



**VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL  
CHILD CARE AGENCY  
CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED**

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 – 2012



ABN 44 665 455 609

Street Address: 139 Nicholson Street, East Brunswick Victoria 3057

Mail Address: PO Box 494, Northcote Plaza, Victoria 3070

Telephone: 03 8388 1855 Fax: 03 8388 1898

Website: [www.vacca.org](http://www.vacca.org) Email: [vacca@vacca.org](mailto:vacca@vacca.org)



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## OUR VISION, PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY

### Our Vision

A community that is strong in culture, values their children and young people and recognises the importance of the whole community in raising children and keeping families together.

### Our Purpose

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is a statewide, Aboriginal community controlled organisation whose purpose/mission is to advocate on behalf of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, youth and families, premised on human rights, self determination, cultural respect and safety.

*For the purposes of this document the term Aboriginal includes Torres Strait Islander people.*

#### In particular this means

##### •Respect and recognition for Aboriginal cultures by:

- maintaining the agency's Aboriginality
- embedding culture into all aspects of service delivery
- promoting and affirming the importance of culture
- promoting the importance of children and young people's connection to family and community

##### •Advance Aboriginal self-determination, human rights, including the rights of children and young people by:

- promoting the inherent rights of Aboriginal children and young people
- promoting children's and young people's rights to cultural, physical and emotional safety
- promoting self-determination as best practice to capacity-build families and communities

##### •Understand and navigate the dominant culture context by:

- developing positive and mutually respectful partnerships with mainstream services and governments
- building the capacity of Aboriginal workers to deliver positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families
- enhancing VACCA's lead agency capacity within the child and family welfare sector
- provide high level advice and advocacy to governments on legislation, policy, program development, practice and service delivery

##### •Provide services which are premised on Aboriginal child and family principles by:

- focusing on a holistic and strengths based approach
- striving towards the provision of culturally appropriate and quality best practice models responsive to community needs
- building the resilience of Aboriginal families
- promoting healing and culturally responsive therapeutic practices
- enhancing the community's capacity to address the broader systemic issues that impact on child wellbeing
- developing the Aboriginal child and family welfare services' capacity to deliver enhanced outcomes for children and young people
- Assisting Aboriginal children, young people and their families address trans-generational grief, loss and trauma issues.

### Our Philosophy

VACCA is the lead agency in the state of Victoria representing the interest of the Aboriginal community in all policy, program and service development for the welfare of our vulnerable or at risk children and young people in the Child and Family Welfare Sector.

## Our future...

Grounded by our past VACCA will be the lead Aboriginal organisation for vulnerable children and young people involved in Child and Family Welfare.

## OUR OBJECTIVES AND SERVICE OFFERINGS

### Our objectives

VACCA's objectives are:

1. To preserve, strengthen and protect the cultural and spiritual identity of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people.
2. To provide culturally appropriate and quality services that are responsive to the needs of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people.
3. To provide services which reflect and support Aboriginal child rearing practices which recognises the importance of including the child and young person's Aboriginal community in raising resilient Aboriginal children and young people
4. To encourage active participation of families in all aspects of decision making regarding their vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people.
5. To advocate in the best interests of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people.
6. To make governments and other organisations more accountable and responsive to the needs of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people and families in the Child and Family Welfare Sector.
7. To achieve and promote excellence in the field of Aboriginal Child and Family welfare.
8. To raise awareness of the ongoing impact of past removalist and other government policies on the Aboriginal Child and Family welfare sector in contemporary Victoria
9. To educate governments and other non-Aboriginal organisations involved in child and family welfare about becoming culturally respectful organisations.
10. To hear the voice of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people in decision making as it impacts on their overall wellbeing.
11. To promote Aboriginal communities capacity to be self determining.

### Our services and programs

VACCA provides a number of services and programs including:

#### *Early Intervention and Family Support*

This program offers a range of interventions for Aboriginal children and families from early intervention and prevention work through to providing secondary and tertiary support services. Programs such as the following are offered: home visiting, playgroups, family counselling and support, family decision making, restoration and family preservation programs.

#### *Placement and Support*

The focus of this program is to manage the needs of Aboriginal children and young people in a range of out of home care placements which include: Extended Care, Residential Care, and Permanent Care. The program also provides cultural support to Aboriginal children and young people placed in mainstream out of home care .

#### *Lakidjeka ACSASS*

This program has the responsibility of ensuring a culturally appropriate and effective response for Aboriginal children and young people when concerns about their welfare are notified to the Department of Human Services Child Protection.

#### *Link Up Victoria*

This program provides services to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 18 years and over who have been separated from their families and communities under past laws, practices and policies of the Australian Government. The program assists in tracing and reunification with families and communities by offering assistance and support with their journey home, in promoting healing and seeking closure.

#### *Homelessness Services*

The programs offered include the Aboriginal Leaving Care program which supports 15 to 18 year olds who are exiting out of home care and the Kurnai Program, which offers case management and cultural connection to young people up to the age of 25 years old who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness .

#### *Southern Child and Family Services*

This service provides a Foster Care, Kinship Care and Cultural Support program, an Aboriginal Family Preservation program for the Southern region and a playgroup for Aboriginal children and families in the Frankston area.

#### *Swan Hill Child and Family Services*

The Swan Hill VACCA office provides an Extended Care program; a Lakidjeka program; an Aboriginal Family Preservation program; a small Family Support program and a Playgroup for Aboriginal children and families.

#### *Eastern Child & Family Services*

The service provides Aboriginal Family Decision Making and Innovations (Inner East) programs.

*\*Please note that not all programs are operational throughout all regions.*



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

### *New Programs and Initiatives*

This program undertakes a range of activities that include: planning, policy, advocacy and public voice activities, providing program support to VACCA programs including undertaking program reviews, promoting staff wellbeing, research and policy analysis, lead agency activities, community education and activities and infrastructure support to VACCA. The program also provides executive support to the Chief Executive Officer.

### *Corporate Systems*

This program undertakes the management of VACCA's corporate systems. This includes: administration, human resources, financial services, property, assets and risk management.

### **New Programs and Initiatives**

As outlined above, this program undertakes a variety of tasks.

### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Koorie FACES Program** – VACCA has developed a family strengthening program called Koorie FACES with the aim of building confidence in parents and families of Aboriginal children. The emphasis of the program is on participants developing an increased understanding and knowledge of self, Aboriginal culture and parenting practices and styles to build resilience against drug and alcohol misuse in children.

The development of this program has involved extensive consultation with the Aboriginal community, writing a program manual, a participant handbook, and developing a facilitators' training program. To date VACCA has trained local facilitators in the Gippsland, Hume and the Barwon-South West regions and the metropolitan Melbourne regions. A comprehensive evaluation was conducted and a report written of both the pilot programs and the Gippsland programs. Program evaluation indicates that this is seen by the Aboriginal community as a highly successful program.

**VACCA's Organisation Induction Program**-VACCA has designed a two-day organisation induction program for new staff with clear learning outcomes, builds on the cultural knowledge, experience and skills of new staff and maximizes staff participation.

The content and activities of the program have been grouped into the following four themes:

*Why VACCA does the work it does*

*How VACCA cares for Aboriginal children and families*

*How we can make a difference to the work of VACCA*

*How we can look after our wellbeing as VACCA staff.*

An evaluation process is conducted at the end of the two days. Feedback shows a consistent increase in staff's understanding and knowledge of VACCA as a result of completing the two day program.

**VACCA Staff Wellbeing Policy** - VACCA has developed a *Staff Wellbeing policy* that recognises VACCA's commitment to respect and value staff and support their wellbeing in providing culturally responsive and effective services to Aboriginal children, families and the Aboriginal community. The policy views Aboriginality as the necessary primary qualification to effectively engage with and deliver culturally appropriate services. The programs of the Staff Wellbeing policy have been identified as important to enhance and build cultural competence and support staff wellbeing along their journey in undertaking their work at VACCA.

There are a number of Staff Wellbeing programs which include: Orientation and Probation; Staff Supervision; Professional Development, Study Leave; Mentoring; Cultural Wellbeing; Self Care; Recognition of Current Competency; Annual Staff Review and Recognition; Critical Incident and Stress Debriefing.

The Staff Wellbeing programs are designed to incorporate culturally appropriate language, concepts, resources and processes that demonstrate respect and support our culture of valuing diversity and flexibility. A Staff Wellbeing Committee has been established to implement the Self Care and Cultural Wellbeing programs of the Agencies Wellbeing policy across the agency.

**Nikara's Journey – Caring for Aboriginal children in Out of Home Care** – VACCA has developed a two day training program for non-Indigenous carers of Aboriginal children in Out of Home Care. The training program is based on VACCA's 2005 publication: *Caring for Aboriginal Children in Out of Home Care*.



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

The two-day program titled “Nikara’s Journey” has been designed to assist carers to understand the importance of culture to an Aboriginal child’s best interests. The training assists carers to identify the particular ways VACCA’s non-Indigenous carers can support and enhance Aboriginal children and young people’s cultural needs whilst in their care to enable the child to maintain connection to their family, culture and community.

**Strengthening responses for Aboriginal Children and Families under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005** – As part of the Statewide Learning and Development Strategy to orientate child protection and child and family welfare workers to the new Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, VACCA developed a 3 hour training module. This training focused on particular sections of the new Act – highlighting the importance of connection to culture in upholding the best interests of Aboriginal children and the significance of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. It provided practical assistance to workers to facilitate stronger compliance.

The module was co-facilitated by DHS trainers with Lakidjeka staff, all of whom completed a Train the Trainer workshop facilitated by VACCA. Fifty-four workshops were held over a 2 month period and over 2,000 staff across the child protection and child and family welfare sector of Victoria attended. VACCA was financially reimbursed by DHS for the development and delivery of this cultural module.

**Successfully lobbied for improvements to new Children, Youth and Families Act** – VACCA has played a key role in the lobbying of the State government to ensure the new Act is responsive to the needs of Aboriginal children, young people and their families. In particular VACCA, successfully lobbied for the Act to establish the principle of Aboriginal self-determination as the basis for the decision making process in relation to Aboriginal children. VACCA is pleased to note that the Act now acknowledges that it is in the best interests of an Aboriginal child and young person for their culture and their connection to family, kin and community to be maintained and supported. In particular VACCA is pleased this is expressed through:

*The Secretary of DHS being able to transfer responsibility for managing Children’s Court protection orders to the head of an approved Aboriginal agency*

*Mandatory compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle,*

*Mandatory preparation of cultural plans for Aboriginal children in Out of Home Care and*

*Cultural competence being a criteria throughout the standards which community sector organisations must meet to stay registered.*

**Established fundraising strategy for Moondani Aboriginal Family Centre** – The focus of Moondani will be to provide user-friendly facilities from which a range of activities and services are delivered aimed at proactively building and strengthening whole of families from infants to Elders. A prospectus has been developed and the official launch of the fund raising campaign has occurred. Partial funding has been secured from the Department of Human Services and the Department of Victorian Communities. With Zen Architects, we are looking at issues relating to proposed sites for Moondani. Through the Buckland Foundation we have been successful in obtaining funds for project management. However, these funds can not be accessed until all the money required to build Moondani have been procured. At this stage significant shortfall in funding still exists.

**Child and Family Welfare Services – Capacity Building**

The DHS Capacity Building Project is targeted towards those Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations who provide Aboriginal Out of Home Care and Aboriginal Family Services to assist in meeting Agency Registration requirements.

VACCA was keen to use our expertise to produce resources specifically for these Aboriginal community organisations that would assist them in meeting their Out of Home Care and Family Service Standards.

VACCA was able to distribute resources partially funded by DHS. These included a Human Resource Package, Staff Wellbeing Framework booklet, Professional Development and Training Plan booklet, Occupational Health and Safety Manual, Culturally Appropriate Professional Code of Conduct Principles booklet, Organisational Governance Practices booklet and the Home Based Care Services Manual. Agencies have also been provided with information regarding agency standards, a dictionary of commonly used terms and staff support.

All the manuals and booklets were provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in both a paper and in electronic form on a specially developed CD that included a range of other useful information to further assist in meeting the new legislation and the Community Service Organisation Registration Standards. Based on feedback received the manuals, booklets and the CD of information were considered to be extremely useful resource material.



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

### **Early Intervention and Family Services**

This program currently offers Aboriginal children, young people and families a range of interventions across a continuum of support from early intervention and prevention work to the provision of both secondary and tertiary support services.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Child FIRST**-Child FIRST Intake services were launched on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007 and are the identifiable single point of access to Family Services in each catchment for children, young people, families and professionals. Over the last year, in preparation for the introduction of Child FIRST, considerable policy input was provided by VACCA at both statewide and more local meetings about ensuring that Aboriginal families were not disadvantaged by the introduction of this new system and that any Child FIRST service developed was culturally responsive to Aboriginal families.

In the North East Metropolitan catchment, the 8 other Family Support funded agencies invited VACCA to join them in providing the Child FIRST service for that catchment. We are part of the North East Consortium for Child FIRST and successfully negotiated with other member organisations to provide partial funding for a new Aboriginal specific position from their own funding.

**Indigenous Innovations Case Coordination panel (ICC)** – A key feature of the Indigenous Innovations Project is the development of an Indigenous Case Co-ordination Panel. The primary purpose of the ICC Panel is to provide a collaborative forum where complex client cases can be presented, discussed, and additional services planned for and allocated.

It is intended to enhance the capacity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies to link with other providers and develop a more holistic service response to their more complex clients. This project is an excellent example of Indigenous and mainstream organisations working together for the benefit of our Aboriginal children and families.

**Restorations Program** – Within very short time lines, program establishment including program development occurred in relation to establishing a Family Restorations Program. This program provides intensive support to families who are placed as a family unit in a community residential setting. There is a comprehensive operational manual with relevant templates developed to guide practice and the program is fully staffed. The program is now operational.

Referrals to the Program clearly outstrip capacity to provide the service and feedback from families and DHS Child protection indicate that there is value and benefits of providing such an intensive intervention in a residential setting for vulnerable families.

**Playgroups** – Playgroups continue to play a critical role in supporting Aboriginal families and promoting the importance of the early years to the development and wellbeing of children. In 2007 expanding the playgroups to other metropolitan and regional areas has occurred. We have focused particularly on establishing and running playgroups in the Southern Metropolitan region (Frankston), Eastern Metropolitan region (Croydon) and Lodden Mallee region (Swan Hill). We have also provided funds and advisory support for the establishment of a playgroup in Shepparton.

These new playgroups are doing well and delivering a supportive and educative service to families. We have also been providing playgroups in partnership with other Aboriginal organisations such as Mullum Mullum in the Eastern region.

We are also working with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI), the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and Playgroup Victoria to develop a support network and Playgroup kit for Indigenous playgroups.



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

### **Link Up Victoria**

Link Up Victorian program provides services to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 18 years and over who have been separated from their families and communities under past laws, practices and policies of the Australian Government.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Healing camps** – The Link Up Program has run two Healing Camps in 2007 and is proposing another two for 2008. The Healing Camps have proven an enormous success in bringing together members of the Stolen Generations. These camps provide participants with an opportunity to share their stories and support each other on their individual journey of healing. The camps are a very emotional experience for all involved. Our camps also have strong cultural components.

**10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the launch of “Bringing Them Home” Report May 2007** – The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health funded the Link Up Program to hold a luncheon to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s report “Bringing The Home”. The Link Up Program was able to secure media attention for the event. The highlight was the support of community and attendance of so many Link Up clients. The speakers spoke well and the day was a huge success.

#### **National Link Up Forum May 2007–**

Link Up Victoria hosted the National Link Up forum with staff traveling from all parts of Australia to attend our forum. This was a very successful forum with the participants entertained by local Aboriginal band “Stray Blacks” as well as being provided with the opportunity to visit local Aboriginal Services. Most however opted to spend time at VACCA where they were provided with gift bags and a formal presentation by staff of the Agency.

### **Lakidjeka (ACSASS)**

The Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice & Support Service (ACSASS) provides specialist consultation and advice to Child Protection when there are reports of Aboriginal children and young people alleged to be at risk of abuse. The service provides consultation on significant decisions throughout the life of the Child Protection case.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Lakidjeka ACSASS program expansion** – Lakidjeka has successfully established its service across the state of Victoria and was rolled out in three main stages:

- i. Consolidation and expansion of the existing Southern, Northern and Management team, establishment of Hume and Loddon Mallee team and Central Intake.
- ii Establishment of Barwon/Grampians and Gippsland teams
- iii. Expansion of service to include providing consultation throughout the life of a child protection case.

The Lakidjeka program now has a total of 33 staff positions spread across 12 separate service sites.

**Lakidjeka ACSASS Outcomes** – From the period of October 2002 up until December 2006 the Lakidjeka program provided consultation and advice on approximately 10,136 notifications to Child Protection. Of these 4,418 were then further actioned and investigated by Child Protection in partnership with Lakidjeka.

**Staff Development** - The program has seen the development and growth of all workers but particularly those who were appointed to the role of Supervisor/Caseworker within the program. These workers came with casework experience roles but with little supervisory experience. All have been prepared to take on the challenge of learning new skills to assist them in supervising staff and in developing and strengthening regional working relationships.

### **Residential Care**

The Residential Care program consists of two Family Group Homes. The VACCA Residential Care program provides a culturally appropriate therapeutic care environment for eight Aboriginal children aged between 0-12 who are unable to live with their parents and for whom extended family or a foster care placement are either inappropriate or where there is no capacity.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Program stability** – The Residential Care program is now in a better position in terms of staffing and staff training to respond to children with complex needs in a more therapeutic way.



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

This has been achieved by employing additional support workers to work with the children after school hours and on weekends; by working with the children individually in their school settings and utilizing the services of the DHS North and West Region START consultant.

The program has provided greater connection for the children with their extended families, the Aboriginal community and their land. Two interstate trips have been organized for children to visit their mother and a high level of access with the children's parents and family members is facilitated and supported by the staff.

Several "Return to Country" trips have been conducted to Yorta Yorta land as well as several cultural trips eg to Brambuk Cultural Centre at Gariwerd, Shepparton Keeping Place, Lake Mungo. The children are always participating in community events such as: Invasion Day, Indigenous Sports Carnivals, Sorry Day, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week, Dreamtime at the G, The Long Walk, SNAICC National Children's Day, Christmas Events at the Aborigines Advancement League and are taught to be proud of being Aboriginal.

### **Extended Care**

The Extended Care program provides safe, nurturing and culturally sensitive out of home care placements for Aboriginal children who are unable to reside with their families for a variety of reasons ensuring that their health, wellbeing and cultural needs are attended to.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Looking After Children** – Successful integration of the Looking After Children Framework into casework practice: This has ensured that for all children in care there has been a focus on: identity, family & social relationships, health, education, emotional wellbeing, social presentation and self care skills

**Staff development and training** – Staff are now participating in accredited training programs including the Developmental Psychiatry Course at Mindful and the Certificate 1V in Protective Care at Kangan TAFE.

**Cultural Connections** – The cultural connections of children in care outside of their connection to family through access are maintained through social activities including participating National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Commemoration (NAIDOC) and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD), Foster Carer Christmas barbeque and other planned activities

**Children & Young People in Care Activities** – In 2007 VACCA also held some very special activities such as:

**Production of Ngaweeyan Thookayngat – Voice of Children** – This was a film directed by Richard Frankland to provide VACCA children in care with an opportunity to discover their voice through learning about Aboriginal warriors from the past and interviewing their present day heroes.

**KicNArp** – Extended Care staff facilitated a 2 day holiday program for kids in care. Approximately 24 children and young people attended the two day camp which was facilitated by Nick Hayne from the Torch Theatre Group.

**Books in Home Program** – This program is focused on fostering a love of reading and in helping to create a home library for each child.

**Deadly Readers** – Distribution of Early Reader bags for children aged 0-6 and including training for carers on the importance and the different ways they can promote and engage the children in language emersion prior to attending school.

**The Boys and Girls Activity Program** – This program is aimed at providing both girls and boys in care with an opportunity to have age appropriate and gender specific discussions and activities.

### **Swan Hill Child and Family Services**

The Swan Hill VACCA office provides an Extended Care program; a Lakidjeka program; an Aboriginal Family Preservation program; a small Family Support program and a Playgroup for Aboriginal children and families.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**The establishment of the Swan Hill office** – this enables a central focus on children and family services for the community.

**The establishment of the Early Literacy Program** - Funding has been obtained to provide an Early Literacy Bag to parents with very young children and to help the parents understand the importance of ready books to children from a very early age.

**Completion of the Review of the Swan Hill Aboriginal Child & Family Services** – The review of the Swan Hill Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare Service is now completed with a number of recommendations to be implemented. We are currently in the process of developing an action plan to work through the recommendations so as not to lose the momentum in achieving the goals of the review which were to "*Strengthen the capacity of the agency to develop innovative, culturally responsive programs and policy responses*".



## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

### **Southern VACCA**

The Southern VACCA Aboriginal Child and Family Service operates a number of programs and services for vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people. The Service also operates family strengthening and support programs as well as early years programs

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Establishment of Service** – Transitioning the service from two worksites to also include an out of home care service has not been without difficulty but the Southern office is now an operation that is running smoothly.

**Establishing Out of Home Care Service** – We now have operating out of Southern VACCA a Kinship Care Program, an Extended Care Program and a Koorie Cultural Support Program and whilst the staffing is only for two positions the importance and relevance of these positions in this region is significant.

**Implementing new programs and services** – Currently in the final stages of implementation is the Frankston playgroup. We are also in the final stage of implementing a Child FIRST/Liaison position in the region.

### **Kurnai and Leaving Care Programs**

The VACCA Kurnai and Leaving Care Programs provided a dedicated youth service for Aboriginal young people who are homeless, at imminent risk of homelessness or who are planning to leave care focus on their specific accommodation and support needs.

#### *Key Achievements 2003-07*

**Dedicated Program Manager** – VACCA in recognition of the need to focus on the specific needs of young people leaving care and young people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness dedicated a Program Manager with specific responsibilities to oversee the management of the program and to contribute to the overall development of the programs.

**Development of program manuals** – The Leaving Care Program has developed an Aboriginal Leaving Care Manual to inform the programs operations including referral pathways, relevant templates etc. This document is distinctly Aboriginal and will be a great resource to inform our practice in regards to young people leaving care.

### **Successful piloting of Leaving Care Program**

– The Leaving Care Program has been successful in piloting an Aboriginal Leaving Care across three regions including Gippsland (Morwell), the North/West and Loddon Mallee region.



## OUR STAKEHOLDERS

### Our Key Stakeholders

We have a long tradition of being close to our stakeholders. As part of our strategic planning process we have identified our stakeholders and their expectations of us. These expectations have informed our strategic priorities.

Our key external stakeholders	
<b>Our clients</b>	Our clients expect us to keep them safe; look after them; ensure that we maintain their cultural connections; advocate on their behalf; hear their voice, make good decisions and support their needs, and ensure that policies and practices of the past are not repeated. Our clients expect that we will work to address past and contemporary removal issues.
<b>Aboriginal families</b>	<p>Aboriginal families expect VACCA to look after their children when they cannot do so. Aboriginal families look to VACCA for assistance when: they want to access culturally appropriate child and family services including playgroups; when they are experiencing family problems; in any contact with the child protection system and in negotiating with government on their behalf. In some cases, families look to VACCA to act on their behalf.</p> <p>Aboriginal families also expect VACCA to play a role in working towards keeping <u>all</u> Aboriginal children and young people safe and in strengthening those families most vulnerable.</p> <p>Aboriginal families expect VACCA to ensure that individuals, children and young people removed under past and contemporary removal policies are offered opportunities for healing and reunification.</p>
<b>The Aboriginal community</b>	<p>The Aboriginal community expects VACCA to action the rights of the Aboriginal community with Government and mainstream services and in developing strategies to comprehensively address the access and equity issues of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people and families. VACCA is expected to help create a safer community for Aboriginal children and young people.</p> <p>The Aboriginal Community also expects VACCA to continue to redress the issues of past and contemporary removal policies, to facilitate family restoration, connections to culture and return to country whenever practical.</p>
<b>Other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations</b>	Other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations expect that VACCA will take a leadership role in keeping vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people involved in the Child and Family Service system safe and in addressing the needs of members of the Stolen Generations. Their expectation is that VACCA demonstrate strong leadership in setting the direction in Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare through strong, leadership, strong advocacy, informing policy, being strategic and in delivering on outcomes as identified by the Aboriginal needs and aspirations of the community.
<b>Mainstream Community Service Organisations (CSO's)</b>	<p>Mainstream CSO's expect that VACCA is expert in their advocacy for vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people involved in the Child and Family Welfare system. Key to this is the ability of VACCA to articulate and deliver the cultural expertise in policy and program development, in service delivery and in improving mainstream practices to strengthen their service response for Aboriginal clients. VACCA is generally expected to be expert in 'all things' Aboriginal across the sector and provide assistance to organisations on being culturally respectful and responsive in their engagement.</p> <p>VACCA will through its Link Up Program, assist mainstream organisations to respond to the needs of members of the Stolen Generations.</p>



## OUR STAKEHOLDERS

### Our Key Stakeholders

<p><b>Government</b></p>	<p>All levels of Government expect VACCA to provide leadership and guidance as part of our lead agency role on all matters related to Aboriginal child and family welfare. In addition, Government expects VACCA to be expert and in all matters concerning the welfare of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people.</p> <p>All levels of government expect VACCA to provide advice on enhancing service delivery and the policy framework for members of the Stolen Generations.</p>
<p><b>Our internal stakeholders</b></p>	
<p><b>Our Board</b></p>	<p>Our Board expects VACCA to advocate effectively with government and will be expert in matters relating to Link Up clients and vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people as it relates Child and Family Welfare and that we will provide services of the highest quality. The Board expects that the resources are being managed effectively and efficiently and that the organisation meets its compliance and regulatory requirements.</p>
<p><b>Our Staff</b></p>	<p>Staff expect our organisation to provide them with the necessary supports to provide high quality services in order to better support the Aboriginal community. They expect that VACCA will provide a safe working environment and continually explore opportunities for their self-development and growth. Staff expect VACCA to be an effective lobbyist with government on Aboriginal workplace issues. Staff expect that VACCA will ensure their cultural identity is valued, supported and strengthened.</p>

### To support our stakeholders:

VACCA will work to support access for Stolen Generations members to quality services that address past trauma and reconnect them to their families and communities to support them and their healing.

Vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people and their families alongside Stolen Generations clients and their families will continue to be our key focus.

VACCA will engage the Victorian Aboriginal community as widely as possible to ensure that, in regard to vulnerable or at risk children and young people involved in Child and Family Welfare that their needs, views and expectations are well represented.

VACCA will develop deeper relationships with other Aboriginal and community organisations.

VACCA will engage locally with government in all regions in order to cement its position as a truly state-wide organisation.

VACCA will work more closely with Government and mainstream services to establish clarity around VACCA's role as the lead agency in regard to vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people involved in Child and Family Welfare.

VACCA will support staff development, undertake succession planning and research and strengthen our teaching capacity to ensure a sustainable future for the staff of the organisation.

VACCA will work to increase the cultural competencies of mainstream and government to ensure that vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people have their cultural needs addressed in the Child and Welfare Sector.



## OUR CHANGING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

### The current operating environment

The environment in which VACCA operates has changed greatly since the agency's inception in 1977. Within Australia there has been a history of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and their communities. More commonly referred to today as the 'Stolen Generations', children were removed on the basis of colour and cultural identity.

VACCA has been recognised as a leading advocate in driving the abolition of these policies and practices and in advocating for appropriate welfare responses for vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people in the Child and Family Welfare Sector in Victoria and more generally. Yet there is still much to do.

### In Victoria today:

- 57 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under 25 years old.  
*(Department of Human Services. 2006. Family and Placement Services Sector Development Plan. Melbourne: Victorian Government.)*
- Aboriginal children are more likely to experience a range of vaccine-preventable infections, and other infections such as ear and respiratory infections.
- Aboriginal children and young people are less likely to achieve relevant literacy and numeracy standards than non-Aboriginal children and young people.
- Aboriginal families are underrepresented within family services.  
*(Department of Human Services. July 2005. Protecting Children: the next steps. Melbourne: Victorian Government.)*
- Children and young people are significantly overrepresented in the Child Protection and Out of Home Care system.
- Aboriginal families known to Child Protection are 20 per cent more likely to have family violence noted as a characteristic.
- Aboriginal young people are 16 times more likely to be in youth detention than non-Aboriginal young people.  
*(Department of Human Services. 2005. Child Protection and Family Violence Guide for Child Protection Practitioners. Melbourne: Victorian Government.)*
- The proportion of Aboriginal children and young people will increase by approximately 27 per cent by 2016 .  
*(Department of Human Services. 2006. Family and Placement Services Sector Development Plan. Melbourne: Victorian Government.)*

**These trends present a significant challenge for the work of VACCA.**



## EMERGING POLICY DIRECTIONS

A number of changes in the broader community, government policy in the child and family welfare sector are influencing VACCA's future directions, these include:

### Commonwealth Government policies

The recent change of government at the national level means that policy is at a transitional state. The Northern Territory Emergency Intervention which is now currently being reviewed may demonstrate whether or not the Rudd Government will continue with an approach based on mainstreaming and bureaucratic intervention or restructure the Federal approach along more consultative lines.

The National Apology, the commitment to Close the Gap in health outcomes and the process of consultation around national Indigenous representation represents an opportunity for Aboriginal organisations and communities to have greater input into Federal Policy. The Federal Government also emphasizes the need for an evidence based approach to policy. This will require Aboriginal organisations and communities to explore ways of research and evidence gathering which is both respectful of Aboriginal communities and can convince governments and government departments.

Current Federal Government policy approach to child and family welfare in general emphasizes a strengths based approach. However the Federal Government is considering Centrelink welfare quarantining for some families involved in Child Protection.

### State Reforms – Child and Family Welfare

The state government has undergone major reforms concerning the sector which they refer to as the every child every chance reforms and incorporate the implementation of the Children, Youth and Family Act (2005).

#### *The Children, Youth and Families Act*

- establishes the principle of Indigenous self-determination as the basis for the decision making process in relation to Indigenous children.
- acknowledges that it is in the best interests of an Aboriginal child for their culture and their connection to family, kin and community to be maintained and supported.
- enables the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to transfer responsibility for managing Children' Court protection orders to the head of an approved Aboriginal agency
- makes mandatory compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle,
- makes mandatory the preparation of cultural plans for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and
- makes cultural competence one of the criteria for performance standards which community sector organisations must meet to stay registered.

The reforms include a two stream approach to issues of concern for children – the Child FIRST Stream and the Child Protection stream.

Mainstream services are now more open to working in partnership with Aboriginal community controlled organisations and returning care of Aboriginal children in out of home care to Aboriginal community controlled organizations.

All these reforms represent significant opportunities for VACCA and other Aboriginal Child and Family Sector services.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

### ***Continuing Commitment by the State and Commonwealth Governments to members of the Stolen Generations.***

There has been a significant increase in funding, particularly from the Commonwealth Government in recognition of the ongoing impact of the Stolen Generations experience on the Aboriginal community.

### **Growth in people with multiple and complex needs**

There are increasing levels of people with dual diagnoses and /or complex needs. This recognizes the growth in the number of people with a mental illness and that the long term impact of substance abuse and resultant disability has also contributed to this trend. Intergenerational poverty and abuse is also having an impact on the community and contributing to the growth in this group.

### **Strengthening families, growing resilience**

Strong families have been recognised as having a positive impact on the development of children and young people. There has been an increased focus on giving children the best start possible by enhancing parenting skills and capabilities through community linkages and connectedness. There has also been a recognition of key transition points in life and the need to help children and young people develop resilience. There is growing recognition of the critical role plays in building resilience for all Aboriginal children, young people and families.

### **Growing focus on the cost effectiveness of service options**

There has been a move by all governments to require services to prove their cost effectiveness. As a result, service provision has moved towards being evidence-based and has become more outcomes focussed.

### ***Building on our knowledge from the Stolen Generations experience***

We need to develop new ways of addressing issues for the Stolen Generations members, their families and our communities, that build on our strong cultural practices and beliefs to assist our people in a contemporary society.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

### **The projected increase in the number of Aboriginal children and young people, combined with radical changes in government policy, will have a number of impacts on VACCA and the Aboriginal community.**

The tension between governments, organisations and the communities they serve because of past government policies and practices in relation to child welfare within the Aboriginal community still exists today.

VACCA will continue to work with all parties acknowledging the history of the past while providing guidance about new ways of working to ensure that culturally proficient responses are available to vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people in the Child and Family Welfare service system.

### **In future years there will be additional demand for services for Aboriginal children and young people, especially those most vulnerable or at risk.**

In order to meet this increased demand, there will be a need for VACCA to continue to recruit and retain appropriately skilled and qualified staff. The workforce shortage throughout Australia will pose a significant challenge to achieving this goal. There is a limited resource pool from which staff can be obtained and competition for this pool will be great. Entry level skill sets will need to be defined and ongoing professional development will need to be provided in order to retain staff and to ensure they remain competent.

In order to meet the increased demand, partnerships and resource transfers between mainstream and Aboriginal agencies will need to be considered. Mainstream services will also need to be educated about establishing their client's Aboriginal status, seeking appropriate secondary consultation, on being culturally respectful and on referring to Aboriginal-specific services.

As the number of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children and young people in the Child and Family Welfare sector increases there will also be a need to develop Aboriginal models of practice that are culturally proficient and enhance Aboriginal self-determination.

The need to ensure that Aboriginal children and young people remain connected to their families, communities and their culture will require the recruitment of Aboriginal carers to 'grow up' children and young people whose parents are unable to care for them.

### **Reforms to the wider children, young people and family service system will require VACCA to position itself to be able to respond to new requirements and challenges.**

There is a need to ensure that VACCA's management and governance structures are robust and appropriately reflect its functional and operational needs. As part of this process it will be essential for VACCA to work with other Aboriginal controlled organisations providing Child and Family Welfare Services to support their growth and development so that Victoria has a culturally proficient service system responsive to the needs of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people and families.

VACCA will continue its advocacy for appropriate resourcing of Aboriginal community controlled organisations so that they are positioned to assume the transfer of Guardianship arrangements.

VACCA will continue to work in partnership with DHS in order to effectively implement the transfer of Guardianship arrangements.

VACCA will also seek to ensure through its Link Up Program that Stolen Generations people, who have suffered from the racist welfare policies of the past, are assisted in reunited with their families and communities.



With the development of our Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012 our focus will be on building and guiding the organisation towards the achievement of our strategic priorities.

While the aim will be to achieve these strategic priorities over the next five years, cementing them as standard organisational practice, the process will be built on practical and achievable steps. A key element in achieving the next steps will be to identify individuals (within and external to the organisation) who will lead the completion of the required actions.

Consideration of timeframes will focus our organisation and leaders on not only achieving our strategic priorities but also provide us with logical and sequential steps to take over the next five years. We will be focussed on what needs to be in place in one, three and five years time with the ultimate aim of achieving our strategic priorities by 2012.

### By 2009 we will have:

- a cultural proficiency framework developed
- new alliances with other Aboriginal controlled organisations
- new partnerships with mainstream community service organisations
- an established research unit
- articulated lead agency functions and structure and secured funding
- staff with a common understanding and shared ownership of promoting the strategic priorities
- established a cultural training and resource unit
- developed a range of training and learning packages for mainstream organisations delivering child and family welfare services
- embedded the staff wellbeing programs throughout the organisations operations
- developed systems to collect data
- an established Human Resource function
- systems in place to ensure continuous quality improvement processes are in place including a systematic approach to VACCA's cultural strengthening dialogue
- successfully complied with all aspects of Agency Registration
- progressed towards accepting responsibility for management of children on Children's Court Orders
- provided annual input into the government's budget cycle
- established regular forums to meet with senior DHS managers regarding key issues effecting vulnerable and at risk Aboriginal children and families
- established a workforce development strategy to grow Aboriginal leadership within the agency and enhance direct service staff skills to meet the complexity of client needs
- implemented the enhanced service model for the Link Up program
- developed a comprehensive policy and procedures framework for the Link Up program and developed innovative approaches to meet client needs

### By 2010 we will have:

- Successfully advocated for local Aboriginal communities to have a rural and regional presence delivering services for Aboriginal children, young people and families both directly and via established partnerships/alliances
- produced and published research on best practice service delivery trends for Aboriginal children, young people, families and for Link Up clients



- become a recognised leader in providing Aboriginal cultural proficiency support and training to mainstream organisations
- Healing and therapeutic responses to grief, loss and trauma
- Supported the development of Parenting programs across the state
- Child focussed responses to family violence and sexual abuse

**By 2012 we will have:**

- adequately resourced and effectively supported Aboriginal community controlled organisations in the areas of advocacy, policy development and best practice service delivery in Aboriginal child, young people and family services
- an established portfolio of published research and be recognised leaders in child, young people and family Aboriginal services
- Effectively supported Aboriginal community controlled organisations develop service responses to vulnerable Aboriginal children, at risk young people and their families within Victoria, serviced by a competent experienced workforce who are supported by best practice policies and guidelines
- Implemented evidence based practice to enhance our service response to Link Up clients



## OUR FUTURE - CHALLENGES

Inherent to the change process, we will face a number challenges in taking the necessary steps towards achievement of our strategic priorities. To most effectively manage these possible risks we have identified, assessed, rated and established controls for each.

### Organisational

- Building the capacity of VACCA's "future" leadership capacity will need to be strengthened to ensure appropriate succession planning and relationship building with other organisations is sustainable over time.
- Our structure will need to be aligned and will need to grow our capabilities of our staff for the future.
- Financial management/funding knowledge within the organisation will need to grow as the complexities of individual care packages increases, increased inter and cross sector collaboration occurs and the organisation develops its role as a leader (more formally).
- Human Resource capacity will need to be strengthen to enable the organisation to effectively meet its legal requirements and provide a responsive human resources response to staff.
- Systems will need to be strengthened to improve VACCA's internal operations.

### Reputation

- Respecting the role that VACCA plays is paramount to our ability to provide services for, and advice on behalf of, our stakeholders.
- Our workforce will continue to be representatives of the Aboriginal community we serve and as such will need focussed support, training and ongoing professional development.
- Strengthening VACCA's public advocacy and the development of cultural resources will enhance the organization's reputation within the child and family welfare sector.

### Staff

- Our staff will be our key resource and they are our pathway to our success.
- Developing and attracting competent staff with an understanding of, and ability to effectively communicate our vision, mission and priorities will be a priority.
- VACCA will continue to support staff gain appropriate qualifications and also provide competency based training.
- VACCA will ensure its environment enhances staff well being and builds on cultural knowledge and strengths.

### Partners/stakeholders

- Our clients and our community will remain our core focus.
- Our reputation will rely on our choice of partner organisations and the strategic alliances we make. Ensuring that appropriate quality processes and accountability for service delivery are in place will be crucial to the success of the relationships and our own sustainability.
- Ensuring we understand our key stakeholders needs better will allow us to more proactively seek out opportunities for VACCA's future.



To respond to changing patterns of demand and need our strategic priorities now and into the future are to:

### **1. Further VACCA's lead agency capacity**

Strategic priority: Strengthen VACCA's role as the lead agency for vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people and their families involved in Child and Family Welfare in Victoria that includes strategic policy and planning approaches that will influence the forward directions of the child and family welfare sector and government.

### **2. Enhance VACCA's continuous quality approach to our service delivery**

Strategic priority: Enhance VACCA's service delivery through practices and processes that incorporate ongoing service reviews, meets compliance requirements and reflects Aboriginal child rearing practices and supported by research.

### **3. Build the cultural competence of the mainstream service children and family welfare sector, government bodies and the broader community**

Strategic Priority: Grow VACCA's focus on capacity building in mainstream organisations and the wider community so as to ensure a culturally competent service response for vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal children, young people and families involved in Child and Family Welfare in Victoria.

### **4. Enhance VACCA's capacity to be a robust Aboriginal organisation**

Strategic Priority: Enhance VACCA's governance/management and corporate structures, processes and systems to support VACCA's strategic priorities.

### **5. Grow our service offerings**

Strategic Priority: Enhance and grow our service development strategy to more effectively support VACCA's strategic priorities.

### **6. Drive VACCA's capacity to be self determining through taking on the Aboriginal reform agenda as articulated in the new Child, Youth and Family Act**

Strategic Priority: To capacity build VACCA to meet all key areas of the reform that promote self determination in the Children, Youth and Families Act of 2005.

### **7. Enhance VACCA's workforce to build a strong and effective Aboriginal child and family welfare service**

Strategic priority: Establish a workforce development strategy to grow Aboriginal leadership within the agency and enhance direct service staff skills to meet the complexity of client need

### **8. Demonstrate VACCA's capacity to achieve program performance outcomes in line with Aboriginal child welfare best practice**

Strategic priority: Develop agency performance framework that articulates key measurables

