

Protecting Aboriginal Children Evaluation Summary

Aboriginal Child Protection Diversion Trials

This summary shares key insights from an evaluation of three Aboriginal-led pilots designed to keep Aboriginal children safe and connected to culture — while diverting families away from statutory child protection.

INTRODUCTION

What are the Diversion Trials?

The Diversion Trials were an Aboriginal-led response to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in statutory child protection. In Victoria, they are 17 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care – a crisis driven by intergenerational trauma, racism, poverty, systemic bias, and fear rooted in past child removal policies.

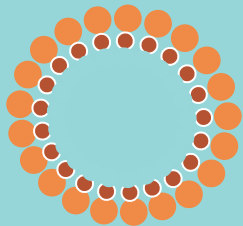
Four Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) – VACCA, BDAC, Goolum Goolum, and Njernda – delivered the trials. Each trial was tailored to its local context but shared the goal of building trust, healing relationships, and keeping families together.

Why do an evaluation?

These trials mark a shift in child protection— led by Aboriginal communities, grounded in culture, and focused on healing rather than punishment. The University of Melbourne evaluated the trials to explore what worked, remaining challenges, and what could be strengthened.

HOW THE DIVERSION TRIALS WORK

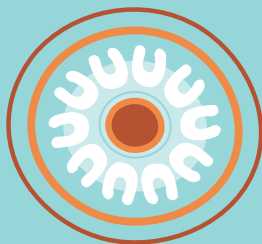
The trials offered culturally safe support to reduce court involvement and prevent child removals:



Aboriginal-led case conferencing

Run by VACCA

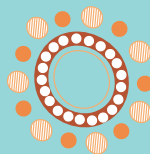
Families and professionals meet together in a culturally safe space to plan for children's safety.



Garinga Bupup Trial

Run by BDAC

Wraparound support to help families stay together and out of the system



Aboriginal family-led decision-making

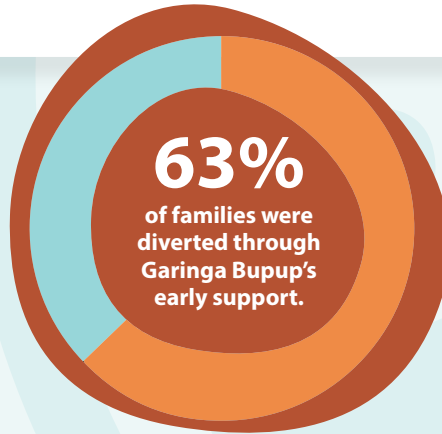
Run by Goolum Goolum & Njernda

Families make decisions about their children's care during child protection investigations

WHAT DID THE EVALUATION FIND?

Diversion Trials kept families out of statutory child protection

Two trials successfully diverted families away from statutory services:



Families felt safe — and trust made it possible

Practitioners worked respectfully, supporting healing and safety. Voluntary engagement, cultural grounding, and honest conversations helped families feel safe to seek support. Parents said this rebuilt confidence and helped them tackle poverty and isolation.

Early referral is critical

Diversion worked best when families were referred early — before statutory investigation. Strong partnerships with Child Protection, especially at intake, were key.

Strong Aboriginal services make a difference

Success relied on skilled staff, strong internal systems, close links with Child Protection, and wraparound support. Ongoing funding and referral pathways were vital for sustainability.

Case conferencing saved up to

\$5 for every \$1 invested

WHAT ARE THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS?

For government and policymakers

- **Invest** in full implementation of all three models, building on early evidence.
- **Fund** future evaluations, including economic and broader impact assessments.
- **Strengthen** collaboration between Child Protection services and ACCOs, especially at referral, to provide early support and divert families from statutory services.
- **Develop** a roadmap for broader rollout, with clear documentation of models, settings, and success factors.
- **Share** these models with other ACCOs ready to adapt or build on them.
- **Consider** how Aboriginal-led diversion can inform Victoria's new approach to Aboriginal child protection.

For ACCOs and service partners

- **Strengthen** internal systems to support sustainable case management — including supervision, brokerage, information-sharing, and referral pathways.
- **Strengthen** coordination with Child Protection and other services partners.
- **Expand** eligibility to more families, including those with perinatal needs or repeat child protection contact.
- **Advocate** for funding to employ additional staff to meet demand, support after-hours work, and sustain intensive care models.

“...a family is getting every opportunity to avoid a Child Protection response – to avoid having Child Protection knocking on their door for maybe the fifth, sixth time.” — Child Protection Practitioner

Find out more

To read the full evaluation report:
[[Read online](#)]

For questions or more information,
contact us: **redteam@vacca.org**

About this Evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned by VACCA, BDAC (Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative), Goolum Goolum, and Njernda, with the cooperation of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). It was conducted by researchers from the University of Melbourne and guided by Aboriginal leadership.

About VACCA

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