



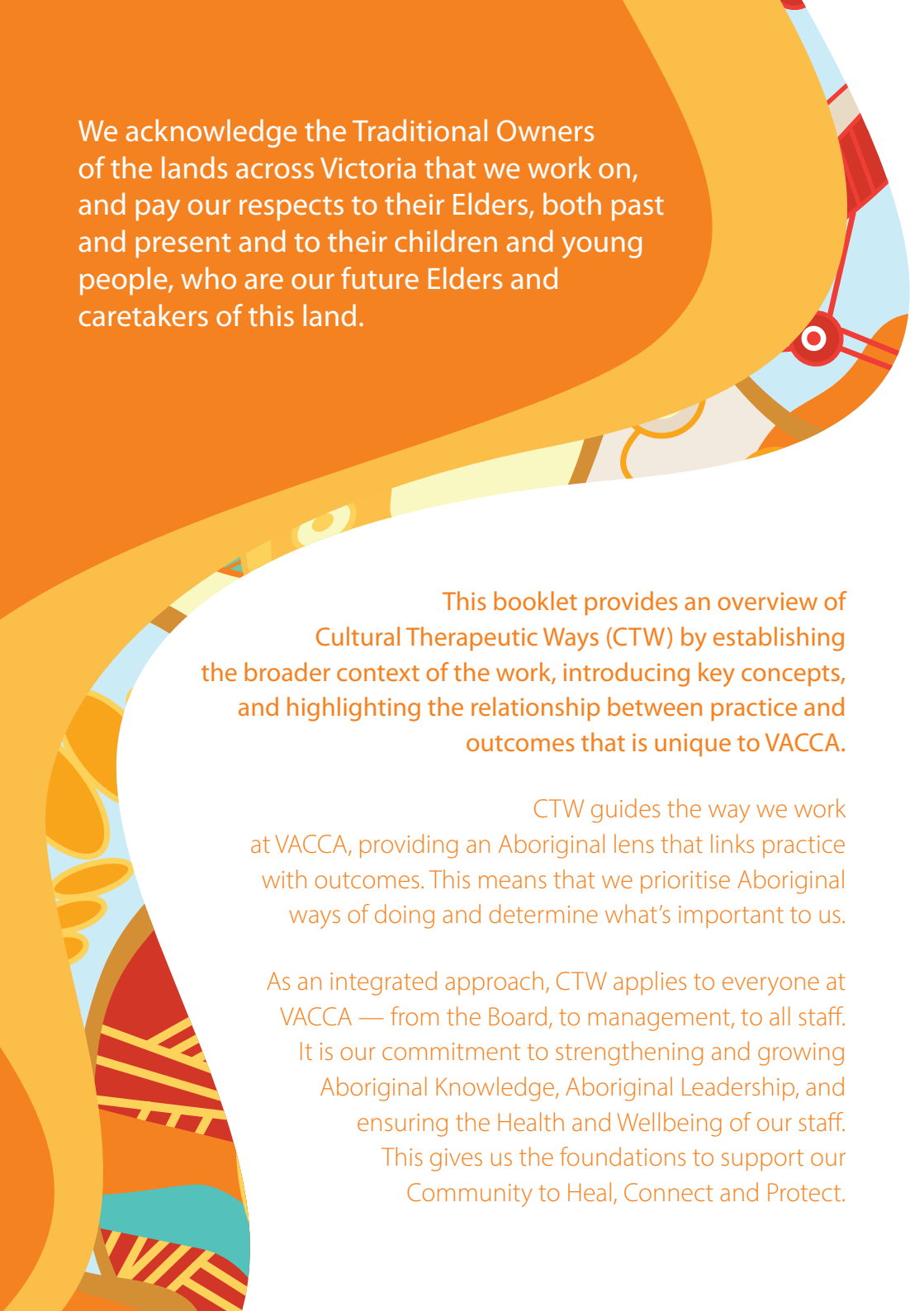
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VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways An Introduction





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands across Victoria that we work on, and pay our respects to their Elders, both past and present and to their children and young people, who are our future Elders and caretakers of this land.

This booklet provides an overview of Cultural Therapeutic Ways (CTW) by establishing the broader context of the work, introducing key concepts, and highlighting the relationship between practice and outcomes that is unique to VACCA.

CTW guides the way we work at VACCA, providing an Aboriginal lens that links practice with outcomes. This means that we prioritise Aboriginal ways of doing and determine what's important to us.

As an integrated approach, CTW applies to everyone at VACCA — from the Board, to management, to all staff. It is our commitment to strengthening and growing Aboriginal Knowledge, Aboriginal Leadership, and ensuring the Health and Wellbeing of our staff. This gives us the foundations to support our Community to Heal, Connect and Protect.

CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC WAYS PRACTICE PILLARS

Cultural Therapeutic Ways is defined by practice that brings together three pillars that are integrated into our day to day as we work towards self-determined outcomes.



CULTURE

A shared understanding of ideas, symbols, rituals and language that enables communication, creates unspoken understanding, , shapes identities and creates belonging. Within Aboriginal communities, culture is shared relationally and nurtures resilience and strength through family ties, kinship systems, linking mob to their land, spirituality, and community.



SELF- DETERMINATION

The foundation for reclaiming Aboriginal community governance and making choices that shape positive outcomes for the present and the future. Self-determination is upheld through grassroots initiatives, Aboriginal led decision making, and the revitalisation and strengthening of culture.



TRAUMA INFORMED

A lens to acknowledge the past and address intergenerational impacts of colonisation. This guides healing efforts with empathy, respect and a deep understanding of cultural strengths, and diversity.

Bringing together **culture, self- determination and trauma informed theories** with wisdom and lived experience from within VACCA forms a rich knowledge system, a broad and complex weave of expertise across time, communities, kin and country.

The way that this knowledge is integrated into our everyday work is outlined in two key frameworks: the **CTW Practice Framework**, and **CTW Outcomes Framework**.

OUR APPROACH:

Working with Cultural Therapeutic Ways across VACCA

Our approach is based on knowing that the best outcomes come from yarning together to find solutions. This means building on existing strengths, taking actions, and working with a collective — with family, extended kinship networks, community, professionals, and other support services.

This is how we developed Cultural Therapeutic Ways, starting from the ground up to capture our experience. We are embedding this practice across the organisation using a range of resources, including integrated learning packages, films and written documents to inform program design and support staff in program delivery.

The Cultural Therapeutic Ways pillars guide this work.

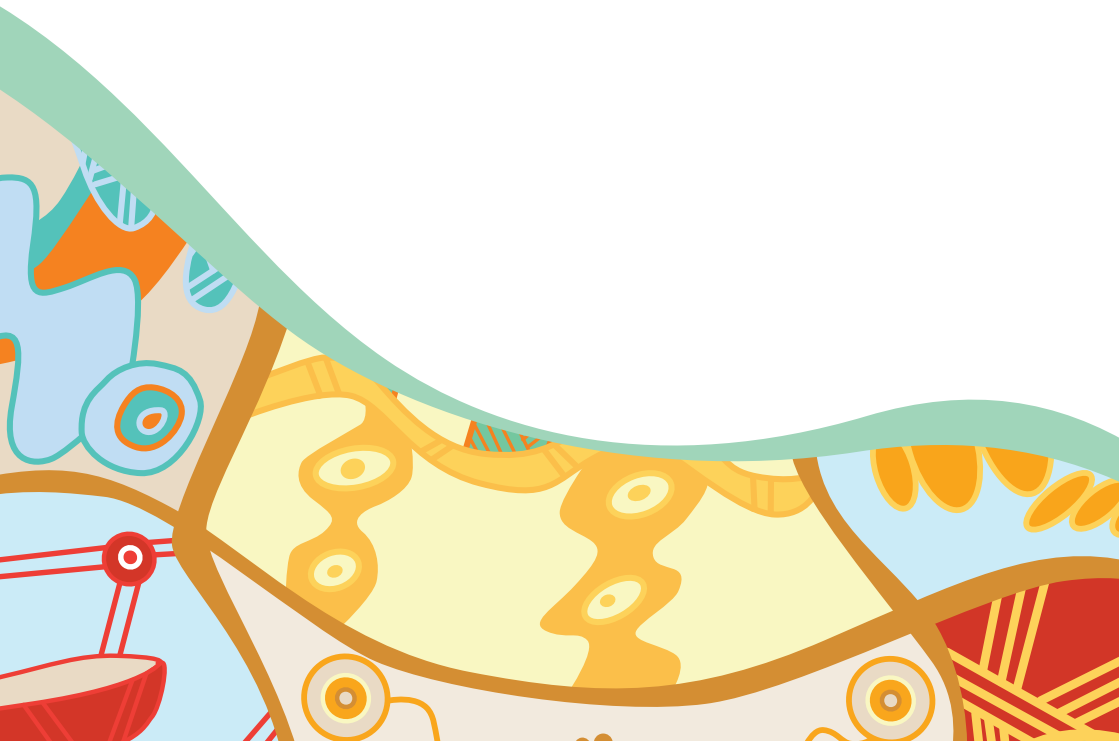




Figure 1: An Aboriginal lens that links practice with outcomes

CTW Practice Framework: Our Work, Our Ways

The **Cultural Therapeutic Ways Practice Framework** is specifically for staff who work directly with Community. It steps out how to practice using culture, trauma informed and self determination theories to heal, protect and connect. Programs adapt their practice to meet their specific needs which is detailed in individual Program Manuals.

There are two key components: the **CTW Program Cycle**, and the **CTW Pillars in Practice**.

CTW Program Cycle: a map

The CTW Program Cycle provides a map of how to work holistically with children, young people, families, and adults to achieve outcomes. It applies to all VACCA programs.

There are five key phases: Engage, Understand, Plan, Progress and Review. These provide a structured approach that details information gathering, documentation, and signposts reflection and decision making.

A key feature of the CTW Program Cycle is that we reframe risk (which is often deficit led) as safety (encompassing holistic assessments). Monitoring safety is embedded throughout, with clear sets of tools and actions to address concerns– **these are non-negotiable**. But it is a strength's-based, culturally appropriate lens that guides decision making.



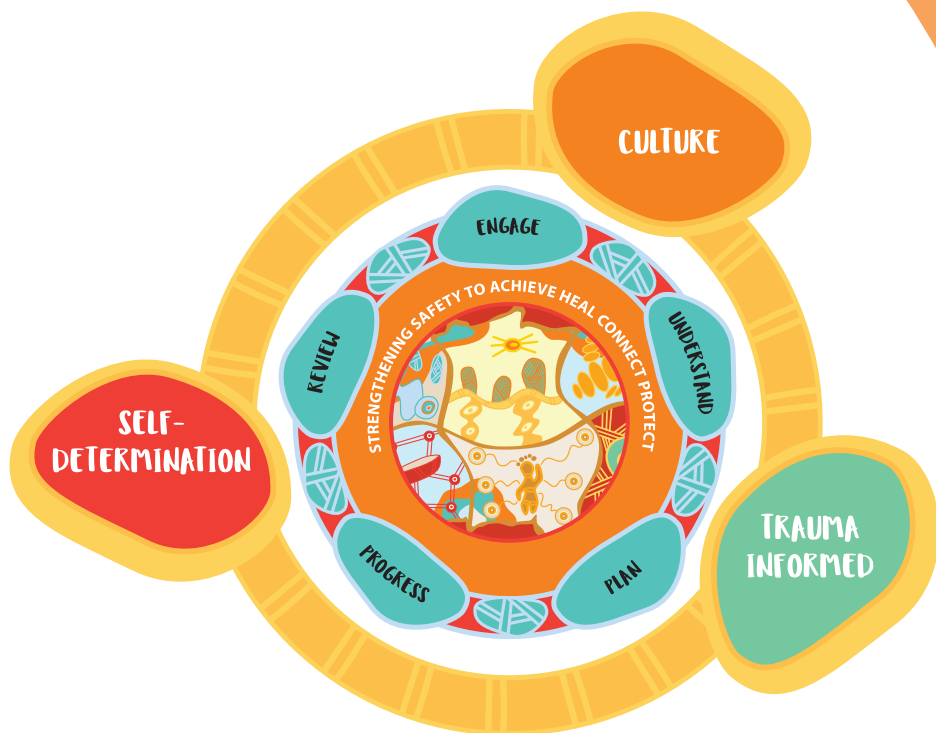


Figure 2: CTW Program Cycle

CTW Pillars in Practice: a toolkit

With the CTW Program Cycle offering a map of practice, the CTW Practice Pillars are enacted into everyday work using **practice elements**. These are a toolkit of specific techniques and strategies that support staff to use culture, self-determination and trauma informed practice through all stages of engagement. This represents integrated CTW practice that is relational, responsive, culturally appropriate and safe.

CTW OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK:

Our Direction

The **Cultural Therapeutic Ways Outcomes Framework** resonates with our history, culture, and values. It provides all VACCA staff with clear areas of direction to work towards, building our knowledge, and keeping us accountable to Community.

There are two parts to our Outcomes Framework:

- **Organisation Outcomes** centre on Staff Health & Wellbeing, Aboriginal Leadership and Aboriginal Knowledge
- **Community Outcomes** focus on the areas of Heal, Connect and Protect

With foundations set in the cultural determinants of Aboriginal health and wellbeing¹, the CTW Outcomes Framework represents a deep reflection on the meaning of the work that we do. It shows what is important about our story, our relationship with our broader Community, and where we want to go.





Figure 3: Cultural Therapeutic Ways Outcomes Framework

¹ Dudgeon, P., Cox, K., D'Anna, D., Dunkley, C., Hams, K., Kelly, K., & Walker, R. (2012). Hear Our Voices: community consultations for the development of an empowerment, healing and leadership program for Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley, Western Australia. In Centre for Research Excellence, Aboriginal Health & Wellbeing, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Department of Health and Ageing, Commonwealth of Australia

CONTRIBUTING TO AN ABORIGINAL EVIDENCE BASE

The knowledge that sits at the core of Cultural Therapeutic Ways isn't new - ACCOs have a long history of delivering services for Aboriginal children and families. However, because Western knowledge has historically been promoted and resourced over our ways, there is a lack of formal evidence about Aboriginal-led services.

To date, much of the Indigenous practice evidence has come from international contexts. It shows that services informed by culture, self-determination and trauma approaches can create environments that are safe, support identity, and build capacity. Bringing a specific Australian focus to this research is a critical next step for our communities.

CTW is ground-breaking work, producing evidence in local contexts. It sees VACCA combining the best of mainstream knowledge systems with our practice wisdom, continuing our commitment to justice and equity. We want Aboriginal practices to be legitimised and resourced, to inform policy and program decisions, and ultimately, to benefit our Community.



CONCLUSION

At VACCA, we are committed to contributing to a culture of change and resilience. This means generating and documenting our work to produce evidence that links our practice with outcomes. To do this we need to support our staff who play a critical role in ensuring that Aboriginal children, young people, adults, families and Communities are thriving.

Our CTW Outcomes Framework details that vision. It ensures that we pay attention to workforce and back-of-house activities by specifying CTW Organisation Outcomes: *Aboriginal Knowledge, Aboriginal Leadership, and Staff Health and Wellbeing*. All roles that manage staff are responsible for these outcomes. This enables Client Services to work directly with Community to achieve our CTW Community Outcomes: *Heal, Connect and Protect*.

For Client Services staff, the CTW Practice Framework provides practical guidance. It details how the three CTW practice pillars — culture, self-determination, and trauma-informed theories — come together as blended practice throughout the CTW Program Cycle, working with a lens of safety.

In bringing an Aboriginal lens to the relationship between practice and outcomes, Cultural Therapeutic Ways redefines the current narrative. We are taking charge of our own path, rallying around our Community, and self-determining our futures. Our focus is clear: putting our children, young people, families, and adults at the very core of everything we do.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1: An Aboriginal lens that links practice with outcomes

Fig 2: CTW Program Cycle

Fig 3: Cultural Therapeutic Ways Outcomes Framework

We thank and acknowledge VACCA staff and their families for sharing the words, stories, personal and collective experiences that have contributed to Cultural Therapeutic Ways.



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