

# Protecting Aboriginal Children Research Summary



VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD  
AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture

## Community Protecting Boorais

**Key insights from research on Community Protecting Boorais — a new, Aboriginal-led model for responding to child protection concerns in a self-determining way.**

### INTRODUCTION

#### What is the Community Protecting Boorais model?

Community Protecting Boorais is part of VACCA's work under the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) program – known internally as Nugel. Through this model, statutory child protection powers — including the investigation stage — are delegated to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, restoring Aboriginal self-determination in child protection.

Grounded in culture, care and respect, the model shifts child protection from government-led responses to community-led solutions. Practitioners walk alongside families to build safety, healing and identity with the goal of keeping children safely at home.

#### Why was this research done?

The research aimed to document how the model was developed, share insights from early implementation, and reflect on what it takes to embed Aboriginal-led decision-making in child protection systems.

# WHAT DID THE RESEARCH FIND?

## Restoring Aboriginal self-determination

Guided by Aboriginal leadership, the program reflects long-standing calls to shift child protection decisions from government to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

## Self-determination is essential for safety and wellbeing

Aboriginal-led responses are more effective in keeping children connected to family, culture and Country — and reduce unnecessary removal and over-representation in statutory care

## Rebuilding trust with families

Families are supported through relational, strengths-based practice – redefining safety in cultural terms, using respectful language to build trust, and working in partnership with families.

## Decades of advocacy laid the groundwork

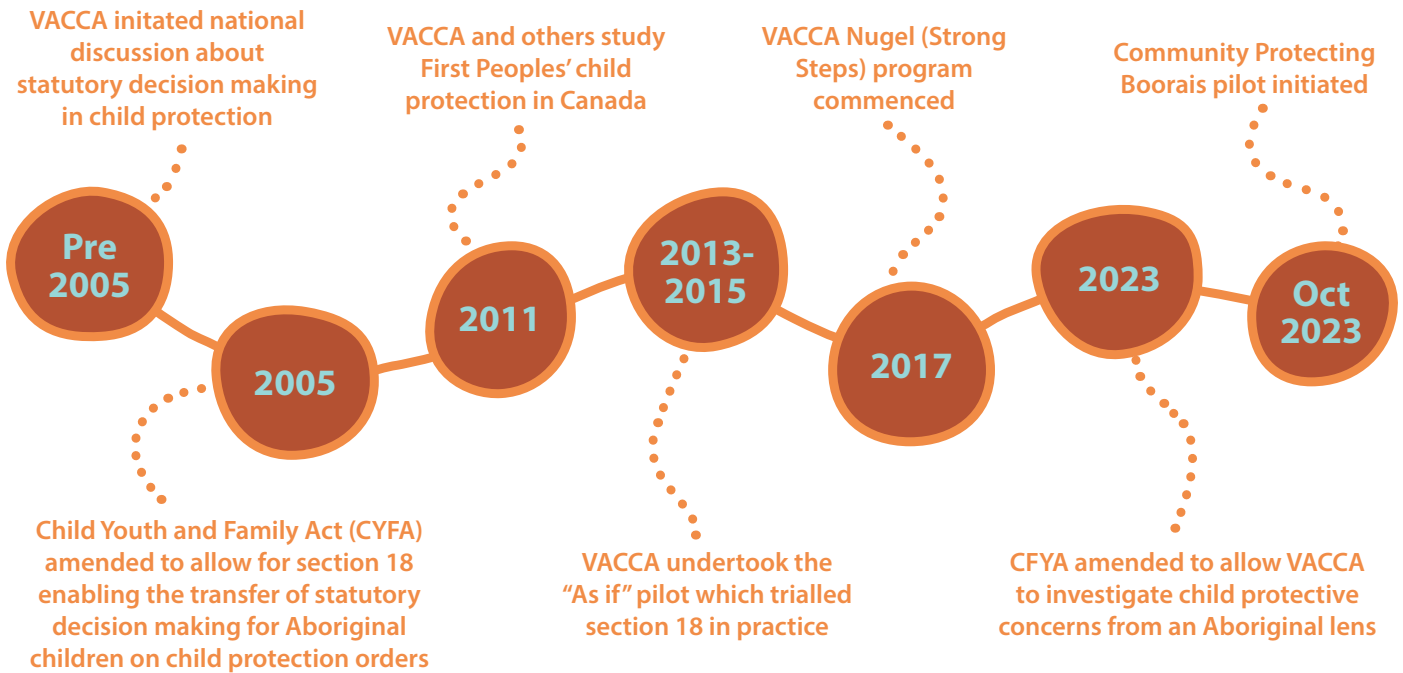
Over 20 years, VACCA and other Aboriginal organisations have advocated for legal and policy change. The Community Protecting Boorais and broader Nugel program reflect this journey, reshaping child protection to align with Aboriginal values.

**“Our children will know who they are and where they belong. They will take pride in their cultural identity and will grow up strong and resilient”**

— Muriel Bamblett, VACCA CEO

## Two decades of Aboriginal advocacy in child protection

The model builds on over 20 years of Aboriginal-led advocacy and reform



### What makes our Aboriginal community-led model different?



**Respectful partnerships with parents and families** – practitioners work with families to build trust, strengthen culture, and support reunification.



**Culture as a source of safety** – culture, kinship and identity are central, helping children stay connected to community.



**Holistic and trauma-informed** – supports healing by addressing the impacts of trauma and colonisation.



**Collaborative safety planning** – uses risk management principles to assess and strengthen family safety.



**Culturally safe legal advocacy** – improves legal processes through Aboriginal-led advocacy in and beyond court.



**Wraparound services** – including health, prevention, parenting, and education programs.

# WHAT ARE THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS?

## For VACCA leadership

- **Advocate** for funding to expand Community Protecting Boorais beyond the pilot to support more families.
- **Continue** advocating for full community authority in child protection, including decision making powers and regionally controlled funding.
- **Secure** long-term investment that supports culturally grounded practice and data sovereignty.



## For Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

- **Advocate** for increased investment in prevention and early support services – including supports prior to statutory involvement, to reduce need for investigations.
- **Ensure Aboriginal** children have access to wraparound services across health, education, family, and culture.
- **Provide** supportive, culturally safe ways—and intervene only when needed to ensure child safety.

## For Government

- **Strengthen** investment in the Community Protecting Boorais and Nugel programs to support Aboriginal-led decision-making and case management.
- **Remove** legislative barriers and improve systems for client information sharing.
- **Commit** to a standalone Aboriginal Child Protection Act and honour Treaty processes that shift decision-making power to Aboriginal communities.

## For the child and family sector

- **Champion** Aboriginal-led approaches and share evidence of what works.
- **Refer** families early to Aboriginal organisations to support safety, cultural connection, and healing.

## Find out more

To learn more about Community Protecting Boorais: [\[Read online\]](#)

To read the research article: [\[Read online\]](#)

For questions or more information, contact us: [redteam@vacca.org](mailto:redteam@vacca.org)

## About this research

This research was written from the standpoint of senior practitioners and leaders within VACCA, centring Aboriginal voices and experiences in providing for the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children. Conducted by VACCA's Research and Evidence Development team, it captures views and opinions of staff, using a traditional method of collective storytelling.

## About VACCA

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) is a statewide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation servicing children, young people, families, and community.