

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Annual Report 2024–2025



VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD
AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture



**Changing the Narrative
Our People. Our Work. Our Way.**

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

Deon Van Den Berg

Thank you to the community members and staff who have given permission for their images and photographs to be published.

Artwork and Design

Kaitlyn Boyer - *Gunditjmarra*

VACCA Graphic Designer



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



Scan to Listen

Who We Are

We are VACCA – the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency, Victoria's leading Aboriginal child and family services organisation, and the largest provider of Aboriginal family violence, youth justice and homelessness support services.

VACCA is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), and for more than 48 years we have responded to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, Elders and community in Victoria.

We know that strong Aboriginal families and communities mean strong Aboriginal children. Our vision for self-determination is exemplified in our work. We focus on creating services, supports, policies and advocacy that deliver solutions for our people now and that make a difference for our future generations.

At the heart of our work is the focus on safety, wellbeing and cultural connections for our children, families and community – first, foremost, always.



Our Vision

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

Our Purpose

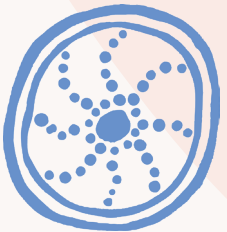
Supporting culturally strong, safe and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our Principles



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.



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.



Excellence

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



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.



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.



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

Changing the Narrative

Our People. Our Work. Our Way.



Scan to Listen

The 2024-2025 VACCA Annual Report theme shares VACCA's reform journey while challenging existing narratives around Aboriginal child and family welfare.

VACCA's strength lies in our connection to the communities we work alongside. Our work is guided by Aboriginal community throughout Victoria, their voices informing our practice. Through strengths-based solutions that centre Aboriginal voices, VACCA's 48 years of knowledge and experience sits at the heart of our innovative service delivery.

Our Aboriginal-led services support children and families to remain connected to their Country, cultural practice and to each other. We empower families to act with self-determination, and protect the physical and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people.

Changing the Narrative is recognition of VACCA's impact on the Aboriginal child and family services sector, and of our advocacy and innovation. Through program highlights and data, we show the way forward through evidence-based reform, placing Aboriginal voices and experiences at the fore.

Our Regions

Our regions offer a wide range of culturally appropriate services and programs that work together to create better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community across Victoria.



Northern VACCA

VACCA's Northern region services Melbourne's northern metropolitan area and includes our head office in Preston.

Southern VACCA

Southern VACCA services Melbourne's southern metropolitan area with offices in Dandenong and Frankston.

Eastern VACCA

Eastern VACCA provides services to community living in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region, with an office in Chirnside Park.

Western VACCA

Western VACCA supports Aboriginal community living in Melbourne's western metropolitan region, including offices in Werribee and Melton.

Gippsland VACCA

Gippsland VACCA operates throughout the Latrobe, East Gippsland and South Gippsland areas, with an office in Morwell.

Ovens Murray VACCA

VACCA Ovens Murray supports community across the region from our main offices in Wangaratta and Wodonga.





Chairperson's Report

In 2024-25, VACCA has continued to grow with more staff, new programs and a bigger service offering across Victoria than ever before. We are supported and strengthened through the many agreements and partnerships we maintain locally, statewide and nationally. These are not just formalities, they are the foundation for our advocacy, our funding, and our ability to deliver culturally safe services that respond to the lived experiences of our people.

We are signatories to key State and Federal agreements, including the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, Marrung, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. With several agreements now up for renegotiation, VACCA is well positioned to ensure Aboriginal voices continue to drive decision-making, particularly in areas of family violence and child protection, where we are helping shape national practice through initiatives like the Latrobe Valley Place-based Partnership.

Our presence in regional forums is critical. In some regions, like the Northern region, we still face challenges with participation and contested spaces. In contrast, our Southern and Western regions are thriving, reflected in their increased funding and policy influence. This reinforces the importance of VACCA being visible, vocal and at the table.

VACCA's policy advocacy is respected because it's grounded in practice experience, cultural authority, and evidence. We are now seen as a national leader, with a seat at many influential tables – from co-chairing the National Safety Plan to helping establish the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body for family violence.

We advocate not just to be heard, but to drive the systemic changes our communities deserve.

James Atkinson
VACCA Chairperson



CEO's Report

Leading with purpose through a time of transformation

As we prepare to launch VACCA's Strategic Plan for 2026-2029, we do so with deep pride in where we've come from and with a clear view of the challenges ahead. Our focus remains unchanged: we are, and always will be, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation – deeply committed to the community we work alongside and the safety and wellbeing of our children, young people and families.

But we cannot accept the status quo. This next chapter for VACCA is not about business as usual – it's about innovation and transformational change. At the centre of this transformation is a commitment to contribute to an Aboriginal evidence base of practice and outcomes.

That commitment is made real through the implementation of VACCA's very first Cultural Therapeutic Ways (CTW) practice and outcomes frameworks that apply an Aboriginal lens to how we work and define success. CTW is a critical mechanism for delivering on some of the goals of our Strategic Plan. While the Strategic Plan sets VACCA's direction, it is the implementation of CTW across the organisation that enables us all to walk that path together – grounded in culture, guided by self-determination, and led by trauma-informed approaches.

Our Strategic Plan builds on this progress. It challenges us to break cycles, influence systems, and deliver measurable, long-term change. It compels us to look honestly at our current outcomes – particularly in critical areas like out-of-home care (OOHC). With more than 800 Aboriginal children in our care, including 370 in Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care programs and Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais, we must continue to listen to our community, drive real change, and deliver the best outcomes for Aboriginal people now and for future generations.

Our Client Services Forum this year powerfully reflected this commitment, with staff presenting bold, culturally-informed strategies to address intergenerational family violence and reduce the number of children entering OOHC. From reimagining permanent care to embedding Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making and expanding Kinship Family Finding, these approaches demonstrate our resolve to remain responsive, culturally safe, and guided by the needs and aspirations of our communities.

Externally, the environment continues to shift. With Treaty in Victoria and the establishment of Gellung Warl, VACCA's voice and leadership are more important than ever. We have decades of experience working alongside community and developing practice knowledge, and we have shown we can achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. But let's be clear: Treaty does not relieve governments of responsibility. They must still be held accountable for Closing the Gap and implementing Yoorrook's 100 recommendations. They must provide the funding to ACCOs to ensure our communities have access to the supports necessary to address the generational impact of failed policies.

Internally, we face challenges from workforce pressures and a decreasing proportion of Aboriginal staff, to funding models that reward outputs rather than outcomes. The cultural load on our Aboriginal staff is real. That is why we are implementing an organisational response focused on strengthening our Aboriginal workforce and leadership across the organisation. We need stronger Aboriginal-led data, better evidence, and budgets that accurately reflect the true nature and complexity of what we do.

VACCA is no longer the small, under-resourced organisation we once were. We are now a nationally recognised leader. But with that recognition comes responsibility. We are called to lead with purpose, to remain grounded in Cultural Therapeutic Ways, and to continue to walk a path of healing, connecting and protecting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community which we walk alongside to achieve transformational change.

Prof. Muriel Bamblett AO
Chief Executive Officer

Performance Snapshot

2024–2025



Client Services

- Expanded service to 258 children in our Nugel program, and 339 children supported by Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais.
- Supported 1,119 children in care across Kinship, Foster and First Supports programs.
- Provided 185 assessments for our Kinship Care First Supports programs and supported 317 placements in Kinship Care Case Contracting programs.
- Managed 8,037 enquiries at The Orange Door, providing nearly 40,000 hours of services to families.
- Provided help to 727 new clients in our Therapeutic Interventions Family Violence programs.
- Commenced 765 new support periods for clients in our Holistic Aboriginal Family Violence programs.
- Supported 124 new young people with our Adolescent Family Violence Services programs.
- Managed 84 new cases via our Aboriginal Family Violence Services programs.
- Supported clients in pre- and post-release diversion programs, lifting up 69 women and 94 men over the year.
- Provided over 26,000 hours of service to young participants of our Better Futures and Home Stretch programs.
- Supported 67 young people through the Youth Through Care program.
- Supported 119 clients who engaged with our Sexual Assault Support Services programs.
- Established and sustained 792 new tenancies with help from our Private Rental Assistance programs.
- Commenced 23 new support periods for our clients in Homelessness Youth Services programs.



Corporate Services

- Supported 180 staff to undertake further training and professional development, over 50% of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Provided new employment opportunities for 21 qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees, interns and students completing their placements.
- Completed our second Ngulunbarra Leadership Program, supporting the development of new leaders across the organisation.
- Redeveloped VACCA's induction training to be a more positive and interactive experience for new VACCA staff.
- Supported the key strategic workforce priorities for learning and development across the organisation, delivering over 64 revised training modules alongside cultural reform initiatives.
- Developed and delivered the Aboriginal Cultural Practice Elements training as a pilot, enabling VACCA to showcase our practice approach aligning to our Cultural Therapeutic Ways framework. This training and coaching package was delivered to 370 Child Protection workers.
- Successfully transitioned from physical client records to a fully digital system, enhancing accessibility, security and operational efficiency.
- Completed the cloud infrastructure migration to Microsoft Azure, resulting in a more reliable and scalable environment while delivering significant cost savings.
- Implemented Power BI dashboards for client data and financial reporting, enabling real-time insights and improved decision-making.
- Delivered further enhancements to our Microsoft Dynamics environment, including the CSQ Investigations System and the Business Development Management database.
- Established a robust cybersecurity framework with the appointment of a Cyber Security Specialist and strategic partnerships to ensure a secure technical environment.
- Supported the rollout of an automated and integrated accounts payable system, streamlining approval workflows and boosting productivity across the organisation.
- Continued to reduce our carbon footprint by increasing our fleet of hybrid cars to 29.6%, introducing solar panels to our Wodonga site and continuing the roll out of LED lighting.
- Rolled out security systems upgrades across all locations.
- Opened and refurbished a new office in Wodonga and a health clinic in Werribee in partnership with Western Health.



Communications & Fundraising

- Raised more than \$680,000 from fundraising, appeals, sponsorship and philanthropic sources to support programs including Emergency Relief, Deadly Culture Camps, Koorie Kids Playgroup and Koorie Kids Homework Clubs.
- Secured over 3,000 gifts through our Christmas toy drive.
- Grew VACCA's social media presence, adding 810 followers to Facebook (21,060), 970 followers to Instagram (6,570) and 1,370 followers to LinkedIn (13,220).
- Added 1,630 followers (8,430) to Deadly Story on Instagram.
- Recorded 268,000 unique website users.
- Developed a Morning Tea for Culture brand to support greater brand awareness, recall and loyalty.
- Redeveloped the VACCA Our Services webpages to improve the user experience for clients, community and sector professionals, highlighting over 50 programs offered across VACCA.
- Redeveloped the VACCA External Training Team webpages to support the opportunity and growth of our training services.
- Celebrated NAIDOC Week with 6 events held across our regions.
- Delivered multiple campaigns focused on culture, advocacy, and showcasing our work: Survival Day, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day, Book Week, Petition to Increase the Foster Care Allowance, 16 Days of Activism, the Federal Election, International Women's Day, Close the Gap Day, Transgender Day of Visibility, the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations and NAIDOC Week.
- Developed digital marketing campaigns to promote recruitment, the Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse scheme, the Christmas Fundraiser and Appeal, Morning Tea for Culture and the Winter Appeal.
- Welcomed over 260 new donors and supporters.
- Recorded 148 VACCA members.
- Distributed 20 media releases.





Policy & Advocacy

- Prepared 59 policy submissions and briefs to support reform and highlight Aboriginal-led, strengths-based solutions across child and family welfare, Closing the Gap, Treaty, self-determination, family violence, housing and homelessness, justice, early childhood, and education.
- Driven advocacy to strengthen the role of ACCOs in the Treaty process. This work aimed to highlight ACCOs as critical knowledge holders and service delivery experts ensuring we can continue to promote ACCO expertise in service design and delivery for the benefit of community.
- Called for genuine system change, meaningful monitoring, and accountability of government efforts to implement commitments under Closing the Gap.
- Advocated for the first national standalone Aboriginal family violence plan, Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices, to include investment in Aboriginal-led prevention, therapeutic and culturally-centred family violence support services, as well as to build the Aboriginal family violence workforce and evidence base.
- Provided coordination of meetings and strategic policy advice to drive reforms led by the Aboriginal Caucuses of the Dhelk Dja Partnership and Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forums. This included the refresh of the Korin Korin Balit-Djak Plan and development of a joint position paper to address the intersection of family violence, housing, and homelessness. Both of these projects highlight the critical role of shared decision-making led by ACCOs and the Aboriginal community.
- Participated in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's truth telling process by providing several submissions and appearing before the Commission.
- Worked continuously to support the CEO of VACCA to strategically participate in policy system reform across all levels of government.





**OUR
PEOPLE**

Our Board

VACCA's Board of Directors governs the strategic direction of our organisation ensuring compliance with reporting bodies, responding to community expectations, and maintaining excellence in service delivery.



James Atkinson
Chairperson

Yorta Yorta/Bangerang

James is the CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES) in Melbourne. He is the former CEO of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and previous Manager of Koorie Education with the Department of Education and Training. James has a great deal of organisational experience and has served on Boards at a state and national level. He was one of the founding members of the first Victorian Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee and a participant in the Koorie Leadership Program. James is a Life Member of VACCA and has served on the Board for 22 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 18 years. She has a long family connection to VACCA and has a passion for child welfare and early childhood education, including 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. She has been a VACCA Board Member for two years.



Jason Kanoa
Vice Chairperson

Gunditjmara/Bunitj

Jason is the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young Peoples' Alliance. Prior to this, he has held positions as Executive Manager of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, CEO at the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, and CEO of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative. Jason holds a Diploma in Business Management and has completed governance training and the Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria course. Jason has been a VACCA Board Member for 13 years.



Aunty Debra Swindle
Director

Wiradjuri

Aunty Debra is an advocate for community and ACCOs in Victoria. She is actively involved in the Healesville Aboriginal community and has been a VACCA Board Member for three years.



Matthew Burns
Treasurer

Taungurung

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



Aunty Margaret Atkinson
Director

Yorta Yorta/Taungurung/Waywurru

Aunty Marg is actively involved in the Gippsland Aboriginal community, having worked previously at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative and at VACCA for over nine years. Aunty Marg is a VACCA Life Member and has been a Board Member for 13 years.



Aunty Deidre King
Director

Gunditjmara

Aunty Deidre is the former CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES). Prior to this, she worked at VACCA and the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) for 17 years. Aunty Deidre has completed Governance Training and an Advanced Diploma in Business Management. She is a Life Member of VACCA and has been a current Board Member for 10 years after serving previously for 14 years.

Membership

VACCA is proud to be owned and controlled by its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members who reflect the strength, knowledge and resilience of our community. They help to support our purpose of culturally strong, safe and thriving Aboriginal communities, and our vision of Aboriginal self-determination.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) like VACCA were born from the aspirations of our Elders to build a more equal, fair and prosperous future for our youth. Aboriginal community control is itself an act of self-determination, designed to build the strength and empowerment of our communities.

With the support of our members, we strive every day to improve the outcomes and opportunities for our community through self-determination. This vision extends to all Aboriginal people, and we want to ensure our members, staff, and the children, young people and families we work alongside are empowered to realise their rights as Indigenous peoples.

VACCA would like to thank all our members for their continuing contribution to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

Our Staff

VACCA has continued to grow over the last 12 months, with our total staff count increasing from 1,154 to 1,270 as of June 2025. VACCA continues to have the strongest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce of any employer in Victoria, with 437 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Key areas of growth included the expansion of the existing Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) programs with new Nugel teams supported by Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais, and additional legal services. Further growth included program initiatives such as Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing and the Strong and Deadly Boorais educational program. Additionally, we continued to strengthen resourcing across Care Services, Cultural Programs and Family Violence.

Staff Recognition

Staff from an array of VACCA's programs and teams were recognised for their incredible work supporting children, families and community across Victoria.

In September 2024, Teagan Dunn was awarded the Foster Care Association of Victoria's Supporting Carers Award. Teagan was nominated by a number of the carers he works with as a Foster Care Case Manager, a testament to his dedication to supporting carers and providing the very best care to the children and young people we work alongside.

Sama Rind, a proud Badimia Yamatji woman, was the recipient of two awards at the Kangan Institute Industry Excellence Awards in February 2025. Sama has worked at VACCA for seven years and is a Program Manager in the Kinship Finding Team. She was the recipient of both the Trainee of the Year: Professional and Creative Award as well as the Uncle Norm Hunter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Award.



Protecting Children Awards

VACCA staff were the proud recipients of three awards at the 2025 Victorian Protecting Children Awards. Held annually, the awards recognise excellence in helping to ensure children, young people and families are safe, supported and thriving.

Deputy Executive Director Corey Harrison (Dja Dja Wurrung/Kurnai) was presented with the Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children. Corey has worked at VACCA for more than 11 years and has been critical to the ongoing success of several key programs, including Nugel, Moorumbina Mongurnallin and Gamadji Balit.

VACCA's Yinga Healing Group, part of our Aboriginal Children's Healing Team, won the Robin Clark Making a Difference Award. Granted to those whose work has directly improved the lives of children, young people and their families – the team was recognised for their unique approach to facilitating healing.

Their work takes a holistic approach to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, strengthening community connections, incorporating trauma-informed therapeutic approaches, and integrating support systems.

Zee Pepper, Quality Manager in VACCA's Child Safeguarding and Quality team, received the Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award. As a proud transgender Gunai Kurnai man, Zee is a fierce advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+SB children, young people, families and carers. Zee's visibility in community demonstrates his commitment to empowering Rainbow Mob to ensure they can always feel safe expressing their identities.



Workforce Development and Training

We offer a range of opportunities for staff to access further training, qualifications and professional development, helping them to achieve their individual career goals while ensuring the continuous improvement of our service delivery.

In 2024-25:

- 43 staff, including 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, successfully completed the Diploma of Community Services through Swinburne University of Technology. Another 50 staff are nearing completion of the Diploma of Community Services.
- 25 staff, including 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, successfully completed the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management through Kangan Institute.
- 14 staff, including 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, are currently completing the Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy: First Nations through The Bouverie Centre and La Trobe University.
- 11 staff, including 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, are currently completing the Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention with Melbourne Polytechnic.
- 29 staff, including 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, are currently completing the Graduate Certificate in Client Assessment at Swinburne University of Technology.
- 6 staff completed Certificate IV qualifications in Community Services.

Our commitment to growing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce at VACCA is demonstrated by our ongoing development of early career opportunities.

In 2024-25 we:

- Welcomed 6 new Aboriginal trainees on entry level 12-month traineeships.
- Developed a new Aboriginal Graduate 12-month program and welcomed 2 new graduates.
- Supported 3 Aboriginal Career Tracker Interns.
- Facilitated 32 student placements, including 12 Aboriginal student placements.

Gold at the Australian Training Awards

In December 2024, following our win at the Victorian Training Awards, we were delighted to be the recipient of the Gold Award for Large Employer of the Year at the Australian Training Awards, the leading national awards showcasing excellence and best practice in vocational education and training for employees across Australia.

VACCA's win is testament to our ongoing commitment to supporting workforce development and capacity building for our more than 1,200 staff across Victoria.

Over the last ten years, we have listened to the voices of our staff and designed training pathways to best support them on their learning journey. This plays an integral part in strengthening Aboriginal opportunities and leadership at VACCA.



Ngulunbarra Leadership Program

Our second Ngulunbarra Leadership Program concluded in early 2025. While the program focuses on leadership development of Aboriginal staff, it is open to all staff in program manager and team leader positions, giving them the opportunity to further develop their skills and prepare for a future in leadership. Since commencing in 2022, a total of 19 staff have completed the program.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Talent Pool

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Talent Pool is designed to support members of our community to find the right role and begin a career with VACCA. From young people looking to start a career, to older people wanting to transition from another profession, our Aboriginal Recruitment Community Engagement Co-ordinator helps people find a role suited to their experience and skills and provides support to apply for a role and prepare for an interview.





Diversity and Inclusivity

At VACCA, we're dedicated to creating an environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We embrace and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and spiritual beliefs of our staff and all who engage with our services.

Our Binbeal Murrup ('Rainbow Spirit' in Woi Wurrung language) working group guides an organisation-wide approach to service delivery, informing practice approaches and ensuring the voices of LGBTIQ+SB (Rainbow) children, young people, carers, families and staff are heard.

As a recognised leader in the sector, VACCA proudly upholds our commitment to maintaining Rainbow Tick accreditation, successfully achieving our second round of accreditation in November 2024. We continue to champion inclusivity and accessibility by embedding best practice principles throughout the organisation.

Rainbow Inclusive Practices Training

Our Rainbow Inclusive Practices Training supports all staff to better understand the diverse experiences of Rainbow Mob, learn inclusive practices, and to help foster a respectful and supportive environment. This initiative aligns with our broader commitment to creating a workplace and community where everyone feels valued and acknowledged. In line with Rainbow Tick accreditation, VACCA maintains a minimum 80 per cent of staff trained at all times.

In late 2024, after successfully acquiring a grant through DFFH Equality, VACCA developed, delivered and evaluated a training package called 'Working Alongside Rainbow Mob'. The training was designed to build the capacity of VACCA's client-facing staff to ensure they have the practical skills and knowledge required to effectively respond to and affirmatively work alongside Rainbow clients, carers and community.

Evaluation of the training described staff gaining deeper insights into the barriers Rainbow Mob face, feeling more confident to hold meaningful conversations, and applying culturally responsive and client-led approaches.



Legal Practice

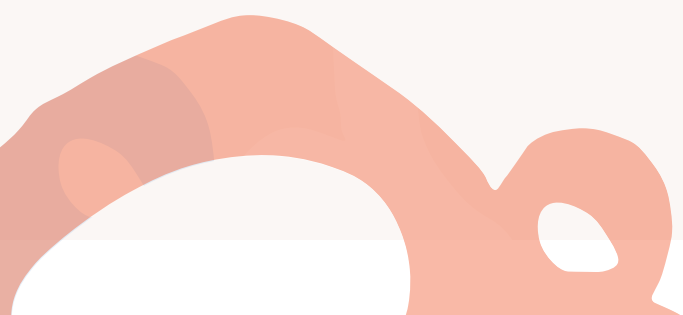
VACCA's Legal Practice directorate commenced operations in October 2024. The directorate was established to meet the demand, additional risks, and opportunities that flow from both the rapid growth of Nugel, and the Treaty-era environment that VACCA currently operates in. The scope of the directorate broadly includes responsibility for VACCA's In-house Legal Service (litigation and advice), Law Reform Projects and Legal Policy.

The primary role of VACCA's In-house Legal Service (ILS) is to provide legal advice in relation to case planning and risk assessment, protective intervention investigation, disposition advice, reviewing court reports, representing the Nugel program in court events, alternative dispute resolution, the preparation of legal documents, and the provision of foundational legal training to all new staff commencing in the Nugel program.

Legal practice at VACCA also includes the provision of specialist legal training and consultation to internal and external stakeholders on an 'Aboriginal child rights-based approach' and the special measures for Aboriginal children and families under the Children, Youth and Families Act. This has led to VACCA's growing reputation as the subject-matter expert within this and other jurisdictions.

In a relatively short period of time, legal practice at VACCA has grown from a single lawyer to a team of eight. This expansion services not only the growth of the Nugel program but also the strategic vision and reform agenda of VACCA as a whole. The recent growth of Nugel across our regions has seen ILS appearances increase to over 250 hearings per year and expand from just two court venues in 2023 to six venues in 2025. This includes all specialist Children's Court sites in metro Melbourne, as well as three regional courts.

VACCA continues to hold an outstanding reputation in the legal sector due to our distinct human rights-based court reports and Nugel leading best practice in reversing non-reunification case plans into court orders that bring children home.



The background features a series of overlapping, organic, blob-like shapes in various shades of blue and white. A large, dark blue shape with a white circular cutout is prominent in the lower-left and center. Other lighter blue and white shapes are scattered in the upper and right portions of the frame.

**OUR
WORK**

Strengthening Families

Pre-birth Response Model

VACCA's Pre-birth Response Model is a culturally informed approach to supporting Aboriginal families expecting a baby and is designed to divert them from involvement with Child Protection. The model is comprised of two programs:

- **Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC)** - Aboriginal families who have been reported to Child Protection are referred to a VACCA convenor who works with them to address concerns and refer to appropriate and culturally safe services.
- **Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH)** - mothers of Aboriginal babies referred to VACCA during the pregnancy stage to provide wraparound support and intensive case management.

Following successful pilots, both programs have now been integrated into our service offerings.

Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing

From 2021-23, VACCA co-designed and piloted the Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC) program in our Northern region. In the pilot evaluation by the University of Melbourne, the ALCC program was found to have a 78.3 per cent diversion from Child Protection success rate and was recommended to be fully implemented. The program then received funding to continue and expand to other VACCA regions.

In September 2024, after collaboration with key Department of Families, Fairness and Housing partners, ALCC expanded its service delivery to include unborn reports and now Aboriginal families who are subject to an unborn report have the option of working with a culturally safe service to provide advice, support and assistance. Subsequently, ALCC has launched in our Southern, Eastern and Western regions.

Read the evaluation here: [Seeking Safety: Aboriginal Child Protection Diversion Trials Evaluation Final Report](#)



CASE STUDY

Following a report made to Child Protection, Jada* was referred to ALCC. After meeting with the VACCA case convenor, it was discovered that Jada was from a family who had experienced multiple generations of child removals, including herself being removed from family as a child. Jada was also living with other significant challenges, including escaping family violence, active drug use and homelessness.

ALCC stepped in to provide Jada with the wraparound support she needed, including assisting her to reconnect with family and advocating to the hospital on her behalf. With a judgement-free approach and by celebrating each success, Jada was able to stop using drugs, was supported into stable housing, and began to build a new life for herself and her unborn child.

After birth, baby left the hospital in Jada's care and is developing well. They are now connected to an Aboriginal playgroup, with baby attending a 'Welcome Baby to Country' ceremony to start a lifelong connection to culture.

**Name has been changed to protect client's privacy*

Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home

Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH) is an Aboriginal-led, systems-based approach aimed at keeping Aboriginal children at home with their parents. Developed in partnership with the University of Melbourne, BUABAH engages with mothers during pregnancy, and for up to six months post-birth, to provide wraparound support and intensive case management so babies can grow up safe at home.

The BUABAH program was piloted in the southern metropolitan Melbourne area through philanthropic support. The University of Melbourne's evaluation of the pilot found the program was successful in keeping six of the seven babies born with their families, with one baby placed in kinship care.

BUABAH is now being delivered in all VACCA regions. BUABAH can accept referrals from any source, and the expansion of the program includes a hospital engagement strategy to encourage referral of mothers into the program early in pregnancy.

Read the evaluation of the pilot program (2022-23) here:

[Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home: Program Evaluation](#)



Deadly Dads

VACCA's Deadly Dads program supports father figures of all kinds to come together in a culturally safe, supportive space.

The program welcomes Aboriginal dads, uncles, granddads and non-Aboriginal dads who care for Aboriginal children to meet and have open, honest yarns. Men discuss parenting skills and challenges, share tips and advice, and explore the strengthening influence of culture on a child's upbringing.

The program is jointly run by VACCA's Northern and Western regions at the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre in Wyndham Vale. The group meets monthly to further their understanding of early childhood development and parenting and explore what their roles look like in the home and as a parent or carer. Support is offered where necessary, and a wraparound, holistic service is provided.

The Deadly Dads program facilitates workshops including possum skin and didgeridoo burning to help participants engage in personal storytelling through traditional art practice. There are also regular yarning circles and mental health wellbeing sessions, helping men to connect more deeply with their cultural identity.

Education Support

Strong and Deadly Boorais

Currently running as a pilot program in VACCA's Northern, Eastern and Gippsland regions, Strong and Deadly Boorais (SDB) provides one-on-one education support from qualified teachers to children and young people in out-of-home care.

The program aims to close the gap on educational attainment and outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care who are at higher risk of experiencing disadvantage and poorer outcomes at school.

Through a culturally safe and trauma-informed approach, teachers support the young person to improve their literacy, numeracy, social and emotional skills. This is done in collaboration with the young person, their carer, the VACCA care team, their school and other key stakeholders to help develop achievable and authentic learning goals.

The program has already seen positive impacts and outcomes - 85 per cent of the young people have achieved (and exceeded) their initial learning goals, and we've seen a 70 per cent increase in school attendance.



CASE STUDY

After disengaging from school, 16-year-old Jim* was referred to the Strong and Deadly Boorais program. Jim had experienced unreliable and inconsistent relationships with the adults in his life and was involved with the justice system – but he was adamant that he wanted to change. Arriving at a positive, stable placement assisted Jim to begin a new trajectory.

Jim's tutor spent time listening to Jim's needs and identifying barriers that existed. As the relationship strengthened and Jim developed trust, they were able to work together to develop a plan and increase Jim's school attendance while reducing his justice involvement. The tutor became a great support for Jim's carer and Jim in communicating with the school.

Jim is now maintaining regular attendance at school and experiencing success in all subjects. Recently, he completed a work experience placement with a community youth organisation where he demonstrated strong aptitude and engagement. As a result, Jim was invited to apply for the position of Youth Ambassador with the local city council.

**Name has been changed to protect client's privacy*



Justice Programs

Koorie Men's and Women's Diversion Programs

VACCA's Koorie Men's Diversion Program and Balit Baggarrook Women's Diversion Program, based in our Northern region, support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have had, or are at risk of having, contact with the criminal justice system.

Our programs are culturally grounded and client-centred, meeting participants where they are and supporting them through complex and high-risk circumstances.

Case workers walk alongside each person to develop personalised goals and provide culturally appropriate support to help them achieve positive change. Through strong partnerships with internal VACCA services and a wide network of external agencies, the programs offer holistic and coordinated support. These partnerships include connections with Koori Court, legal aid organisations, family violence counselling, health services, housing support, and other specialist community agencies.

Through ongoing case management and advocacy, participants are empowered to make informed decisions and navigate legal, social and community systems with greater confidence.

Our approach is culturally strong and respectful, acknowledging each individual's unique story, lived experience and capacity for growth. This commitment reflects VACCA's dedication to self-determination, cultural safety, and creating long-term, positive outcomes for our communities.



Support for Stolen Generations

Link-Up Victoria

Link-Up Victoria supports Stolen Generations survivors to find and reunite with their families, reconnect with their culture and walk on their traditional Country as proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Link-Up also provides assistance to those searching for family members who were removed.

Link-Up 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 supporting them to reclaim their identity and culture, an essential part of the healing process. In 2024-2025, Link-Up supported five reunions for Stolen Generations survivors including facilitating family, gravesite, institution and return to Country reunions.

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.

In May, Link-Up held an event to commemorate National Sorry Day on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, with many Stolen Generations clients from across the state joining in a day of healing, storytelling and yarning.

By advocating on behalf of Stolen Generations and their families, continuing conversations around our nation's true history, and observing dates of remembrance, Link-Up supports Stolen Generations survivors to heal and ensure that their stories are never forgotten.

Family Violence Services

Yananganyin

Yananganyin (meaning 'we walk together' in Boonwurrung language) is our access point to the family violence and child wellbeing system for community in the Bayside Peninsula region. Yananganyin empowers users to navigate services by walking alongside them, providing culturally safe information, planning and support.

Our program staff, known as 'Journey Walkers', provide services to community, as well as non-Aboriginal family members and carers, who are experiencing or have experienced family violence; are at risk of using/at risk of family violence; or in need of care, development and wellbeing.

Journey Walkers provide advocacy and support which can include comprehensive safety planning and risk mitigation strategies, legal support, assistance with work and learning goals, and advocacy and liaison with Child Protection. We can also support with access to VACCA services and events, engagement with community, referrals to and assistance in accessing local services, and material support through the provision of household essentials, food relief and rental assistance.

Yananganyin takes a family-centred approach and promotes self-determination within families, identifying and building upon their individual strengths and abilities to promote a sense of self-worth and resilience.

CASE STUDY

After experiencing family violence, Bianca* self-referred to Yananganyin following an initial self-referral to The Orange Door. Bianca, who was raising young children, was juggling overdue bills, unstable housing and needed to access culturally safe medical supports.

After yarning with her, the Journey Walkers supported Bianca to set financial goals, provided referrals for medical and housing solutions, and made sure her children were enrolled in school and had uniforms. They assisted Bianca with rent and bill payments, food vouchers, support to attend medical appointments, and the purchase of a car seat for her youngest child.

Now, after working alongside the Journey Walkers, Bianca is on her way to achieving all the goals she set during her initial yarn. Through Ngwala's housing and homelessness program, Bianca was supported to find a safe place for her family to live. Yananganyin also helped Bianca to get the medical assistance she desperately needed, and her ongoing health is no longer a source of stress and anxiety. Bianca and her family are now living in a stable housing situation, and her children are regularly attending school.

**Name has been changed to protect client's privacy*

Family Violence Therapeutic

Our Family Violence Therapeutic (FVT) program operates across all six of VACCA's regions and support community members who have experienced family violence with individual counselling and therapeutic group work.

FVT provides holistic support for community members who live with the long-term impacts of family violence, supporting them on their healing journey. The program recognises that familial trauma, unhealed grief, loss and shame can be intergenerational and draws on the knowledge that strengthening cultural connection and pride in Aboriginal identity is a major protective factor against family violence.

FVT provides individual therapeutic counselling and group work that responds to the diversity and complexity within community. The program aims to support families to repair and heal by building on their sense of identity through cultural connection as well as providing information about the impacts of family violence. Our therapeutic practitioners work in partnership with community members to identify goals that are important to them and walk alongside them to achieve them.

All practitioners in the program have a comprehensive understanding of family violence and formal training on the causes and impacts of historical, intergenerational and individual trauma. This training enables them to ensure they embed physical, emotional and cultural safety for families during group and individual counselling sessions.

Therapeutic practitioners can also assist community members with risk assessments and safety plans needed to respond to family violence risks, often partnering with our Family Violence Case Management program to offer wraparound support.



Supporting Young People

Lubly Consent

The Lubly Consent project was developed to support young people aged 12-15 years, their parents, youth workers and teachers, to understand the new affirmative consent laws and legislation that commenced in 2023.

The project was designed by VACCA in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS), with funding from the Victorian Government. It included the development of resources such as information sheets, activities and videos outlining the age of consent, the meaning of 'affirmative' consent, stealthing, and harmful use of digital communications.

Training was delivered to over 160 VACCA and ACCO sector staff, building a strong network of culturally safe and informed facilitators to have safe and meaningful conversations with young people.

Working with ACCOs, including VALS, Djirra, Dardi Munwurro and Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service, equipped their staff with the knowledge and confidence to have responsive, culturally safe consent conversations with young people and contributed vital cultural knowledge, trust and connection with community.

Participants in our training program reported increased confidence and skills to support young people to make informed decisions, with 91 per cent stating that the cultural resources created greater ease in talking about sexual consent and relationships.

Take a look at our Lubly Consent resources here: [Lubly Consent - VACCA](#)

Family Services Youth Group

Based in our Northern region, VACCA's Family Services Youth Group (FSYG) provides a culturally safe and inclusive gathering space for school aged children and young people. Since launching in 2024, 30-40 young people meet each week to participate in cultural and wellbeing activities including arts, crafts, sports, music and cooking.

FSYG sessions are designed to support healing, emotional self-regulation and personal growth, as well as being fun and community-building. The program was developed in response to the clear and ongoing need for a consistent, culturally responsive youth group that offers safety, stability, and connection for mob. FSYG enables young people to come together, engage in meaningful cultural activities, and develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. It is designed to empower participants through positive experiences that support social, emotional and behavioural development.

Since FSYG launched, we have witnessed a profound impact on the young people who attend. We have observed significant improvements in emotional regulation, confidence, social skills, and the ability to form and maintain positive relationships. Participants are increasingly demonstrating leadership, empathy, and a willingness to uplift and support mob.

We have seen children with behavioural challenges and modified school timetables thrive within FSYG. This transformation speaks to the strength of culturally safe spaces – spaces where our young people are not just accepted but celebrated. At FSYG, young people are free to be themselves alongside other Koorie youth in community, finding joy and a deep sense of belonging through meaningful connection to culture.

Cultural Supports

Western VACCA Cultural Services

Our Western VACCA team has developed a range of deadly events and activities designed to strengthen community connections, celebrate culture and support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people, families and carers. Through these initiatives, we're creating safe and inclusive spaces where community can come together, share stories, and build pride in identity and culture.

Here are just a few examples of the amazing work happening in the west:

Wurrung of the Ngangwurra Project

Western VACCA, in partnership with Dhelk Dja, proudly delivered the Wurrung of the Ngangwurra (Yorta Yorta for 'Tongue of Heart') program to 47 young people aged 11–17 during the April and July school holidays.

This culturally grounded program was designed to strengthen the identity, sense of belonging and resilience of the young people involved by fostering connections to culture, Country, peers, and local Aboriginal services.

Workshops covered themes of healthy relationships, consent, wellbeing, CPR, and water safety. Activities included intergenerational learning with Elders (cultural cooking, traditional art, yarning and jewellery making), designing NAIDOC t-shirts, digeridoo carving and possum skin burning.

Closing the Gap Day

For the third consecutive year, Western VACCA's Community Engagement team has led an event for Closing the Gap Day in the west, hosting over 55 stall holders to provide information to community around support programs, health, education, employment and justice. Community members were also able to book health appointments and take advantage of free eyesight and hearing checks on the day.

Western VACCA Youth NAIDOC Ball

Western VACCA proudly hosted the 2025 Youth NAIDOC Ball with the support of Wyndham City Council. The event was attended by 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 11–17 from across the region.

The NAIDOC Ball provides a culturally safe space for young people to connect with peers, celebrate culture, and engage in the spirit and meaning of NAIDOC. Highlights of the night included the youth-led awards, cultural performances, and lifelong memories for the young people in attendance.





Yoorrook Walk for Truth Lunch and Community Information Session

The Yoorrook Walk for Truth Community Information Session was held to celebrate Commissioner Travis Lovett's journey walking from Portland to Parliament as part of the historic Walk for Truth. The event created a space for the western community to come together, share a meal, and yarn with Travis about the significance of the walk and its connection to truth-telling. Community members were given the rare opportunity to hold the message sticks being delivered to Parliament, symbolising their shared role in this important journey.

Welcome Baby to Country

Building upon the previous success of the program, Western VACCA have continued their collaboration with the local councils, maternal and child health services, ACCOs, and Koorie Education Support Officers to host Welcome Baby to Country ceremonies. The program continues to be popular with new families in the west, with 94 babies and children welcomed to Country in 2025.

Horticulture Group

In partnership with the Australian College of Agriculture and Horticulture, VACCA hosts a weekly horticulture group in Werribee South. This innovative program immerses participants in Indigenous food production techniques and native plant cultivation. The program provides hands-on experience in growing Indigenous plants, managing plant sales, and integrating traditional practices with modern technology. Upon completion, participants are awarded a Certificate IV in Production, specialising in Indigenous food production.

Brimbank Best Start Partnership

The Western Community Engagement team have long-lasting partnerships with many local council's Best Start programs. This year, our team was invited to the Brimbank Council annual forum, allowing us insight into the work Best Start programs are doing all over the state. We also attended a First Nations Culture training day with the Brimbank team, sharing their perspective on engaging with community and Aboriginal families through a cultural lens.



Financial Supports

Mangen Batjelan

Mangen Batjelan (meaning 'to build money' in Yorta Yorta) supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to build confidence and control with money. Grounded in four pillars – knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes – Mangen Batjelan offers a culturally safe journey to financial wellbeing.

On the launch of the program, the Mangen Bajelan team engaged with VACCA staff across the organisation to better understand the needs of community surrounding money.

Through yarning, clients are supported to explore their individual 'money story' - understanding how money works in their life right now. Together, we set money goals and plan steps to make this happen. This could include managing regular household bills or ways to deal with complex debt. We also support clients to access relevant concessions and grants.

By strengthening each client's money story, Mangen Batjelan works to improve self-worth and self-esteem, build confidence, alleviate 'shame' around money and support economic security and wellbeing for community.





OUR WAY

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care

Nugel

VACCA's Nugel (meaning 'belong' in Woiwurrung) was Victoria's first 'Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care' (ACAC) program, supporting children and young people on Child Protection orders. Using an Aboriginal-led approach, Nugel workers walk alongside families to strengthen safety together – actively supporting families to build their parenting capacity and reclaim their rightful roles in the care, protection and guidance of their own children.

In 2024-25, we have expanded Nugel to our Southern region and we now operate a total of ten teams across five VACCA regions – Northern, Western and Southern, Gippsland and Ovens Murray. Our expansion has increased our capacity and we can now work with up to 360 children and their families at any one time, helping to restore circles of care that have been a part of the Aboriginal way of protecting children since the times of the ancestors.

CASE STUDY

Jayden* experienced an unstable childhood characterised by parental substance use and exposure to family violence. He was removed from his parents' care and authorised to Nugel at 13 years old.

Over the years, Jayden had been in multiple placements including residential care. Jayden began engaging in high risk-behaviours and was reportedly absent from his current placement on most nights, leading to the placement breaking down.

Nugel became aware that Jayden was staying with his mum on the nights he was absent from his placement. Seeking out a relationship with family is common, so Nugel ensured Jayden was supported in this process by arranging a visit to see if reunification was possible.

Jayden had difficulties forming connections in the past, but Nugel observed a positive shift towards building strong connections with his family. This was an important first step in facilitating Jayden's journey to healing and after Nugel assessed that reunification was possible, the family were eager to have him at home.

To assist Jayden's transition, Nugel wrapped supports around the family including accessing our Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response (AFPRR) team and Targeted Care Packages (TCP) program. Nugel helped the family to access counselling and supported ongoing work with services already involved including alcohol and family violence services. The support Nugel provided enabled Jayden to return home and live safely in the care of family.

**Name has been changed to protect client's privacy*

CASE STUDY

Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais accepted the transfer of a protective intervention report in relation to a 3-week-old baby due to family violence concerns. Parents Shani* and Ryan* were young, had intellectual disabilities and experienced complex trauma associated with growing up in the child protection system.

Shani and Ryan did not have role models or opportunities in their lives that allowed them to learn what safe, nurturing relationships could look like. At times they struggled to understand and distinguish between harmful and healthy dynamics.

While engaging with the family to understand their story, Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais found that Shani was determined to keep her baby at home. She consistently engaged with supports including with her VACCA family violence worker and Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH) practitioner, and also regularly attended mother's groups.

Unfortunately, Ryan was not able to engage with his supports and despite attempts to facilitate safe family time, he continued to use family violence towards Shani. Over time, with psychosocial education from her supports, Shani was able to understand the impact of the violence on baby and acknowledge the patterns of abuse she was experiencing.

Following a significant family violence incident, Shani ultimately chose to leave the relationship. With the collaborative efforts and support of Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais and BUABAH, alongside Djirra, Shani and baby were supported to enter refuge accommodation.

Since entering refuge, both Shani and baby are thriving and are safe from family violence. Because of Shani's commitment, Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais were able to walk alongside Shani, working voluntarily and collaboratively to strengthen safety together and ensure she had the right supports in place to keep baby at home – without the need for statutory protective intervention through the Court.

**Name has been changed to protect client's privacy*

Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais

Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais is part of our Nugel program and builds on Nugel's successful family strengthening and reunification work. Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais is a statutory, Aboriginal-led alternative to investigating Child Protection reports. The program connects with children and families who are the subject of a protective intervention report to understand their story, assess safety concerns, and where necessary, step-in to ensure the safety of children.

In 2024-25, Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais worked alongside 119 children from 63 families, exceeding the 12-month target set by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). We supported a significant number of these families with referrals to our Family Services and Family Violence teams, ensuring families had access to ongoing, culturally safe supports. In this period, we also saw legislation passed in parliament enabling the authorisation of non-Aboriginal siblings to our care, ensuring sibling groups can be kept together.

Gamadji Balit

Gamadji Balit (meaning 'emerge strong' in Woiwurrung language) is our new Aboriginal-led model of residential care that recognises the need for a model of care founded on connection to culture and therapeutic, trauma-informed practice as the cornerstones of healing and self-determination.

Gamadji Balit was developed through an extensive consultation process including internal staff, other ACCOs, local community groups, and young people and families with lived/living experience of residential care. Through this process, five key principles and seven objectives were developed to guide our practice.

Objectives

- Building secure home relationships
- Pathways to emerging strong
- Developing a strong mind
- Strengthening Aboriginal Identity
- Connecting to services and local community
- Strengthening family relationships
- Establishing education and employment pathways

Principles

- My Cultural Journey, My Voice
- Connection and Engagement with Family and Kin
- Connection to Country
- Mutual Cultural Respect
- Collective Responsibility



Gamadji Balit provides a safe, culturally grounded space for young people who are unable to live at home or in a care placement. Each young person's experience is shaped by their cultural plan, ensuring they have a pathway to explore their Aboriginal identity and engage in cultural activities and events. They are supported to strengthen their relationships to family and kin, establish employment and educational pathways to prepare them for the future, and stay connected to community and local services.

With our Aboriginal-led approach, Gamadji Balit works to heal and empower young people to leave care with the strength and confidence they need in their journey ahead – to truly 'emerge strong'.





Strengthening Cultural Knowledge

Cultural Therapeutic Ways

After many years of dedicated work, the Cultural Therapeutic Ways (CTW) project is coming to a close – marking a powerful shift towards establishing a clear link between the work we do and the outcomes we need to achieve.

CTW was developed over a period of six years, capturing VACCA's experience to contribute to building an Aboriginal evidence base. Though the ideas behind CTW are not new, documenting and embedding them across the organisation has been a major step forward.

The *CTW Outcomes Framework* and *CTW Practice Framework: Our Work, Our Ways* are the two key pieces that guide this work as CTW brings an Aboriginal lens to practice and outcomes.

We are now implementing CTW across the organisation using a range of resources - including films, written documents and integrated learning packages – to inform program design and delivery, support our staff, and work with community.

This has been a significant project and will continue to showcase our point of difference and enable us to build an Aboriginal evidence base of our programs and practice and demonstrate the impact of our work for community.

So much more in-depth than other trauma-informed trainings, and beautifully interwoven with the Indigenous cultural lens.

External Training

VACCA's External Training team delivers a range of training programs to organisations, government and individuals, particularly those working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and community.

Strengthening Cultural Connections

The Strengthening Cultural Connections training officially launched on 8 April 2025, replacing the existing Nikara's Journey training. This two-day training program offers a safe and supportive learning space for carers to better understand the needs of Aboriginal children and understand why it's so important for them to grow up with a strong sense of pride and knowledge of their cultural identity.

Waterways – Culturally Responsive and Trauma Informed Practice (Victoria and Tasmania)

The Waterways project was a national initiative, funded by the Department of Social Services. It was designed to support the embedding of cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed practices across Australia's child and family services. The project's goal was to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's overrepresentation in out-of-home care by enhancing cultural awareness, improving practices, and strengthening early intervention to keep families together. This project was delivered in partnership with peak ACCOs across the country including SNAICC, AbSec (NSW), QATSIPP (QLD) and Kornar Winmil Yunti (SA). In total, the project trained almost 2,000 child and family workers across Australia.

Training Sessions Delivered:

Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training

- 89 sessions
- 1,738 participants

Nikara's Journey/Strengthening Cultural Connections

- 15 sessions
- 232 participants

Waterways Project

- 7 online sessions
- 7 sessions delivered in Victoria
- 2 sessions delivered in Tasmania
- 258 participants

The facilitators created a space of honesty, vulnerability, and safety. The stories shared will stay with me.



“Thank you so much for putting this training together and sharing so much with us. A must do for anyone living, working or studying in so-called Australia. Should be mandatory to undertake, I believe.”

Connecting to Culture

Cultural Camps

Our Deadly Cultural Camps play a key role in keeping young people in care connected to culture and Country. Camps provide them with an opportunity to explore their culture through activities and time spent with Elders and on Country. In 2024-25, we supported 78 registrations over 5 camp visits, facilitating these young people to strengthen their connection to culture and find pride in their identity.

The cultural camp held in April 2025 focused on building a meaningful partnership between young people and Victoria Police by welcoming the presence of their Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers (PALOs), who were led by Aunty Eva Jo Edwards. This initiative was implemented with the intention of breaking down barriers and reducing the stigma and fear many young people in community face when coming into contact with police.

The young people and PALOs enjoyed their time socialising together without fear or judgement. Having learnt more about one another, the young people left the experience with a new view of the police.





Art Mentoring

Our Art Mentoring program is open to all community members with a passion for art. In 2024, we supported 20 to 25 participants in each session, whose ages ranged from 12 to 20.

The program connects participants with established Aboriginal artists from across Australia to explore a wide range of art forms. We focus on helping participants grow their passion for art and explore the many different styles and techniques used by the invited artists.

At the end of the program, participants have the opportunity to present their creations at their own exhibition. This event not only allows them to showcase and sell their work but also celebrates their artistic growth, creativity and the skills they've developed throughout the program. It's a proud moment where family, friends, and community members can come together to support and appreciate their achievements.



Koorie Tiddas Choir

The Koorie Tiddas Choir works to build the self-esteem, confidence, identity and resilience of Aboriginal girls and young women through connection to their culture and community.

The choir, with around 20 girls aged 8 to 13 regularly attending, is an after-school activity with opportunities to learn traditional languages, develop music skills and, eventually, to perform in front of an audience.

Young people in the program were mentored by Aboriginal musicians, including Kristel Kickett, Maylene Yinarr, Kee'Ahn Bindol and Phoebe Elsworth; they helped the girls to write their own songs and gain confidence in performing. The young people have now performed at different festivals in Melbourne, gaining pride, confidence and strength.



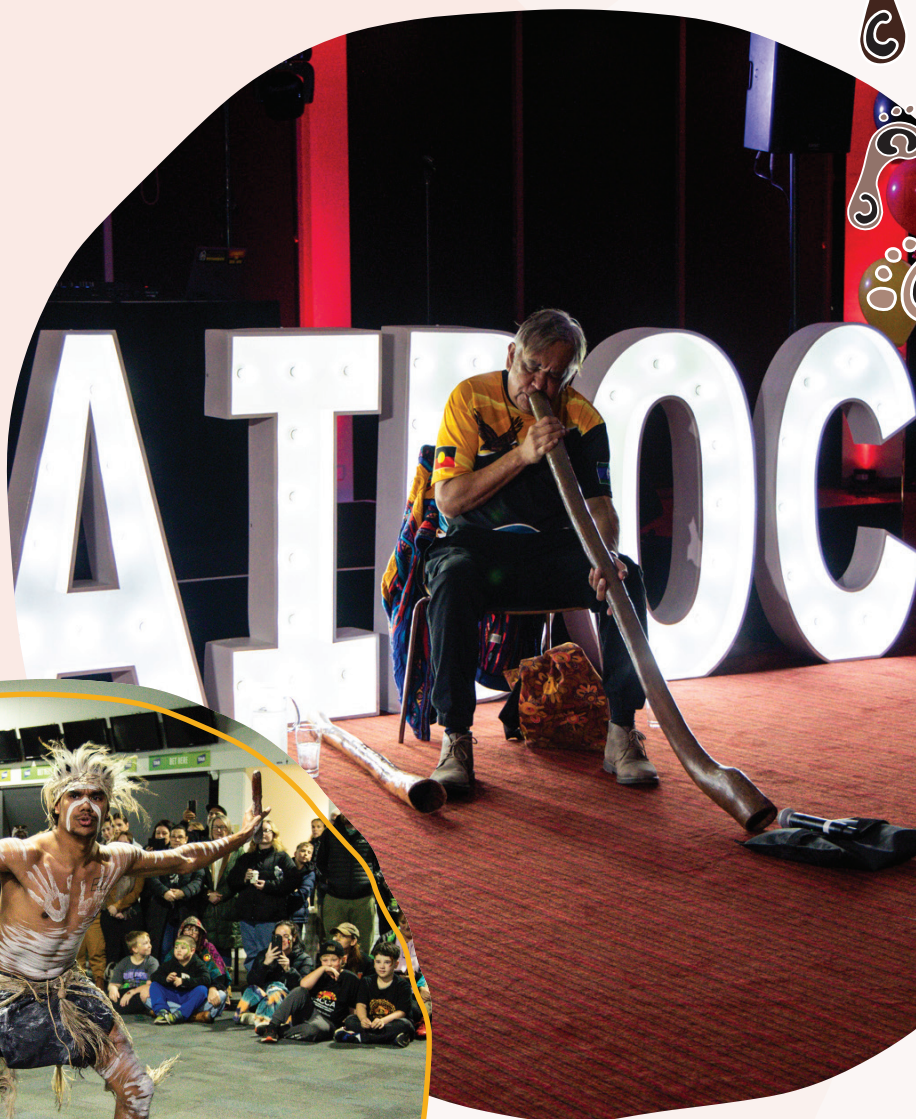
NAIDOC Week

The Next Generation: Strength, Vision and Legacy

Each year, NAIDOC Week is a time to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and excellence. In 2025, we marked an important milestone for NAIDOC Week – 50 years of recognising and elevating the voices, culture and remarkable resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This year's theme was 'The Next Generation: Strength, Vision & Legacy', inspiring us to not only celebrate the past, but to look ahead to the future. It reminded us to draw on the wisdom and strength of our ancestors and Elders, while encouraging us to look ahead to the next generation of Aboriginal leaders who will take us forward and continue to fight for truth, justice, equality and self-determination.

During NAIDOC Week, we hosted a series of events across our regions, bringing together hundreds of children, young people, families and carers. These gatherings created meaningful opportunities for connection and cultural celebration, showcasing the strength, resilience and unity of community while inspiring the next generation of strong, proud, and courageous Aboriginal leaders.





Building an Aboriginal Evidence Base

Research and Evidence Development

VACCA's Research and Evidence Development (RED) team worked on over 40 research and evaluation projects during the year. This included an evaluation of Gamadji Balit, our new model of Residential Care; and Our Mob, Our Measures, a partnership with Melbourne University to develop an outcomes measurement tool for family violence programs for Aboriginal women.

After receiving a Lowitja Major Research Grant in 2024, VACCA began an internal evaluation of the Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais program in partnership with the Indigenous Child Protection Hub, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Research and Education at the University of Technology Sydney. VACCA also began an evaluation of its Pre-birth Response Model (Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing and the BUABAH program) in partnership with the University of Melbourne.

Knowledge Translation

VACCA expanded its knowledge translation work through the publication of a journal article, *Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care: Transforming the landscape of Child Protection in Australia*, published in the Journal of Genealogy in June 2025. At the Outcomes Practice Network (OPEN) Symposium in 2024 we ran a session focused on the Aboriginal evidence base, and in 2025 conducted five presentations at the Lowitja Conference on Indigenous Health and Wellbeing.

Community Data Project

Drawing on community direction, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Community Data Project plan was completed. The plan embeds Indigenous Data-Sovereignty principles through three interconnected activity streams:

- Community data partnerships: The relationship with data custodians.
- Community implementation: Ensuring community strength is at the heart of the data and information.
- Partnership monitoring, accountability and reporting: The oversight and analysis of outcomes.

The streams enable data-sovereignty to support empowered, shared decision making.



ADVOCACY AND REFORM

Aboriginal Community of Care

Aboriginal Community of Care is our vision for an Aboriginal-led child and family services system. VACCA is advocating for the transformation of the state-led system to a community of care approach that embeds Aboriginal ways of being and doing, and uses positive, cultural and humanising language that families can understand.

An Aboriginal Community of Care model would see:

- All services for Aboriginal children and families are designed by ACCOs.
- All services for Aboriginal children and families are delivered by ACCOs.
- All decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of children at risk is made by ACCOs in partnership with a child's family.
- The legal framework for the provision of services and for making decisions is designed by ACCOs.

The Aboriginal Community of Care Model

The model uses a dual language approach, including both cultural terms that reflect and prioritise our own unique practice approach, alongside terms commonly used in the child protection system.

The components of an integrated Aboriginal Community of Care system across the continuum of care are:

1. Strong & Deadly Communities ('Early Help')

Offering a variety of programs, including Cultural Camps, art mentoring, community events, parenting groups, youth groups, supported play groups, and therapeutic groups to help us to connect with families that are looking for support, advocacy and community.

2. Pathways to Safety and Healing: Keeping Families Together ('Secondary Child & Family Services')

Working in partnership with families to ensure they have access to strong and culturally safe programs to support the care of their children and to prevent statutory involvement. Under a Community of Care model, all Aboriginal families who are subject to a child protection report would be referred to an ACCO to best support safety, healing and keeping families together.

3. Yarn ('Intake')

An Aboriginal model for receiving reports about the safety and wellbeing of children includes parental involvement in referrals, increased community involvement in decision-making, and conferencing to inform assessments about risk and support. Yarning is essential for community and families to develop their own solutions and build on cultural healing.

4. Understanding Story ('Investigation')

Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais brings a culturally informed response to the investigation of reports made about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children. We connect with children, family and community to determine how best to respond to relevant issues.

5. Stepping In and Strengthening Safety Together ('Protective Intervention')

When it is necessary, we step in to ensure the safety of a child. Inspired by 'Big Aunty Energy', we use love and care alongside a firm, no-nonsense approach to speak hard truths while focusing on hope. We apply our Strengthening Safety Together framework and resource tools to guide information gathering, analysis and decision-making processes.

6. Strong Steps for Boorais ('Protection Order')

This phase occurs if a Children's Court order has been issued. We focus on increasing parental involvement and decision making in care plans. We ensure families have access to intensive services to support the restoration back to their care. When the time is right, families can walk on ahead without the need for statutory intervention in their lives.

7. Circles of Care ('Out of Home Care')

Circles of Care sees the maintenance and strengthening of connection to culture, Country and community as the pathway to belonging and the key to breaking future cycles. These circles prioritise care arrangements that involve family and children remaining on Country.

8. Stepping out ('Leaving Care')

The final phase supports families to move forward and regain full control and decision-making power. We celebrate success and acknowledge the work of family and community. Stepping out is about respecting family as they claim or reclaim their rightful roles in the care, protection and guidance of their own children.

Closing the Gap Treaty

VACCA continues to advocate for all Closing the Gap (CTG) targets and outcomes to be met, and we work across all levels of government to make representations and provide strategic advice and guidance on how to close the gap for our community.

We participate in Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum, as well as contributing to consultations on the CTG Implementation Plan. Through our advocacy, we seek to hold governments to account on meeting these critical targets for the benefit of the children, families and communities we serve.

Nationally, CTG outcomes are falling behind expectations. Figures are continuing to worsen for four CTG targets: adult imprisonment, children in out-of-home-care, suicide, and children being developmentally on track. Six targets are improving but not yet on track: life expectancy, healthy birthweights, year 12 (or equivalent) education, tertiary qualifications, youth engagement, and appropriately sized housing.

There are just four targets that are considered improving and on track: preschool program enrolments, employment, and land mass and sea country subject to legal rights and interests. The CTG target aiming to reduce the number of young people in detention has been assessed as having no change from the baseline year (2018-19).

The state of Victoria shows improvement for most targets, but is worsening against target 12, with an increasing number of children entering the out-of-home care system. We recognise and continue to advocate that funding allocated to ACCOs for service delivery is the most effective way to close the gap and create a fair and equal future for our children and young people.

In 2024-25 the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria moved at a rapid pace to progress Victoria's first Statewide Treaty, including three Statewide ACCO Treaty Forums, an Expert Panel on Strengthening Culture, Communities and Families, and a Sector Design Working Group to consult with ACCOs about how the future Aboriginal Representative Body will work with ACCOs in the Treaty era.

VACCA has dedicated significant time and resources to this process to ensure Victoria's first Treaty is the best possible for all Aboriginal people living in Victoria. VACCA has produced and shared extensive materials on self-determination including a framework for completing the transformation of a State-led child and families service sector to an ACCO-led Aboriginal Community of Care. Leading the way with half a century of activism, we have championed the roles of all ACCOs to participate and be recognised and strengthened by Treaty.

VACCA will continue to seek and create every opportunity to advance the interests of the Aboriginal community of Victoria through the relationships built with government and the public sector over decades. We look forward to working in partnership with the future Aboriginal Representative Body to advance the rights of all Aboriginal people in Victoria.





OUR SUPPORTERS

Fundraising

Our Fundraising team connects with supporters from across the country, raising vital funds to ensure the children and families we work alongside are connected to culture, community and Country. Donations, bequests and grants go directly towards funding essential programs, events and resources.

Here's how our donors have made a difference:

Cultural Programs

VACCA's Morning Tea for Culture, Run Melbourne and Melbourne Marathon raise funds toward NAIDOC events and cultural programs like our deadly Cultural Camps. NAIDOC events bring communities and families together to reflect and celebrate the strength of Aboriginal culture, while our Cultural Camps support young people in care to connect with peers and Elders, strengthen their connection to culture, and develop leadership skills.

Emergency Relief

Our Winter Appeal in June 2025 was our most successful yet. This enabled us to provide essential emergency relief to community members in need by means of food hampers, blankets, and access to vouchers for clothing and transport.

Our Ovens Murray and Gippsland regions are totally reliant on these fundraising and philanthropy efforts for emergency relief, making the critical work they perform impossible to continue without ongoing support.

Giving the magic of Christmas

The 2024 Christmas Appeal raised funds and provided gifts for the children and young people involved with VACCA's programs. Supporting our Christmas events enables children and families across the state to connect with community and culture – as well as being able to look forward to a special visit from Koorie Santa. We're also able to provide extra support to address food insecurity and cost of living pressures for families.

Our fundraising in 2024-25 has enabled:

- More than 2,600 children and families to attend our NAIDOC week events across the state.
- Koorie Santa helping us to deliver over 3,200 presents to children and young people in care in time for Christmas.
- Our Emergency Relief program to support more than 6,000 families and children.



Financial Report

VACCA continues to grow, although at a slower rate than in previous years. Revenue increased by 10 per cent in this financial year compared with 18 per cent in the prior year.

VACCA recorded a net operating deficit of \$1.7 million. This is the first time in over a decade and is indicative of tighter funding, rising costs, and an increasingly complex operating environment.

Continued expansion of Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care, the transferring of Aboriginal children to VACCA's responsibility under the Victorian Government's Stronger Families: Closing the Gap initiative, remains the largest growth factor for the organisation into the future. Further VACCA program initiatives to support Closing the Gap include Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC), Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH), and Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais. VACCA continues to advocate strongly for proportionate funding and target transfers.

It is expected that the Victorian Government's Roadmap for 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 2025

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Total Income	163,264,755	147,707,872
Total Expenses	165,011,438	146,186,626
Total comprehensive (loss)/income for the year attributable to members of VACCA	(\$1,746,683)	1,521,246

Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at 30 June 2025

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Total Current Assets	52,007,401	64,086,156
Total Non-Current Assets	51,206,977	29,854,701
Total Assets	103,214,378	93,940,857
Total Current Liabilities	49,514,997	49,784,134
Total Non-Current Liabilities	29,706,285	18,416,944
Total Liabilities	79,221,282	68,201,078
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	23,993,096	25,739,779
Total Equity	23,993,096	25,739,779

Gross Operating Income compared to the previous year increased by 10 percent - from \$147.7 million to \$163.3 million.

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 of Victoria, 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, National Indigenous Australians Agency.

Corporate Sponsors

AMC Commercial Cleaning, Fee Synergy, Kinetic, oOh!media, JC Decaux.

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:



THANK YOU

Thank you to our donors, funders and corporate partners for their continued support this year.

With your help, we are able to continually innovate and evolve our programs and services for Aboriginal communities across Victoria, including many of our culturally-led programs which are only made possible with your generous support. Thank you for believing in our work and for allowing us to demonstrate the strength of Aboriginal-led solutions.

If you, your workplace, school or group would like to fundraise, leave a gift in your will or support a particular program through a Reconciliation Action Plan, corporate social responsibility or environmental social governance programs, please contact us at supportus@vacca.org or call **03 9287 8800**.

To support our work and make a tax-deductible donation please visit vacca.org/donate.

VACCA Shop

Our shop sells a range of Aboriginal-designed merchandise and educational resources. All proceeds from the sale of these items goes to supporting vital programs for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Visit vacca.org/shop or email resources@vacca.org.

Show your support

For more information about how to support VACCA visit: vacca.org/support-us.





Contact and Feedback

Become a Member

We invite all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years and over to become VACCA Members. Membership provides the opportunity to share your voice on key issues which affect community, connect with one another, and have input on VACCA's operation. Membership also includes voting rights at our Annual General Meeting. For more information on membership, or to sign up, visit 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.

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, Suite 6/405
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

186-188 High Street
Wodonga VIC 3690
p. (03) 8373 1710



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

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Connected by culture

VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY