



Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH)



This summary shares key findings from an evaluation of BUABAH — a new approach piloted to support Aboriginal mothers during pregnancy and prevent removal of babies from their families.

INTRODUCTION

What is the BUABAH program?

BUABAH is a new alternative family support service for Aboriginal families, starting during pregnancy and continues after birth for as long as support is needed—building trust, strengthening cultural identity, and keeping babies safe. Led by an Aboriginal practitioner, the program provides mothers with intensive case management and wraparound support. The program was designed and piloted by VACCA in Melbourne's Bayside Peninsula Area.

Why do an evaluation?

Aboriginal babies in Victoria are 16 times more likely than non-Aboriginal babies to enter out-of-home care.

BUABAH was developed as a new Aboriginal-led support model to reduce unborn reports and prevent Child Protection involvement. The evaluation explored how the program was working in practice, what outcomes it was achieving, and how it could be strengthened.

WHAT DID THE EVALUATION FIND?



More babies stayed with their families

The program helped most mothers take their babies home from hospital and reduced the trauma of legal intervention.



Mothers felt safe and respected

The Aboriginal practitioner offered mothers cultural and emotional support and helped create better working relationships with Child Protection services.



The model made a difference

The program's cultural approach and small caseloads were essential, allowing for tailored, flexible support that met each women's needs.



Late referrals made change harder

Most women entered the program late in pregnancy, often when Child Protection was already involved. Earlier referrals would improve outcomes.



**6 out of 7
women**

were discharged from
hospital with their baby
in their arms



**1 baby was
placed with kin,**
while mum continued to
receive support

WHAT ARE THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS?

For VACCA leadership and program delivery teams

- **Continue** and expand the program in the Bayside Peninsula Area and seek funding for a full team – at least 2 practitioners and 1 team leader – to sustain the intensive model.
- **Advocate** for funding to expand the program to other VACCA sites where similar service gaps exist.
- **Broaden** referral pathways including from hospitals, primary care, maternity services, and community outreach to prevent involvement of Child Protection where possible.
- **Maintain** small caseloads, especially when supporting women with complex needs.
- **Adapt** eligibility so women can enter the program at any stage of their pregnancies, from early pregnancy onward.
- **Document** how the program works, including staff roles and partnerships, and develop a monitoring and evaluation framework.

For policymakers and funding agencies

- **Invest** in BUABAH as an Aboriginal-led early intervention model that is improving outcomes for keeping families together safely.
- **Support** dedicated, long-term funding to support Aboriginal-led family support services like BUABAH
- **Ensure** policy settings prioritise culturally safe, community-led support services.

**“BUABAH was the point of difference
– that meant she left the hospital
with her baby in her arms.”**

— Child Protection Officer

Find out more

Learn about BUABAH: [\[Read online\]](#)

Read the evaluation report: [\[Read online\]](#)

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

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

About this Evaluation

The BUABAH program was funded by the Out-of-Home Care Philanthropic Funders Network and piloted over 42 months. The evaluation was co-designed by VACCA and the University of Melbourne and ran over 18 months (2022–2023). It included interviews with two mothers and 13 professionals across the hospitals, program delivery, and Child Protection. While small participant numbers limited quantitative data, the evaluation provides strong qualitative evidence of impact and feasibility.

About VACCA

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