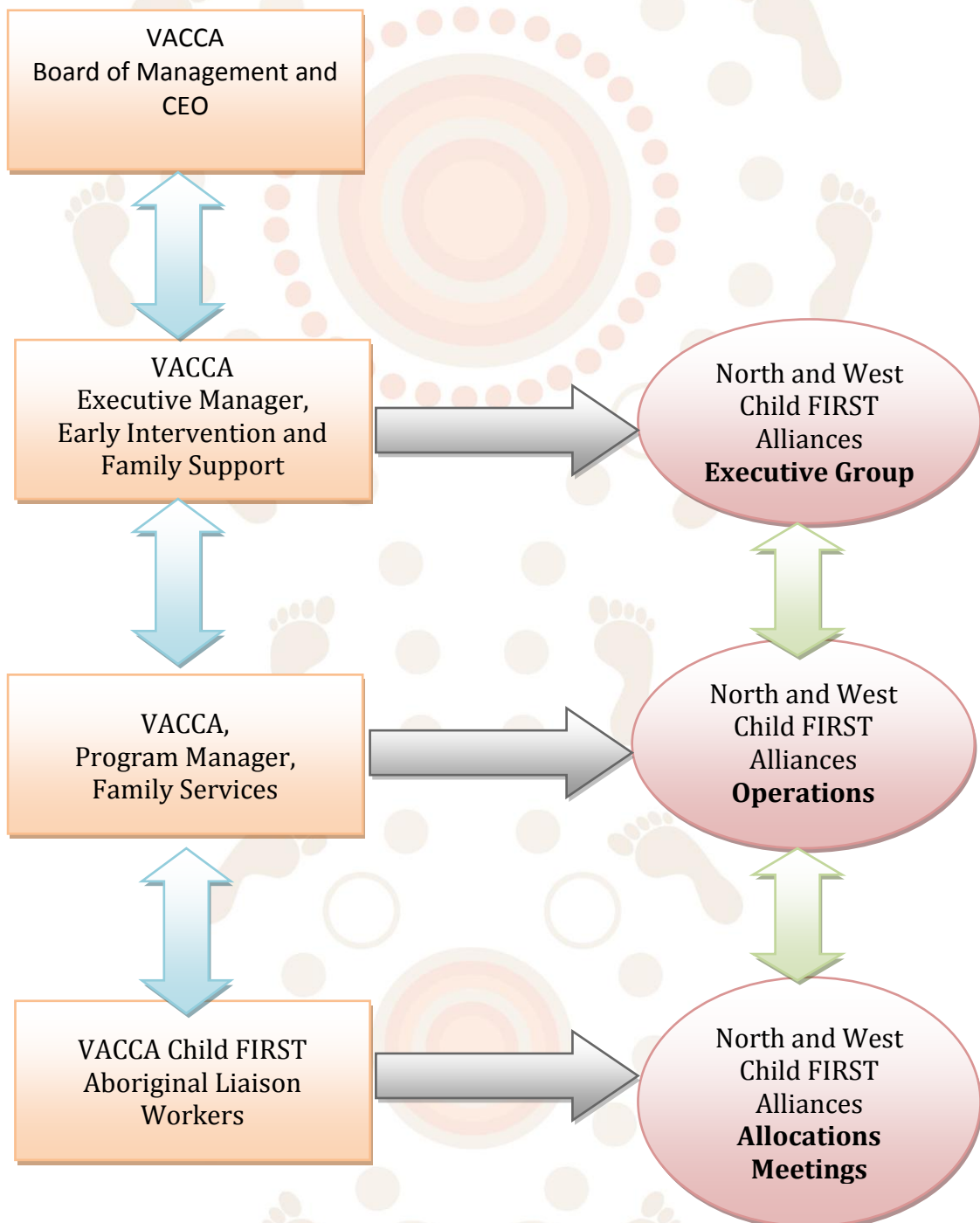
VACCA's Child FIRST will be a single entry point for Aboriginal children and families who need family support. Core functions of VACCA's Child FIRST will be initial screening and assessment, provision of advice and information, referral and service coordination or intake into the relevant VACCA program. Because VACCA deliver a suite of family support services in the region, VACCA Child FIRST will quickly and easily be able to determine the most appropriate service for the referred family and the availability of that service.

VACCA Child FIRST service will

- deliver a Child FIRST service across all geographical areas of the North and West region
- accept referrals from Child Protection, Police, other professionals and other community members and families about Aboriginal children and families needing support, including self referrals
- undertake intake and assessment with those families referred
- work alongside a community based child protection worker, dedicated to VACCA'S Child FIRST, and VACCA's ACSASS service
- determine the most appropriate service response, including allocation to VACCA's suite of family support services
- alternatively, decide when it is appropriate to allocate families through the Child FIRST mainstream allocations processes
- refer families to other Aboriginal or wider services as appropriate
- provide ongoing advice to mainstream organisations delivering a family support service to Aboriginal families



**Diagram 1: Governance Relationships across the Child FIRST service system**





### Governance and VACCA's Child FIRST Proposal

The following table examines VACCA's Aboriginal Child FIRST proposal against the governance framework based on principles of public sector governance<sup>3</sup>.

Governance	VACCA Aboriginal Child FIRST
<p><b>Accountability</b> Answer for decisions and abide by all applicable standards</p>	<p>Like other organisations that deliver Child FIRST services, VACCA will comply with existing funding and service agreements including the Strategic Framework for Family Services (2007); Best Interests Case Practice Model (2007); agency accreditation standards; and Children, Youth and Families Act (2005). VACCA is also part of and abides by the agreements developed across the Child FIRST Alliances in the region to facilitate effective decision making and service delivery.</p> <p>In addition, VACCA has strong community accountability through its Board and Chief Executive Officer. Members of VACCA's Board represent Aboriginal communities and are community members. They are elected by their community, and their first accountability is to their community. They can speak on behalf of their community, establish priorities for services within their community and determine appropriate messages about their community. They represent Aboriginal children and families who need a Child FIRST service response. VACCA's community accountability is highly developed given the election, structure and function of the Board and the high visibility of the Board and the Chief Executive Officer within Aboriginal communities.</p>
<p><b>Transparency/openness</b> having clear roles and responsibilities and clear procedures for making decisions</p>	<p>The current Child FIRST system is a mainstream referral process for Aboriginal people (families and organisations) who must contact a particular mainstream service provider, organised by geographical location, to access a family support service delivered by an Aboriginal organisation. Many Aboriginal people have had generations of experience that leads them to be wary and distrustful of mainstream services. Aboriginal people may delay seeking help until there is a crisis and fear that any request for help will jeopardise children in their care.</p> <p>By VACCA providing a central referral point within the North and West region</p>

<sup>3</sup> ANAO, 2003, *Public Sector Governance, Volumes 1 & 2: Better Practice Guide*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, [http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/Public\\_Sector\\_Governance.zip](http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/Public_Sector_Governance.zip) Guidance Paper No.1, p.2



	<p>for referrals about concerns for Aboriginal children, there is a visible and accessible entry point for Aboriginal families. Aboriginal families and organisations, other professionals and the wider community will be clear about where they can go to for assistance and advice in the North and West region. As VACCA’s reputation for delivering culturally appropriate early intervention and prevention services becomes more widely known and trusted in Aboriginal communities, there is less likelihood that families will delay seeking help until there is a crisis, thereby decreasing the need for Child Protection involvement.</p>
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<p><b>Efficiency</b> ensuring the best use of resources with a commitment to evidence-based strategies for improvement</p>	<p>We understand that the more steps there are between a family needing a service and receiving one, the less likely the family are to get the service they need. Within Child FIRST, when a family is not able to access support when needed, there is a strong likelihood that some families will be referred to Child Protection.</p> <p>VACCA’s Child FIRST will reduce the number of ‘steps’ in the referral process by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For most Aboriginal families, the process between referral and service will be significantly streamlined. Families referred to VACCA Child FIRST will be assessed and then referred to the appropriate VACCA family service. Because VACCA Child FIRST and VACCA family services are co located, referral on will be straightforward. There will be strong program and organisational links between VACCA Child FIRST and all of VACCA’s family services.</li> <li>• For Aboriginal families, the process between referral and service will be streamlined and culturally informed. Aboriginal families taken to Child FIRST mainstream allocations meetings will be reduced to those families that cannot be provided with an Aboriginal service in a timely manner, and those families that request a mainstream service. For this smaller group of families, VACCA Child FIRST will be involved to talk with the family about what they need and will assist the family with other service provision, for example involvement in VACCAs playgroup program, referral to other Aboriginal services.</li> <li>• The referral process is illustrated in Diagram 2</li> </ul>
<p><b>Effectiveness/helpfulness</b></p>	<p>Services delivered through VACCA’s Aboriginal Child FIRST are more effective for Aboriginal families because</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural capacity and competence is core to the service delivery model</li> <li>• The professionals at VACCA understand Aboriginal communities, cultures, philosophies and values. They understand and may be part of the community the family is from. They know about community relationships and are able to identify people that can help the child and be a source of strength for the family. This means that their ability to engage with Aboriginal children and families, undertake culturally informed assessments and determine the most appropriate intervention is strengthened.</li> <li>• VACCA understand the availability and appropriateness of the suite of family support services available to Aboriginal families because VACCA is the major service provider of these services in the North and West region.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Integrity</b> acting impartially, ethically and in the interests of the agency, and not misusing information acquired through a position of trust</p>	<p>At VACCA, our organisational values of respect, accountability, honesty and equality exist in the context of cultural excellence. Our commitment to Aboriginal Child FIRST services is based in our strong belief that Aboriginal services can deliver effective, culturally based service interventions because we understand and engage with Aboriginal children and families. Our strong commitment is to map the impact of our services for Aboriginal children and families. Integrity in service provision means that Aboriginal Child FIRST must deliver genuine change for Aboriginal children and families.</p>
<p><b>Stewardship</b> properly use and develop organisational resources, including the organisation's people, property and financial assets</p>	<p>VACCA's key resource is its staff. The professionals who work at VACCA have a strong existing skill base, taking a holistic and family strengthening service approach and including cultural and narrative assessments.</p> <p>VACCA's Aboriginal Child FIRST will require core skills of risk and needs assessments, knowledge of Aboriginal cultures, communication, coordination and facilitation expertise; case recording and data management and advanced knowledge of wider Aboriginal and mainstream services. VACCA's Child FIRST will require further investment in our staff to build on their existing skills and</p>

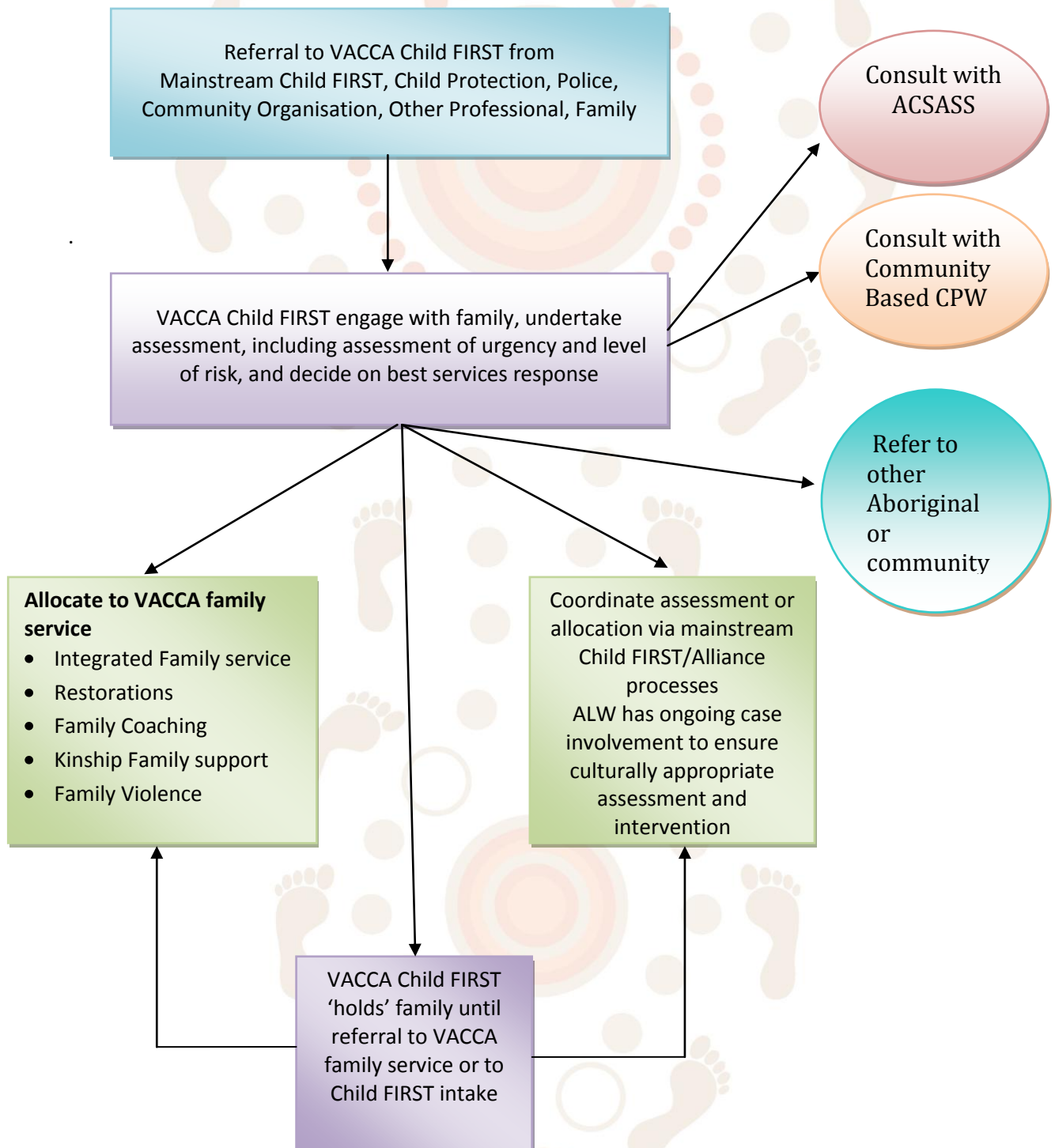


	enable them to undertake the Child FIRST role.
<p><b>Leadership</b> achieving an agency-wide commitment to good governance through leadership from the top</p>	<p>While VACCA is part of the Child FIRST alliance in the North and West region, this was initially dependent on the ‘goodwill’ of mainstream organisations who financially contributed to VACCAs Child FIRST positions.</p> <p>Our proposal allows VACCA to be an equal partner within the Child FIRST alliance. This, in turn, facilitates strong partnerships between alliance members and allows VACCA to take a leadership role within the Child FIRST alliance executive group in the area of Child FIRST services for Aboriginal families.</p> <p>At a case specific level, Aboriginal Liaison Workers from VACCA Child FIRST will continue to provide cultural support to those mainstream family services providing services to Aboriginal families. VACCA will continue to take a leadership role in establishing standards and approaches to culturally competent service delivery level across the region.</p>





**Diagram 2: Aboriginal Child FIRST Process**





## Appendix 1 - Summary of recorded data for Child First consults in the North West Region.

The VACCA database recording Child First consults indicate the following:

- ALW consults in the NW Region have decreased by approximately 50% in 2010/11 compared to data from 2008/09.
- Since 2008, on average there is 60 consults occurring a year across all four catchments, an average of 15 consults per catchment per year.
- Data indicates that a consult occurred within 7 to 14 days of the family being referred to Child First. In 2011 this has increased to an average of 30 days before consultation occurs with the ALW.
- Majority of families are being allocated to main stream services.

There appears to be limited use of the ALW role by Mainstream Family Service providers once the family has been allocated. Approx 2-3 consults per year from Mainstream Family Service providers occur with the ALW.

These statistics are preliminary and VACCA is analysing more detailed data on an ongoing basis.

VACCA Child First will invert these emerging statistics by increasing access and engagement with Aboriginal families, decreasing the current increased trend of excessive waiting times and majority mainstream service provision for Aboriginal people. Current data does not provide an outcomes evaluation for families involved in the mainstream service system. VACCA Child FIRST provides the capacity to evaluate the outcomes for Aboriginal families accessing family support services by centralising referrals and allocations. Outcomes will be recorded for all stages of engagement intake, service engagement and closure.

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