

**VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024**



Connected by culture

**VACCA**

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY





## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country that we work on, and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities.

We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders both past and present, and to their children and young people who are our future Elders and caretakers of this land.



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## Accessibility

We are committed to providing accessible services to all community members. If you have difficulty understanding this report, please contact us on 03 9287 8800 and we will arrange assistance.

## Diversity and Inclusion

We appreciate and welcome diversity in all its forms, including staff and service consumers, and believe this makes our teams, services and organisation stronger and more effective.

## Privacy

In the interest of our client's privacy and protection, names have been changed.

## Photography

Thank you to the community members and staff who volunteered and gave permission for their photographs to be published.

## Multimedia

### Audio

Kalem Murray, *Bardi*  
First Nations Broadcasting Australia

### Illustration

Kaitlyn Boyer, *Gunditjmarra*, VACCA

### Video

Eva Foxall & Deon Van Den Berg, VACCA

## Artwork and Design

### Artwork

Nakia Cadd, *Gunditjmarra, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj, Boon Wurrung, Taungurung*  
Artist, More Than Lines

### Design

Kaitlyn Boyer, *Gunditjmarra*  
Graphic Designer, VACCA

# OUR CONNECTIONS

This artwork represents the many connections VACCA nurtures – our connection to the communities we work alongside, the Country we work on, and to the cultural practice that informs our work in protecting the safety and wellbeing of our children.



The earthy colours of Country acknowledge the many sacred lands, skies and waters that VACCA works on. In recognition of the challenges presented throughout the past year, gum leaves depict healing. In the center of the artwork a coolamon represents the generations of families VACCA supports, acknowledging their individual journeys and stories. Surrounded by support, care and culture, the family shown in the middle is made up of multiple generations. From boorais to Elders, VACCA nurtures their connections to culture, community, and one another.

Culture is a protective factor for community, and it is at the center of all that VACCA does. Culture informs service delivery, helps to heal and protect families, and strengthens the identities of our children and young people. Vibrant colours celebrate the many achievements of VACCA, and those of staff, the children and families VACCA works alongside, and the community members VACCA supports.

**Nakia Cadd**, *Gunditjmarra, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj, Boon Wurrung, Taungurung*  
**Artist, More Than Lines**

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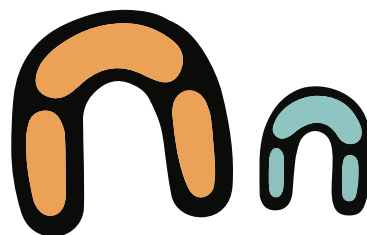
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**This is an interactive publication.**  
**Click the links to hear and see our work in action.**

**You can find our videos on our Youtube channel:**  
[youtube.com/@vaccaorg](https://youtube.com/@vaccaorg)



# WHO WE ARE

For 47 years, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) has responded to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families throughout Victoria.

As one of Victoria's largest employers of Aboriginal people, VACCA has grown to become more than 1,100 people strong, enabling us to deliver more than 80 programs across the state and support community members where they live.

In 2024, VACCA became the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency.

This change to VACCA's name reflects both our significant growth in service delivery and our

ongoing commitment to protecting the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people, families, Elders, and community members.

As the peak voice for Aboriginal children in Victoria and the leading provider of Aboriginal child and family services in the state, VACCA's place-based approach to service delivery connects us to the communities we work alongside.

While our name has changed, our commitment to supporting safe, strong and thriving Aboriginal communities has remained the same.

As the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency, we will continue to create better outcomes for Aboriginal people throughout Victoria.

Connected by culture and guided by community; we are VACCA - now and always.

## OUR VISION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination – Live, Experience and Be.

## OUR PURPOSE

Supporting culturally strong, safe and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



Hear the story behind  
our name change



CLICK HERE TO WATCH



# OUR PRINCIPLES

**We believe in the fundamental right of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are committed to strengthening understanding and empowerment in the exercise of rights and discharge of associated obligations as First Peoples.**



## Respect

We pay respect to the individual and collective cultural rights, obligations and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our operations, management and in the delivery of our service. We show respect to each other, our partners and the community we serve.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Observance

We believe that compliance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols, cultural practice and ceremony is integral in helping us achieve successful outcomes for our community and especially for our children and young people.



## Best Interests of the Child

Our children and young people have the right to be heard, to be nurtured and safe; to optimal life opportunities (education, healthcare and development of social and emotional wellbeing); to their identity and connection to their community and to be with their own families.



## Excellence

We believe that the community we service expects and is entitled to a high quality and professional service that is culturally embedded.



## Healing and Empowerment

We use a strengths-based approach and aim to provide empowering, healing services to repair damage done to the Stolen Generations and the community by policies of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and disenfranchisement of our community.



## Self Determination

We believe in the fundamental right of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are committed to strengthening understanding and empowerment in the exercise of rights and discharge of associated obligations as First Peoples.



# ANNUAL REPORT THEME

**Safe, resilient Aboriginal children and strong Aboriginal families grow from culturally connected communities.**

Aboriginal children are connected to their community, culture and Country before they are born. These connections to family and ancestors, cultural practices and lore strengthen their identities and help to protect and heal.

VACCA's strength lies in our connection to the communities we work alongside. Our work is guided by Aboriginal community throughout Victoria; we listen as local voices share their wisdom.

Our place-based, Aboriginal-led services support children and families to remain connected to their land, to cultural practice and to each other. We protect the spiritual wellbeing of our children and young people by keeping culture at the heart of all VACCA does.

Connections is a celebration of VACCA's connection to the Aboriginal children and families we support, and of their enduring connections to Country and community. It is evidence of the essential role that connection to culture holds in the outcomes we achieve, and in the wellbeing and safety of our children and young people.



**Connections: Community,  
Culture, Country**



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## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

VACCA's foundation as the peak voice for Aboriginal Children in Victoria is built on our unwavering commitment to advocate on behalf of vulnerable Aboriginal children and families, based on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety. This continues and is exemplified through members voting to change our name to the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency. A more apt description of who we are, what we do and why we exist – to serve and give back to the Aboriginal communities we come from, and to build bright futures for our children.

Investing in prevention and privileging culture through supporting families to stay together safely has been one of our central messages since our beginnings 47 years ago. We are pleased that this finally came to fruition with the passing of landmark legislation to enshrine prevention as an essential element of child safety principles in 2023. 18 months of lobbying and advocacy saw the first legislation to have a Statement of Recognition and binding principles that recognise the sovereignty of Aboriginal people and our right to self-determination. It has led the way for similar approaches in health and justice legislation and provides an enduring legacy for future generations. Prevention of harm is critical to our ongoing Statewide reform journey and our path to Treaty.

Truth telling through the Yoorrook Justice Commission was a significant focus of our advocacy efforts over the past 18 months with evidence provided to numerous roundtables

and hearings, and substantial written submissions on historical and contemporary systemic injustices within child protection, the justice system, housing, health, education, land rights, economic prosperity and family violence. VACCA was the first and one of two standalone submissions to Yoorrook on the importance of addressing the colonial impacts and enduring racism that we see today through sustained and endemic family violence towards our women and children. As a critical driver of child removals, VACCA once again demonstrated their position as the leading advocate for children, young people, families and Community affected by family violence. While Government action remains slow, we welcomed the courage of Victoria Police through their 75-point plan and public apology for their role in the Stolen Generations.

This year we saw significant growth across our child safety, family violence, early years and justice portfolios reinforcing our approach to holistic service provision. Thankfully much of the growth was not from increased demand but from the transfer of children and resources from Government to Community control. Our place-based delivery model saw us well placed to implement this historic investment in ensuring Aboriginal decision-making sits in Aboriginal hands.

VACCA's approach to local innovation remains an area in which the Board is most proud of and our staff's unwavering commitment to design, with community, Aboriginal solutions and ways of knowing, being and doing. With new investments in place based projects, sector strengthening work and knowledge transfer and translation, the future for VACCA remains bright and centered on elevating the voice of Aboriginal Victorians.

The Board's aspirations for the year ahead are to ensure that we have the right governance structures and frameworks in place to support the organisation continue to be a thought leader in negotiating Treaty and leading reform to achieve better outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal children and families.

**James Atkinson**  
**VACCA Chairperson**





## CEO REPORT

This year I celebrated 25 years as CEO of VACCA. For me, personal accolades feel foreign, and I am much more excited to talk about the significant achievements of our staff including their individual and collective awards and public acknowledgements in IT, training, community leadership and excellence, our Mollie Dyer award recipients, and especially celebrating our graduating staff. Staff that we support to take the time to invest in their own futures through education. I believe and know first-hand that the work we all do in ACCOs is for the collective benefit of our local communities and our future generations and leaders

For the last 25 years I have spoken about the growth and innovation of VACCA and our growth journey is still evolving. After such humble beginnings, I feel so privileged to work at such a leading, innovative and inspiring organisation for so long. The challenges we have faced together over the last few decades have only made our successes more rewarding, because the positive impact of our collective efforts and advocacy across all facets of operations and service delivery are so evident and transformative.

What I am most proud of these last 12 months are our efforts in enacting reforms within the child protection system and the successful transfer of Aboriginal Children to Aboriginal Community Control. With expansions across the State of our Nugal program, we are on track to see VACCA move from 3 teams to at least 15 teams across our 6 regions, allowing us to directly support around 60% of

Victorian Aboriginal children who are in out of home care by 2027, maintaining and creating strong connections for our children to culture, community and family.

VACCA has long been high achievers in returning children safely to family and helping them stay there, and since October 2023, by taking on a small cohort of child protection investigations and removal decision making duties for the first time (an Australian first), we have been able to prevent more children from unnecessary removed from their families at inspiring rates.

Over just that short period of time, our teams have been able to change the narrative and prove that the best way to stop family violence and child removals is to work with the whole family and address the drivers of removal at their core. We have demonstrated that family violence is not men's or women's business, it is family and community business. That by working with the whole family you can keep children at home safely, supported and stop future violence and trauma. Through this groundbreaking model, I believe we are creating generational change and transforming broken western systems.

By privileging the safety of the child and placing the child at the center of our intensive work, we provided more linkages to kin and family for more children and families than in previous years. Our intensive supports are empowering parents to be the role model they never had, but what they had aspired to be to their children. To reinforce our practice, we have significantly increased our internal and external training offerings including our trademark Koorie Faces program, our work on Cultural elements that is coveted

Nationwide; and we are about to commence on Statewide cultural safety and trauma training for community services organisations.

I have long espoused that increased demand on VACCA support programs is not always a bad thing. We are seeing more parents, young people, families, and Elders seeking VACCA's support and this speaks to the trust community and families have in us to deliver better futures. It speaks to a strong, empowered community that is not afraid to ask for a helping hand when they need it, and provide help when asked.

I was privileged to be able to speak at the Police Apology to the Stolen Generations and also witness the Premier's direct, personal apology to Stolen Generations survivors. Apologies are a commitment that the wrongs of the past will not be allowed to happen again and that we take our learnings from past injustices to drive reform now to create better outcomes. 2023/24 saw this happen in a profound and uplifting way that was hopeful and heartfelt.

VACCA will continually strive to preserve, strengthen and protect the cultural and spiritual identity of Aboriginal children, encourage the active participation of families in all aspects of decision making regarding their children. Our priority and future focus is always to place the child at the center of everything we do and advocate for their best interests.

**Prof. Muriel Bamblett AO**  
Chief Executive Officer

# 2023-2024 PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT



## CLIENT SERVICES

- Supported 695 children in care.
- 193 children in our Nugel program, and 91 children supported by Community Protecting Boorais.
- Recorded 828 new cases in our Therapeutic Interventions Family Violence programs; 23 new cases in our Aboriginal Family Violence Services programs; and 92 new cases in our Adolescent Family Violence Services programs.
- Commenced 936 new support periods for clients in our Holistic Aboriginal Family Violence programs.
- Supported 40 women pre and post release through women's diversion programs.
- Supported 38 men pre and post release through men's diversion programs.
- Supported 97 clients who engaged with our Sexual Assault Support Services programs.
- Established and sustained 589 new tenancies with help from our Private Rental Assistance programs.
- Commenced 19 new support periods for our clients in Homelessness Youth Services programs.
- Facilitated 9 reunions for Stolen Generations survivors.
- Provided 226 assessments for our Kinship Care First Supports programs and supported 314 placements in Kinship Care Case Contracting programs.
- Supported 49 young people pre and post release from youth justice system through the Youth Through Care Program. 11 young people completed their involvement with Youth Through Care after achieving their goals.



Received 220 new referrals  
for family finding

Updated 97 genograms

Accredited 10 new foster  
carers, for a total of  
92 households





## COMMUNICATIONS AND FUNDRAISING

- Grew VACCA's social media, adding 1,250 followers to Facebook (20,250) 1,200 followers to Instagram (5,600) and 4,150 followers to LinkedIn (11,850).
- Recorded 231,000 new website users over 12 months (Google Analytics).
- 6,800 followers (+1,800) on Deadly Story social media (Instagram).
- Celebrated NAIDOC Week with 6 events held across our regions.
- Launched new Careers pages on the VACCA Website.
- Delivered several campaigns focused on culture, advocacy, and our work: Survival Day: We are Strong, Wurundjeri Seasons, Yes Campaign, Rebrand Campaign, and NAIDOC Week.
- Distributed 24 media releases.
- Raised more than \$820,000 from fundraising, appeals, sponsorship and philanthropic sources to support programs including Emergency Relief, Deadly Culture Camps, Koorie Kids Playgroup, Koorie Kids Homework Clubs.
- Welcomed 409 new donors and supporters (3,770 total).
- Recorded 39 new members following goal three of our Membership Engagement Strategy (79 total).
- Secured over 4,000 gifts through our most successful toy drive for children at Christmas.



## POLICY AND ADVOCACY

- Prepared 70 policy submissions and briefs to support key social policy reform initiatives across early childhood, child and family welfare, justice, family violence, housing, and social and emotional wellbeing.
- Supported 36 committees and working groups statewide and nationally.
- Worked on 44 research and evaluation projects.
- Received an Australian Research Council grant to begin a three-year partnership with Monash University to commence a project on improving outcomes for young people transitioning from out of home care.
- Delivered training sessions to 1,007 participant across 81 sessions since January 2024.
- Developed a Cultural Responsiveness and Trauma Informed training package for DSS funded organisations across Australia.
- Grew partnerships across several sectors including corrections, education, government, and community services to deliver tailored training packages.







# OUR PEOPLE



# OUR BOARD

**Our Board of Directors govern the strategic direction of VACCA; ensuring compliance with reporting bodies, responding to community expectations, and ensuring excellence in service delivery.**

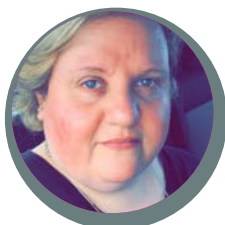


**James Atkinson**

**Chairperson**

*Yorta Yorta / Bangerang*

James is the CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) in Melbourne. He is the former CEO of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, and previously Manager, Koorie Education within the Department of Education and Training. With a great deal of organisational experience, having served on Boards at a state and national level, James was one of the founding members of the first Victorian Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee and a participant in the Koorie Leadership Program, and has been on VACCA's Board for 21 years.



**Bindi James**

**Secretary**

*Yorta Yorta (Moirra Clan)/Barapa Barapa/Boon Wurrung/Palawa*

Bindi has been employed at Services Australia as a Service Officer for the past 17 years. Bindi has a long family connection to VACCA and has a passion for child welfare and early childhood education, with over 34 years of experience working at Yappera Children's Services, VACCA, and the former Department of Human Services. Bindi holds a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and a Certificate in Business, and has been a VACCA Board Member for 12 months.



**Jason Kanoa**

**Vice Chairperson**

*Gunditjmara / Bunitj*

Jason is the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young Peoples' Alliance. Prior to this, Jason has held positions as Executive Manager of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-op., CEO at the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, and CEO of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative. Jason has a Diploma in Business Management and has completed governance training and the Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria course and has been a VACCA Board Member for 12 years.



**Aunty Debra Swindle**

**Secretary**

*Wiradjuri*

Aunty Debra is an advocate for Aboriginal community in Victoria, and Aboriginal community controlled and managed organisations. Aunty Debra is actively involved in the Healesville Aboriginal community and has been a VACCA Board Member for two years.



**Matthew Burns**

**Treasurer**

*Taungurung*

Matt is the CEO of the Taungurung Land and Waters Council. Prior to this, Matt has worked in the banking and financial sector. He is an elected member of the First Peoples Assembly as the Taungurung representative. Matt holds an Advanced Diploma in Financial Services, and has been on VACCA's Board for two years.



**Aunty Margaret Atkinson**

**Director**

*Yorta Yorta / Taungurung / Wurundjeri*

Aunty Marg was a Wurreker Broker with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI). Aunty Marg is actively involved in the Gippsland Aboriginal community, having worked previously at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative and was an employee at VACCA for over nine years. Aunty Marg has been an active VACCA Board Member for 12 years and has completed Governance Training.



**Aunty Deidre King**

*Gunditjmara*

Aunty Deidre is the former CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES). Prior to this, Aunty Deidre worked at the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) for 17 years and at VACCA. Aunty Deidre has completed an Advanced Diploma in Business Management and completed Governance Training, and is a Life Member of VACCA. She has been a current Board Member for 9 years, and was previously on VACCA's Board for 14 years.

# MEMBERSHIP

VACCA is owned and controlled by its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) like VACCA were born from the aspirations of our ancestors and Elders for a more equal, fair and prosperous future.

Our members help to support culturally strong, thriving Aboriginal communities, and work towards achieving our vision of Aboriginal self-determination. The right to self-determination extends to all Aboriginal people, and VACCA aims to ensure our members, staff, and the children, young people and families we work alongside are empowered to realise their rights as Indigenous peoples.

Thank you to all our members for their ongoing support and contribution to Aboriginal communities in Victoria.



**Clarisse Slater**

*Yorta Yorta, Kamilaroi*

Being a VACCA member is important to me, professionally and personally. I've worked at VACCA for many years and as an Aboriginal staff member, I feel proud to contribute to and help shape the important work that our organisation does for families across the state.

I'm honoured to continue the legacy that many members of my family have walked before me – I come from a long line of VACCA Members, including my grandmother Elizabeth Morgan who was the first Chairperson of VACCA. I hope to pass this commitment of Aboriginal community control and community self-determination on to my own children.



**Tayla Fitzgerald**

*Gunai, Gunditjmara*

I enjoy being a VACCA member as it allows me to have a say in important matters that affect our community. As a young Indigenous person, our voices will impact the next generation and strive towards a better future for our people.

When I graduated from school in 2020, I was unsure what I wanted to do but always knew that working within community and making a difference for our families was important to me. I've now been at VACCA for 3 years and am so grateful to be able to work in a space I'm passionate about.



**Damien Murray**

*Stolen Generations*

It's important for me to be a member because my contribution to VACCA's current and future vision makes me feel strong within myself and in my place in our community. VACCA's commitment to achieving a more positive and abundant future for the Victorian Aboriginal community is what drives my passion to be a member and do my bit for community.





# OUR STAFF

## 2024 Mollie Dyer Awards

VACCA has continued to experience significant growth in staff numbers in FY23-24. Our total staff grew from 912 in July 2023 to 1,154 in June 2024. Of our staff group, 425 staff members are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, making us one of the largest employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the state.

### Mollie Dyer Award

**Named for our co-founder Auntie Mollie Dyer, the recipients of this award are considered to have upheld VACCA's vision, purpose, and principles in the most outstanding and consistent way.**

- Winner – Tamrah Johnson
- Runners Up – Abigail Dent and Amanda Hill

### Emerging Leader Award

**Awarded to staff under 25 who demonstrated a high level of competency, insight and understanding in their work. Our emerging leaders are committed to ongoing learning and will help shape the future here at VACCA.**

- Ovens Murray - Mackayla Westbury
- Gippsland - Lauren Lawler
- North - Tori Brooks
- South - Jo Woods
- East - Jada Heffernan-Wooden
- West - Cleo Olive
- Statewide & Practice Development - Breanna Browning
- Non-Client Services - Kaitlyn Boyer

## Excellence Award

**Awarded to staff for their outstanding excellence in upholding VACCA's vision, purpose, and principles in the delivery of their work.**

- Ovens Murray – Letecia Ritchens
- Gippsland – Amanda Hill
- North – Joshua Gallagher
- South – Tamika Kerr
- East – Paul Gregory
- West – Michelle Goodman
- Statewide & Practice Development – Abigail Dent
- Non-Client Services – Alli-Jade Briggs





## CORPORATE SERVICES

- Completed over 600 recruitment actions to promote, replace and grow our workforce, expanding our Nugel program with new teams in our North, West, Gippsland and Ovens Murray regions.
- Conducted our third staff survey and maintained steady staff engagement levels despite doubling in size since our first survey in 2018.
- Key survey results include a 73% 'Great Place to Work' rating and high levels of personal wellbeing responses indicating that overall staff find their work meaningful, purposeful and are proud to work at VACCA.
- Supported 9 Aboriginal staff to complete the Ngulunbarra Leadership Program.
- Supported 59 staff to undertake further training and professional development, 59% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Provided employment pathways for 26 Aboriginal trainees, interns and students undertaking placements.
- Developed two new supervision training packages for staff and supervisors, resulting in over 500 staff upskilling over a period of 6 months.
- Developed a new and extensive VACCA Care Service Induction training package which includes modules on Aboriginal history and culture, VACCA's services, carers, and children and young people.
- Strengthened the Learning and Development team to safeguard VACCA's ability to build workforce capability now and into the future.
- Transitioned to our new recruitment, onboarding and performance development review system enabling us to better recruit, develop and retain a skilled and high performing workforce.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

**Workforce development remains a key priority at VACCA as we continue to grow our staff group and expand service delivery. We offer multiple employment pathways and opportunities for staff to access further training and professional development.**

**During the 2023-2024 financial year, we supported:**

- 26 staff, including 17 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, completed the Diploma of Community Services through Swinburne University of Technology.
- 15 staff, including 6 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, completed Certificate IV in Leadership and Management thorough Kangan Institute.
- 11 staff, including 7 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, are currently completing the Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy: First Nations through The Bouverie Centre and La Trobe University.
- 7 staff completed Certificate IV qualifications in Community Service.





**In June 2024 we celebrated the achievements of 60 staff members who completed their qualifications at a graduation ceremony.**

**Our Traineeship and Student Placement Programs continue to grow, reflecting our commitment to providing our young people with career opportunities and developing an Aboriginal workforce. During the year, we:**

**Welcomed 10 new Aboriginal Trainees on entry level 12-month traineeships**

**Supported 6 Aboriginal Career Tracker Interns**

**Facilitated 36 Student Placements, including 10 Aboriginal student placements**

## **Celebrating our Successes**

At the 2024 Victorian Training Awards, VACCA was awarded Large Employer of the Year in recognition of our commitment to workforce development and excellence in provision of nationally recognised training to staff. We are proud to have our dedication to the ongoing development of our staff formally recognised alongside other high-profile finalists. VACCA was also shortlisted for the 2024 Australian Training Awards.

Staff member Taylor Hampton, *Ngiyampaa/Wiradjuri*, was awarded the Uncle Norm Hunter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Award at the 2024 Kangan Institute Industry Excellence Awards, and Koorie Student of the Year at the Victorian Training Awards. Taylor was supported by VACCA to complete the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management, and is a very deserving winner.

## **Wellbeing for a Sustainable Workforce**

Our Organisational Development team facilitate several wellbeing initiatives for VACCA staff. These include self-care workshops, focusing on building resilience through wellbeing strategies including self-reflection and mindfulness; and Deadly Yarnz, a culturally tailored yarning circle where teams get together to yarn about issues affecting their wellbeing in their life and workspace.



# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY AT VACCA

VACCA is committed to ensuring our staff and all who access our services are treated with dignity and respect by honouring all cultural backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and spiritual beliefs.

A recognised leader in the sector, VACCA is proud to continue our commitment to Rainbow Tick accreditation by embedding best practice inclusivity and accessibility across all levels of the organisation.

## Binbeal Murrup

### Rainbow Spirit in Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung

Our Binbeal Murrup working group guides an organisation-wide approach to service delivery, informing practice approaches and ensuring the voices of LGBTIQ+ children, young people, carers, families and staff are heard.

Our offices actively support LGBTIQ+ observances including Pride Month, Wear It Purple Day and IDAHOBIT. We connect with our supporters, allies and Victorian Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ community at events including Midsumma and the Gertrude Street Party, and by acknowledging and celebrating key dates on our social platforms and newsletters.

## Resources and Training

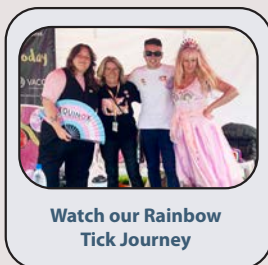
In line with VACCA's overall growth, we have continued to maintain high levels of staff attending our LGBTIQ+ Inclusivity Practice training with more than 75% of VACCA staff achieving completion.

I am just so proud to be a part of an organization that offers this training. This is the first time being a part of a community-based organisation that supported the LGBTIQ+ community. I am blown away by the training and really can confirm it makes such a huge difference.

*VACCA Staff Member*

In January we launched new resources for client-facing staff to support families accessing our services to locate appropriate and supportive programs, peer groups, and resources for young queer mob.

Future initiatives such as training co-delivered with Transgender Victoria and Rainbow Health will ensure a more informed, safe and effective response when working with LGBTIQ+ young people and families.



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH](#)



# CHILD SAFEGUARDING AND THE CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Established in 2022, VACCA's Child Safeguarding team ensures our compliance to the eleven Victorian Child Safe Standards (CSS) which are designed protect and promote the safety of children, prevent child abuse, and ensure any allegations are taken seriously and acted upon.

Our Child Safeguarding team positions VACCA to lead the way in maintaining a workplace culture where children are protected and informed about their right to safety. Working alongside program teams to strengthen VACCA's child safeguarding processes, the Child Safeguarding team ensures our commitments are clearly communicated and our work is continuously reviewed, monitored and improved against the standards.

**During the 2023-2024 financial year, the Child Safeguarding team have:**

- Updated our Child Safeguarding information sources to ensure children, staff, families and community are informed about our work as it relates to protecting children and their rights.
- Commenced the Child's Voice Project, which works with children to ensure their views and opinions on matters affecting them are captured and validated. Our child safety posters are one outcome from this project, providing children with an alternative platform to speak out or seek advice.
- Developed new Child Safeguarding Training to be delivered in early 2025 to VACCA staff.
- Been actively involved in the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and the Commission for Children and Young Persons (CCYP) recent legislative reviews and have had significant input into various new policies and processes, to be released later this year.
- Started working with The National Office of Child Safety on a new child safeguarding campaign for 2025.







# CONNECTION TO CULTURE



Watch our NAIDOC  
Celebration



CLICK HERE TO WATCH



# CULTURAL SUPPORT PLANNING

Cultural Support Plans (CSPs) provide Aboriginal children and young people with an outline of their connections to family, community and clan, helping them to learn and understand their traditions and customs.

During the 2023-2024 financial year, 171 new CSPs were submitted and 185 existing CSPs were reviewed. Of the new CSPs, 57 were from Victoria, 55 from interstate, 17 from Victoria/interstate, and a further 42 were being explored.

CSPs guide our carers on how best to support the child or young person in their care to retain their connections to family, community and culture.

This is especially important when a child is in the care of a non-Indigenous family member or carer.

“It [cultural support planning] helped me to understand the importance of cultural connection for my Aboriginal grandchildren.

VACCA Kinship Carer

In recognition of the importance of CSPs, our regions have focused on strengthening cross-program relationships to ensure compliance rates remain high through training and capacity building sessions. The majority of VACCA's regions report compliance rates sits at or above 90%.

In February 2024, the Statewide Cultural Planning Forum was held over two days on Dja Dja Wurrung Country. Co-hosted by Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC), the Forum marked the start of a redesign of the current cultural plan model.

Incorporating input from workshops and discussions, a proposed statewide model of cultural planning designed to improve CSP quality and compliance will be led by Victorian ACCOs responsible for Aboriginal cultural planning funds, including VACCA.





# CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

**For thousands of years, smoking ceremonies have been used by Aboriginal people to cleanse places and people of bad spirits, and to promote the protection and wellbeing of visitors to Country.**

How the fire is lit and what is used to create the smoke form important elements of the ceremony, and these depend on the Country, type of ceremony and clan. Those present at a smoking will be invited to walk through the smoke, washing it over their head, body and feet.

Only Traditional Owners may conduct a smoking ceremony. A smoking ceremony will often take place during a Welcome to Country and is conducted prior to all VACCA events and large gatherings on Country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be made by anyone and acknowledges and pays respect to our First Peoples as the Traditional Owners and ongoing custodians of the lands we inhabit. It is standard practice at VACCA to begin our meetings with an Acknowledgement.

Including a smoking ceremony, Welcome or Acknowledgement at the start of VACCA events, gatherings, and meetings promotes an ongoing acknowledgement of connection to place for our Aboriginal staff and service users. By including these protocols, we show our respect for Traditional Owners and Elders and signify to Aboriginal community members that they are in a culturally safe space.



**CLICK HERE TO HEAR OUR  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

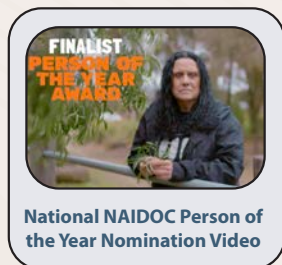


# NAIDOC WEEK

## Keep the Fire Burning: Blak, Loud and Proud

During NAIDOC Week we celebrate Aboriginal culture, history, and achievement. The 2024 NAIDOC theme **Keep the Fire Burning: Blak, Loud and Proud** recognises the enduring strength and resilience of our people and proudly celebrates the spirit of our culture.

**Throughout NAIDOC Week, VACCA hosts events for hundreds of children, young people, carers, families and community across our regions. These events provide the opportunity for families to participate in cultural activities, create connections, and celebrate 65,000 years of continuous culture.**



National NAIDOC Person of the Year Nomination Video



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH](#)



### NAIDOC Person of the Year

This year we celebrated as Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Boon Wurrung Elder and VACCA CEO Aunty Muriel Bamblett was awarded 2024 NAIDOC Person of the Year. This incredible achievement recognises Aunty Muriel's significant contribution to the safety, wellbeing and future prosperity of Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

We congratulate Aunty Muriel on all her incredible achievements.

### Victorian NAIDOC Awards

At the 2024 Victorian NAIDOC Awards, VACCA staff member and proud Gunai Kurnai trans man Zee Pepper received the LGBTIQ+ Pride Award. Acting Quality Manager in our Child Safeguarding and Quality team and member of the Binbeal Murrup working group, Zee was recognised for his leadership and contribution to the Victorian LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal community.

An incredible honour – congratulations Zee.



Wisps of smoke rising from the flames, wrapped in a hold around a snake tell a story of unbroken and enduring strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our path is cleansed by the smoke. Our creator, Bunjil, watching over us and championing new direction and rich resilience in our steps forward.

This path of endurance is 65,000 years strong in our unapologetic fight for justice, unity, and respect. We keep the fire burning, standing tall, empowered, and connected to each other in continuing our celebration of what it means to be blak, loud and proud.

Kaitlyn Boyer, *Gunditjmara*  
Graphic Designer and Artist of VACCA's 2024 NAIDOC Artwork







# KOORIE KIDS SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

**VACCA's Koorie Kids Supported Playgroups are designed to strengthen connections to culture and community for children, their parents and carers by providing a culturally safe, fun and empowering environment for families with children under five years.**

During the 2023-2024 financial year, we continued to expand our playgroups across our northern region to deliver weekly playgroup sessions in West Heidelberg. We also broadened our playgroup service delivery by embedding the Strong Steps, Stronger Starts program.

Strong Steps, Stronger Starts assists Aboriginal families to access and navigate support services in a culturally safe, responsive environment. Through educational workshops, yarning circles, cultural activities and practices, the program aims to enhance wellbeing and community connection while empowering families to access the support they need.

Our Early Years program was also extended to include additional supportive elements, providing families with early years information and resources while assisting them to access relevant services.



Watch our VACCA Northern Playgroup in action



**CLICK HERE TO WATCH**

## Case Study

### Wraparound Supports

Recently, a family supported by our Early Years program became homeless and were living in their car. Our Early Years team worked quickly to source short term accommodation through VACCA's Emergency Relief program.

The next challenge was finding longer term, secure housing for the family. Due to demand caused by the ongoing housing and cost of living crisis, VACCA's housing and homelessness service was at capacity. The family were supported to secure short-term accommodation through Home Safe Haven, before longer term housing was found.

The team assisted the family with moving to their new space and provided food and fuel vouchers to help ease financial pressures. When yarning with the family, they expressed gratitude for the support offered and speed at which they were assisted. Outcomes like this are made possible through a holistic, integrated approach which addresses multiple needs.

The family is now being case managed by VACCA's housing and homelessness service as they work towards securing a home of their own and continue to be supported by our Early Years program.

# CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN

VACCA's Carer Training, Assessment and Support (CTAS) program provides training and support to carers so they can provide culturally safe homes for Aboriginal children and young people who are unable to live with their birth families.

## During the 2023-2024 financial year, CTAS:

- Accredited 10 new carer households, for a total of 89 carer households.
- Delivered Our Carers for Our Kids foster carer training to 34 foster care applicants.
- Delivered Our Carers for Our Kids Train the Trainer to 12 staff in regional ACCOs, to support their foster care programs to deliver training to carers.

## In late 2023, CTAS expanded to include two additional carer supports:

- The Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centre - in partnership with Better Health Network and Berry Street Take Two, the Connect Centre provides a safe space for carers, families and kin to seek support. Through VACCA's involvement, the Connect Centre provides an inclusive and culturally safe mental health support service for carers (particularly kinship carers) and community members in our South and East regions.
- The Carer Support Program – provides targeted support to carers to ensure they can continue to provide care for our children in the long term. This includes VACCA's partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and Kinship Care Victoria for Carer KAFE, which facilitates learning and development opportunities, retreats, conferences, wellbeing sessions and cultural activities for carers to learn and connect.

VACCA once again partnered with the Long Walk to support more than 1,000 carers, children, young people and staff to attend Dreamtime at the 'G. 30 participants from our 2 Deadly Youth group led the pre-game march, and 200 carers, children and young people joined Michael Long to walk on the MCG.

## Culture Lives Here

We continued to invest in long-term, targeted marketing activities to attract potential carers. Culture Lives Here celebrates the diversity of our carers and shares VACCA's commitment to keeping Aboriginal children in care connected to culture.

- Utilised digital, out of home, television, radio and streaming placements.
- Hosted activations at events including Midsumma, VIC NAIDOC march and Womindjeka Festival to drive community education around foster care.
- Partnered with sporting organisations in the regions we work to raise awareness around the need for carers in local areas.







## CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC WAYS

**Cultural Therapeutic Ways (CTW) guides how we work at VACCA, both internally and with the community we work alongside. CTW provides an Aboriginal lens that links our practice to outcomes and advocates for Aboriginal ways of doing.**

CTW practice is a rich knowledge system that integrates cultural wisdom and lived experience with trauma informed and self-determination theories. This is a groundbreaking approach as we formalise our expertise and draw from decades of experience across diverse communities.

CTW outcomes are both the commitment to Heal, Connect and Protect the communities we support, and our dedication to staff as we work to embed organisational outcomes focused on Aboriginal Knowledge, Aboriginal Leadership, and Staff Health and Wellbeing.

These organisational outcomes create a solid foundation to ensure that staff at all levels, in all programs and functions, are culturally informed, have access to emotional wellbeing support, and that our programs are Aboriginal-led and guided by our Aboriginal evidence base.

### **During the 2023-2024 financial year, the CTW team:**

- Developed two cornerstone resources for VACCA staff to support them to implement CTW in their work – our Practice Framework, to guide our work with community; and our Outcomes Framework, to guide staff in understanding how we work alongside community.
- Achieved a critical Client Services milestone by implementing community outcomes across our Care Services programs. In working alongside Care Services, we work towards a self-determined future that connects programs, community and staff with the cultural heart at the centre of all that we do.
- Worked towards fully embedding CTW throughout VACCA to become everyday practice through training modules, inclusion in staff inductions, and resources developed by our CTW team.







CONNECTION  
TO COMMUNITY



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Continuous community engagement enables VACCA to respond to the individual needs and unique service requirements of each of the regions we work in. Through regular events, gatherings and group activities, we create vital links between our work and the communities we service.**

**Ongoing engagement helps us to identify how best the support social, emotional and physical health of our communities and to address gaps in service delivery. Connecting with community members to yarn about local needs supports self-determination and encourages participation in decision-making processes.**

**Western VACCA creates safe spaces for community to connect and provides opportunities for community members in Western Melbourne and the Melton / Brimbank area to strengthen cultural connections and build individual resilience. Through hosting regular celebrations of Aboriginal culture and identity like the NAIDOC Running Festival and NAIDOC Ball, we create sources of pride, strength, resilience, and healing.**

## Deadly Dads

The Deadly Dads program supports fathers, uncles, grandfathers and stepfathers of Aboriginal children to enhance their parenting skills. Gathering in a culturally safe and supportive environment, men learn about early childhood development and play while developing an understanding of their own roles within the lives of the children they care for.

## Koala Kids Homework Club

Our Western Koorie Wellbeing Ways team attends a local primary school each week to provide learning and education support through the Koala Kids Homework Club. Open to Aboriginal primary school aged children, the homework club provides help for reading and homework and facilitates cultural activities.

## NAIDOC Running Festival

Held in partnership with local community groups, health services, council, businesses and ACCOs, the NAIDOC Running Festival is an inclusive event for all ages, abilities and cultures that aims to promote better health and wellbeing outcomes while creating stronger connections between local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.



## Western VACCA

Western VACCA provides a broad range of family and cultural services to Aboriginal children and families living in the western metropolitan region, including Wyndham, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Brimbank.



WESTERN VACCA

## Gippsland VACCA

Gippsland VACCA is one of the region's largest Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. We employ over 60 staff and operate across sites in Latrobe, East Gippsland and South Gippsland areas.

## MORWELL PLACE BASED PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY DATA PROJECT

**In partnership with the Victorian Government, VACCA is supporting the Morwell Partnership Place Based Model. One of six place-based partnerships focused on implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap at a local level, the Morwell Partnership will focus on Target 12 which commits to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care by 45% by 2031.**

Planning for the Morwell Partnership Place Based Model started in early 2024, with two community workshops scheduled for later in the year. Held in Gippsland over two consecutive days, the workshops provide a culturally safe space for local community members to have their voices heard on matters affecting local Aboriginal community.

Through two focus areas – Early Years and Youth Justice - the Morwell Partnership will work on practical solutions to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care in Gippsland. While Aboriginal people make up 1.9% of the population in the region, Aboriginal children make up 28% of children in out of home care in inner Gippsland.

Including local Aboriginal voices in governance structures that develop long term, meaningful and systemic changes, the planned workshops will gather input from those who understand local issues and are best placed to contribute to discussions, provide evidence, and shape solutions. Initial workshops will provide clear priority areas and guide future workshops, discussions, and eventually inform policy and funding for local programs.

Implementing Aboriginal-led early intervention and prevention is one of the most effective ways to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people entering the child protection system, and it is our hope that the Morwell Partnership will deliver transformational and sustainable change to reduce this overrepresentation.





## CARE SERVICES

**Throughout the year, our Eastern Care Services teams have worked to strengthen connections to the local carer community and ensure that young people living in residential care are able to connect with the right support services as they transition to independence.**

Regular carer yarning circles, family events and gatherings hosted by the team allow carers to connect with one another, while providing opportunities for VACCA staff to actively engage with carers and their families. Carers of Aboriginal children through mainstream services are also invited to these events, furthering understanding of the importance of culture in an Aboriginal child's life while helping to strengthen connections between the child and their culture.

The Eastern Care Services teams working with Aboriginal young people also host regular youth groups, group activities and camps. These provide young people living in residential care with opportunities to connect with culture and strengthen their relationships with other young people.

Our Better Futures and Targeted Care Packages (TCP) programs work holistically with Aboriginal young people to assist them with making the transition from residential care to independent living. Many of the young people they work with have experienced complex trauma and require support to heal and build the skills required to live independently once they leave residential care.

During the 2023-2024 financial year, we celebrated the achievements of these young people who attained drivers' licenses, purchased vehicles, secured employment, and enrolled in or completed higher education qualifications.



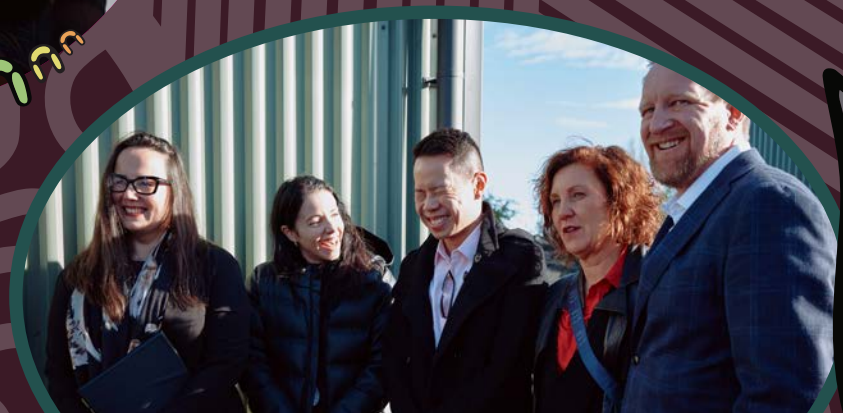
### Eastern VACCA

Eastern VACCA provides services to Aboriginal Children and families living in the eastern metropolitan region.



EASTERN VACCA







# MOORUMBINA MONGURNALLIN

**Meaning 'you are loved' in Bunurong Boon Wurrung language, Moorumbina Mongurnallin is a culturally safe, supported accommodation program for Aboriginal young people transitioning out of care in the Bayside/Peninsula area. Developed in partnership with Kids Under Cover, it is the first dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander independent living model of its kind.**

Six Aboriginal young people, supported by live-in mentors, a Key Practitioner, and Program Coordinator, are connected to local Elders and provided with access to local Aboriginal services and wraparound supports that strengthen their identity and culture, build independent living skills, and improve their long-term education, employment and housing options as they transition from out of home care to independence.

The Moorumbina Mongurnallin model allows young people to draw on their own strength and resilience in a supported environment so they can successfully navigate the next chapter in their lives, surrounded by culture and with strong links to community.

VACCA hopes to replicate this model across the regions we work in, so that more Aboriginal young people leaving care can access the supports they need to build bright futures.

## Southern VACCA

Southern VACCA provides a broad range of children, youth, family and cultural services to Aboriginal children and families in the southern metropolitan area, including Bayside Peninsula.

### Case Study

#### Bianca

Bianca is about to turn 18 and this means she has to move out of her current care placement. She is excited to move into Moorumbina Mongurnallin, and have a new space to call home.

Living in stable, self-sufficient accommodation alongside other young people, Bianca is supported by mentors and practitioners to access services and social activities, and has secured an apprenticeship through Moorumbina Mongurnallin's local networks. Bianca has described Moorumbina Mongurnallin as the start of her own journey to independence.

"It is exciting, but I know I won't be alone, and I'll have support if I need it and others close by. I feel hopeful and excited."

Living at Moorumbina Mongurnallin enables Bianca to remain connected to the local Frankston area where her social networks are, and to maintain connections to friends and family, which is important to her overall mental health and wellbeing.

Bianca has also spoken of looking forward to engaging in cultural activities, linking in with Elders, and giving back to community whilst juggling study and work.

## Northern VACCA

VACCA delivers a range of services from a number of locations in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region. Our head office is based in Preston.

Using an early intervention approach, Deadly Choices aims to reduce the use of violence in the home and prevent potential involvement with youth justice, out of home care, or criminal justice systems.

Through weekly sessions, Deadly Choices workers develop trust and rapport. Young people are therapeutically supported to strengthen their emotional regulation and develop violence prevention strategies, while practical supports, like purchasing uniforms or books, help to connect young people with activities and hobbies or engage them with school and learning.

By strengthening emotional regulation, family relationships, connection to culture and community, Deadly Choices works with each young person on goal setting to achieve significant positive outcomes, such as reduced use of violence in the home, more stable mental health, greater connection to culture, improved school attendance, emotional regulation, wellbeing, sense of self-worth and self-esteem, building confidence and reducing feelings of isolation.

## DEADLY CHOICES

**Deadly Choices works with young people aged 12 to 17 years who are using violence in the home towards parents, siblings, or caregivers. The program provides therapeutic and whole family interventions to support young people and their family members.**

### Case Study

#### Harry

15-year-old Harry\* was referred to Deadly Choices as he began to have thoughts about hurting his family. Harry grew up around family violence – his father had been abusive towards his mother, and this led to Harry having paranoid thoughts.

At the time of entering the program, Harry had poor mental health, was withdrawn and struggled with school attendance. Harry's mum didn't feel comfortable leaving him home alone with his younger brother which meant she was unable to work, adding financial pressure to the family.

Harry wanted to stop the paranoid thoughts and sought help to get better. VACCA's Deadly Choices staff worked with Harry long term to help build trust and rapport. They developed violence prevention and emotional regulation strategies tailored to his needs, including sessions on setting boundaries to help address his previous experiences of family violence.

With this support, Harry has come a long way. He has stable mental health, and improved self-esteem and confidence. Harry is attending school, has made strong friendships and has built a social network. He is now able to babysit his younger brother, and his mum is now able to go to work, which has reduced financial stress on his family.

\*Names have been changed or omitted to protect privacy





## Ovens Murray VACCA

VACCA's Ovens Murray offices are based in Wangaratta, Wodonga and Shepparton. We provide a range of services and programs across Mansfield, Benalla, Wangaratta, Alpine, Indigo, Wodonga and Towong shires. Goulburn support services are limited to the Lakidjeka program.

## 2 DEADLY YOUTH PROGRAM

**The Stronger and Resilient Communities (SARC)  
2 Deadly Youth program pilot provided young people aged 12-18 in our Ovens Murray region with opportunities to connect with culture and community, and support to reengage with education and learning.**

Program participants met regularly with mentors to set goals and participate in strengths-based activities to strengthen connections to culture and Country. Young people were provided with opportunities to engage with community Elders to gain knowledge of traditional Aboriginal practices and protocols, which further developed their sense of identity and belonging and helped build self-confidence and pride in their Aboriginality.

Young people at risk of becoming disengaged from learning were supported to work towards their education and training goals. Focusing on longer-term outcomes, future aspirations, and building positive attitudes towards education and employment, young people were encouraged to reengage with school and provided with targeted support for social and emotional wellbeing.

The 2 Deadly Youth program delivered 51 group sessions to 183 young people and 77 one-on-one cultural mentoring sessions, engaging 16 young people in the Hume area with a focus on young people living in the Ovens Murray region.





# CONNECTION TO COUNTRY



Watch our Gariwerd  
Seasons Video



CLICK HERE TO WATCH



# KOORIE KIDS BUSH WARRIOR PROGRAM

VACCA's Koorie Kids Bush Warriors program provides a culturally safe, empowering learning environment for families with children aged 5 and under.

The Bush Warriors program is part of VACCA's supported playgroups and was created in response to the need for culturally enriched playgroups in our Eastern region. Since starting in August 2023, 243 children and 244 parents and carers have participated in the Bush Warriors program.

Sessions take place on Country, helping children to create connections to land and water and build an understanding of traditional Aboriginal ways, which is integral to developing a strong sense of cultural identity.

Facilitated by VACCA playgroup staff and Healesville Sanctuary's resident Elder and Noongar woman Lisa Hodgen, children participate in exploratory activities, learning about the local animals, plants, lands, rivers and bush tucker that make up their surroundings. They gather feathers, bark, leaves and other special items to include in artwork or sensory play.

Through our supported playgroups, parents and carers are empowered to see themselves as first teachers of the children in their care and can access support in a culturally safe, non-judgmental shared space while strengthening their own connections to local community.

## Children participating in the Bush Warrior program benefit from:

- Strengthened cultural knowledge, identity, and pride through participation in cultural activities, storytelling, song, and yarning with Elders.
- Engagement with other families in a culturally safe setting which builds confidence for future group learning environments.
- Improved developmental skills through activities that build gross motor and physical skills (movement and dance), fine motor skills (craft activities) and language.





# CULTURAL CAMPS

**VACCA's Deadly Cultural Camps play an integral role in keeping children and young people living in care connected to culture. Our camps provide them with opportunities to participate in cultural activities and learnings while on Country.**

When Aboriginal children are able to connect to culture, their therapeutic outcomes and overall wellbeing markedly improve. VACCA's Deadly Cultural Camps are sometimes the first introduction to culture a child or young person living in care has.

At each camp, children and young people engage in men's and women's business and are guided by community Elders and culturally qualified facilitators. By participating in cultural activities, such as burning possum skins to contribute to possum skin cloaks, participating in didgeridoo lessons, cultural burning, emu egg etching, weaving, playing Marngrook and walking on Country, young people can strengthen their connections to culture and develop pride in their cultural identity.

Through deep listening and feedback evaluation, the children and young people who attend these camps help to guide the sessions, creating meaningful cultural learnings that are taken forward as they move towards independence and adulthood.



Watch our cultural activity in action



CLICK HERE TO WATCH









# LINK-UP VICTORIA

**Link-Up Victoria supports Stolen Generations survivors to find and reunite with their families and communities, reconnect with their culture and walk on their traditional country as proud Aboriginal people. We also provide assistance to those searching for family who were removed.**

**Link-Up Victoria is the only federally-funded service in the state to provide reunions for Stolen Generations and their families. Reunions provide survivors with a greater sense of who they are and where they belong by providing the opportunity to reclaim identity, connect to family, culture, and traditional Country, and are an essential part of the healing process.**

During the 2023-2024 year, Link-Up supported nine reunions for Stolen Generations survivors. This included facilitating family, gravesite, institution and return to Country reunions, or a combination of these.

Each year, in partnership with Connecting Home, Link-Up Victoria organises commemorative events which acknowledge the trauma faced by Stolen Generations and their families and recognises the resilience of survivors and their kin.

## Victoria Police Apology to Stolen Generations

On 24 May 2024, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police provided an historic acknowledgement and apology to the Stolen Generations for the role of Victoria Police in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Speaking at the apology, VACCA CEO Muriel Bamblett reminded us of the reverberating trauma and pain felt through the generations as a result of forced removals, and expressed gratitude to the Police Commissioner for taking this step towards truth and justice.

By advocating on behalf of the Stolen Generations and their families, continuing conversations around our nation's true history and ensuring we observe dates of remembrance and acknowledgement, we support Stolen Generations survivors and their families to heal and ensure that their stories are never forgotten.







ADVOCACY  
& REFORM



# VOICE CAMPAIGN

**Publicly declaring our support for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament early in 2023, VACCA's view has always been nothing less than yes to a Voice. This reflects our belief that Voice is vital element in safeguarding better outcomes for the families, children, young people and community members we work alongside. and to ensure we are heard now and in the future on issues that affect us.**

**While we had hoped the referendum would provide an historic moment of unity for all Australians, VACCA remains committed to ensuring the voices of our people are heard on issues that affect us both now and in the future.**

**We will continue to fight for and advocate on behalf of the children, young people, families and communities we work alongside, as walk the path to Treaty in Victoria.**

## Nothing Less Than YES

In support of a Yes vote, we produced a range of educational resources for staff, community, supporters and allies, including animated explainers and video testimonial from staff which were shared across our digital platforms.

Leading up to the referendum we hosted two Yarning Circles, inviting Aunty Jill Gallagher (VACCHO) and Jade Richie (Yes23) to speak about the Voice and provide opportunities for staff to ask questions.

VACCA also produced Yes merchandise including magnets, stress balls, posters, and t-shirts, alongside digital billboards, street posters, and downloadable digital resources in support of Yes.





# COMMUNITY PROTECTING BOORAIS

As part of our Nugel program, VACCA launched Community Protecting Boorais (CPB) in October 2023 in Northern metropolitan Melbourne. CPB provides an Aboriginal-led alternative response for child protection reports about Aboriginal children, building on Nugel's successful family strengthening and reunification work.

**CPB is grounded in culture. We walk alongside children and families, practicing deep listening and building trust. VACCA is changing practice by shifting language and using our unique approach to further self-determination and ensure that families and communities are more involved in decision making and strengthening their connections to culture.**

**By engaging with families earlier in the child protection pathway and diverting them away from this system, CPB supports and strengthens the rightful roles of Aboriginal families and communities in the care, protection and guidance of their own children.**

## During the 11-month delivery of the pilot:

- CPB worked with 90 children from 35 families.
- 8% of the children referred to CPB were placed away from their parents (7 children). This percentage is very low in comparison to government child protection services, who on average remove Aboriginal children in 40% of cases that progress to the investigation stage.
- Nugel is actively working to support these 7 children to return to parental care.
- CPB has stepped out (closed) with 36 children without going to court.

## Case Study

### Strengthening families to stay together

Child Protection received an unborn report which was transferred to Community Protecting Boorais when the baby was born. Concerns were in relation to the young age of the parents, and exposure of the baby to family violence.

A Nugel worker met with the parents and arranged for baby to be safely discharged from hospital. Following disengagement with services and concerns around living arrangements, Nugel met with mum and dad to discuss their concerns. Mum and dad agreed to a hotel stay until they could move into their own home.

Mum was referred to VACCA's family services, where she identified goals including participating in a parenting program, getting her driver's licence, and finding employment to increase her independence. Baby was enrolled in childcare to support mum with accomplishing her goals.

Following a family violence incident, legal action was taken to exclude dad from the property and supervise his family time whilst VACCA addressed the concerns. Mum and dad, with the support of family, attended Marram-Ngala Ganbu (Koori Court).

Dad engaged well with services and was supported to return to the family home in line with mum's wishes. Since returning home, there have been no further incidents of family violence.

Dad continues to hold full time employment. Mum has completed a course to support her goal of employment and is engaged with the Maternal and Child Health Service (MCH) and a family services worker.

As a result of CPB's strong engagement with the family, goal setting, and referrals to culturally safe supports, the family was able to remain together. Mum and dad said they felt very satisfied with their experience of CPB and continue to engage well with the program.

# SHARING OUR WISDOM

**In September 2023, 90 VACCA staff travelled to Larrakia Country for the National SNAICC Conference. With more than 1600 delegates in attendance, the conference provided a significant platform to further sector knowledge in support of safer, culturally connected Aboriginal children and families through sharing our expertise and highlighting VACCA's work towards child protection reform.**

- Our Aboriginal Children's Healing Team (AHT) shared insights into their culturally led therapeutic work which supports the healing journey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- The team leading the innovative Aboriginal-Led Case Conferencing (ALCC) model (VACCA, BDAC, Njernda and Goolum Goolum) presented their findings on how culturally informed practice works to divert families from child protection investigations and strengthens the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal families.
- We shared our Rainbow Tick journey, documenting how VACCA has achieved Rainbow Tick accreditation and continues to create a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTIQ+ staff, young people and families.
- Our Koorie Kids Playgroups highlighted the critical importance of early intervention, culturally informed facilitation and activities to support positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, parents and carers.
- The Deadly Lovin' program showed the ways traditional and contemporary cultural wisdom is used to support the next generation with making good choices in their intimate partner relationships.
- Community Protecting Boorais, a groundbreaking expansion of our Nugel program, shared the ways VACCA is shifting the language and culture of child protection practice by strengthening and supporting the rightful roles of Aboriginal families in the care, protection and guidance of their own children.

“ Our authority and grounding to do the work that we do comes from culture, and this is our greatest strength. No other culture can say they have over 60,000 years of successfully raising children behind them. Our little ones are the only children in the world who can stand on a legacy as strong, resilient, and proud as this.

VACCA CEO Muriel Bamblett





# YOOROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION

**Established in 2022 to investigate historical and contemporary injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria, the Yoorook Justice Commission has gathered evidence on injustices relating to education, health, housing, land, and economic prosperity.**

VACCA's focus is on ensuring that the experiences of Aboriginal children and families are front and centre in the Commission's work.

Throughout the year, our Social Policy team provided written submissions on systemic injustice in child protection, criminal justice, family violence, housing, health, and education systems, as well as injustices in economic life. Due to the immense impact family violence has had on Aboriginal communities in Victoria since colonisation an additional submission on family violence was also prepared.

In September 2023, Yoorook released its report into injustices in the child protection and criminal justice systems, echoing many of the recommendations made by VACCA.

This includes the development of standalone legislation for Aboriginal children and greater transfer of decision-making power and resources to support Aboriginal self-determination in the Victorian child protection system.

VACCA's priority now is holding the Victorian Government to account and ensuring that it works in partnership with Aboriginal peoples to implement the Yoorook recommendations.



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW OUR YOOROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION SUBMISSIONS](#)



STRENGTHENING  
OUR  
PARTNERSHIPS



# FUNDRAISING

**Our dedicated Fundraising team connects with supporters from across the country, raising vital funds to ensure children and families in our care remain connected to culture, community and Country.**

**Donations, bequests and grants go directly towards funding our cultural programs, events and resources at significant points in the year.**

**How our donors have supported us this year:**

## Education Support

Our Education Appeal provided children with deadly backpacks filled with essentials for their first day back at school. A big thank you to the FRRR Back to School Program 2024 for providing much needed vouchers to assist with school supplies, uniform, and technology expenses.

## Cultural Programs

VACCA's Morning Tea for Culture, Run Melbourne and Melbourne Marathon fundraising activities helped fund our NAIDOC events and Deadly Culture Camps. Our camps provide life-changing opportunities for young people to connect with Elders and their peers, build connections to culture and community, and develop leadership skills.

## Emergency Relief

A record number of supporters for our 2024 Winter Appeal enabled us to provide essential emergency relief to our most vulnerable community members, including food hampers, blankets and access to vouchers for clothing and transport.

## Christmas Support

Our 2023 Christmas Appeal helped to provide gifts to children in care and fund VACCA's Christmas parties, so children and families across the state could connect with culture, community and each other. Funds raised also helped to provide hampers and extra support to ease cost of living pressures for families, ensuring everyone in our care experienced joy over the Christmas season.

**Thank you to all our donors and funders who have supported these vital programs:**

- 810 children provided with backpacks containing back to school essentials and resources to start the school year strong and proud.
- 650 children and families provided with back-to-school vouchers.
- Over 1,800 children and families attended our NAIDOC week events across the state.
- Koorie Santa helped us to deliver over 4,000 presents to children and young people in care in time for Christmas.
- Our Emergency Relief program supported more than 6,500 families and children in 2023-2024.



# FINANCIAL REPORT

As has been the case for a number of years, this financial year was of continuous growth, with gross operating income of \$147.7 million and a net operating surplus of \$1.5 million.

Continued expansion of Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care, transferring of Aboriginal children to VACCA's responsibility under the Victorian Governments Stronger Families: Closing the Gap Initiative remains the largest growth factor for the organisation into the future.

It is expected that the State Government Roadmap to Reform and Family Violence 10 year plan will also continue to have a strong impact on the operations, workforce and potential future growth of the organisation, over the next three to five years.

## Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
<b>Total Income</b>	147,707,872	125,018,594
Total Expenses	146,186,626	121,667,121
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of VACCA</b>	<b>1,521,246</b>	<b>3,351,473</b>

## Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Total Current Assets	64,086,156	63,352,059
Total Non-Current Assets	29,854,701	23,921,283
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>93,940,857</b>	<b>87,273,342</b>
Total Current Liabilities	49,784,134	49,948,861
Total Non-Current Liabilities	18,416,944	13,105,948
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>68,201,078</b>	<b>63,054,809</b>
<b>Net Assets / (Liabilities)</b>	<b>25,739,779</b>	<b>24,218,533</b>
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>25,739,779</b>	<b>24,218,533</b>

Gross Operating Income increased by 18% from the previous year from \$125.0 million to \$147.7 million.



# THANK YOU

Much of our culturally led programming is made possible thanks to the generous support of our donors, supporters and funders.

Your support has enabled us to be innovative, improve upon our service delivery, and strengthen our self-determined care for Aboriginal children, families and communities across the state. Thank you for supporting our work as we continue to demonstrate the successes of Aboriginal-led solutions.

If you, your workplace, school or group would like to make a donation, leave a gift in your will or support a particular program through a Reconciliation Action Plan, corporate social responsibility or your environmental social governance program, please contact us:

**Email [supportus@vacca.org](mailto:supportus@vacca.org) or call 03 9287 8800**

**To support our work and make a tax-deductible donation please visit [vacca.org/donate](https://vacca.org/donate)**

## VACCA SHOP

The VACCA Shop sells a range of Aboriginal designed merchandise and educational resources.

Proceeds from the sale of these items subsidises our vital programs supporting Aboriginal children and their families.

**Click this link it visit our shop:  
[vacca.org/shop](https://vacca.org/shop) or email [resources@vacca.org](mailto:resources@vacca.org)**

**For more information visit:  
[vacca.org/support-us](https://vacca.org/support-us)**

# OUR SUPPORTERS AND FUNDERS

## Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

VACCA would like to acknowledge and thank all Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Traditional Owner groups we collaborate and work with across the State of Victoria.

## Partners and Sector Organisations

Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Initiative, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service, Austin Health – Child and Youth Mental Health, ACCESS EAP, Australian Psychological Society, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative, Berry Street, Bridge Darebin – Preston, Brotherhood of St Laurence, CASA House, Centre For Evidence and Implementation, Centre For Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Child First Partners, Community Housing Ltd, Djerriwarrh Health Services, Early Childhood Management Services, Elizabeth Morgan House, Empower Australia, Family Life, Family Safety Victoria, First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing, Foster Care Association, Fostering Connections, Foundation House, Gateway Community Health, Gippsland Pride Initiative, Grit & Resilience Program – Rural City of Wangaratta, Impact for Women, IPC Health, Jesuit Social Services, Kids Under Cover, Kinship Carers Victoria, Koorie Youth Council, Koorie Justice Unit, Latrobe City Council, Latrobe Community Health Service, La Trobe University – Bouverie Centre, Life Without Barriers, Mallee Sexual Assault Unit, Melbourne City Mission, Melbourne Polytechnic, Merriwa Industry, North East Support & Action for Youth, Midsumma, The Orange Door Network, Orygen, Ovens Murray Child and Family Service Alliance, Ovens Murray Family Violence Partnership, Phoenix Australia, Quantum Support Services, Queen Elizabeth Centre, Ramahyuck, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne – Wadja Aboriginal Family Place, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Swinburne University, SANE, SNAICC, Salvation Army, Star Health, The Smith Family, Thorne Harbour Health, Upper Murray Family Care, Uniting Vic Tas, University Of Melbourne – Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health and the Department of Social Work, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, VMCH – Wangaratta, Westcare, Women's Health West, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service.

## Philanthropy

Aesop Foundation, Bagot Gjergja Foundation, Bowness Foundation, Brian M Davis Charitable Foundation, Cages Foundation, Freemasons Foundation, FRRR – Back to School Program, Flora and Frank Leith Charitable Trust, Fred J. Cato Charitable Fund, Joan of Hearts Foundation, Gandel Foundation, Naylor Stewart Ancillary Fund, Nelson Alexander Foundation, Paul Ramsay Foundation, The Ross Trust, Victorian Law Foundation.

## Corporate Sponsors

AMC Commercial Cleaning, Fee Synergy, Kinetic, oOh!Media.

## Pro bono services and gifts in kind

Arts Centre Melbourne, Ashurst, Backpacks 4 Vic Kids, CWA Alphington, Good360, Impact For Women, Koala, Pinchapoo, Sikh Volunteers Australia.

## Key Supporters:

blueAPACHE, 3KND Radio, Coles, Albury Wodonga Foodshare, Adaps, AFL North East Border, Commonwealth Bank, Chirnside Park Football Club, Coldstream Football & Netball Club, D&D Printing, Essendon Football Club, Frankston Arts Centre, Frankston District Netball Association, Fred J Cato Trust, Fostering Connections, GM Leasing, Kia Motors Australia, Judy Courtin Legal, Latrobe Valley Magistrate's Court, Melbourne Football Club, Phillip Webb, Rock Posters, St Kilda Football Club, Target Australia, Toyota Fleet Management, Triple R Broadcasters (3RRR), The Long Walk, The Smith Family, Werribee Districts Football Club, Wodonga Foodshare.

## Government

Department of Social Services; Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business; Department of Education and Training; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Department of Health and Human Services; Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Department of Transport and Planning; Department of Social Services; Dhelk Dja; Family Safety Victoria; National Indigenous Australians Agency.

Victorian Local Government Councils

Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency acknowledges the support of:





# CONTACT AND FEEDBACK

## Become a Member

We invite all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years and over to become a member of VACCA. Membership provides the opportunity to share your voice on key issues which affect community, connect with one another, and have input on operations at VACCA.

Membership also includes voting rights at our Annual General Meeting. For more information on membership, or to sign up, visit [vacca.org/membership](http://vacca.org/membership).

## Feedback

We are always interested to hear how we can improve our services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and community members living in Victoria.

Your feedback is welcome via [feedback@vacca.org](mailto:feedback@vacca.org).

## Our Locations

### VACCA Chirnside Park

Suite 22, Level 2  
1 East Ridge Drive  
Chirnside Park VIC 3116  
p. (03) 8727 0200

### VACCA Dandenong

Suite 2, Level 2  
1-7 Langhorne Street  
Dandenong VIC 3175  
p. (03) 9108 3500

### VACCA Frankston

Level 1, 405 Nepean Highway  
Frankston VIC 3199  
p. (03) 8796 0700

### VACCA Melton

43 Bakery Square  
Melton VIC 3337  
p. (03) 8746 2776

### VACCA Morwell

21 Hazelwood Road  
Morwell VIC 3840  
p. (03) 5135 6055

### VACCA Preston (Head Office)

340 Bell Street  
Preston VIC 3072  
p. (03) 9287 8800

### VACCA Wangaratta

Suite 3, 27-29 Faithfull Street  
Wangaratta VIC 3677  
p. (03) 5756 9000

### VACCA Werribee

Ground Floor  
75-79 Watton Street  
Werribee VIC 3030  
p. (03) 9742 8300

### VACCA Wodonga

Suite 3, 1 Birralee Place  
West Wodonga VIC 3690  
p. (03) 8373 1710





Serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,  
young people, families, and community members.

**Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency Co-operative Limited**

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[w. vacca.org](http://w.vacca.org)     [@vaccaorg](https://www.instagram.com/vaccaorg)



Connected by culture

# VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY