



Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-Op. Ltd

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# **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) submission in response to:**

## **The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence**

### **June 2015**

#### **More Information:**

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## **Background to the Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)**

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children, young people, families and the community. VACCA provides a range of services to the Aboriginal community particularly children and family services to support their wellbeing, safety and to strengthen Aboriginal culture and encourage best parenting practices. Also VACCA provides, re-unification services to Stolen Generations advise government and community services organizations in relation to issues effecting the community including child abuse and neglect. VACCA is a statewide Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation whose purpose is to advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children, young people families and the community, and provide them with services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.

VACCA's planning, program design and decision making processes prioritise the voice of Aboriginal people to ensure our approach and services meet the needs of the Community. VACCA has been operating since 1977, providing culturally responsive, safe and accessible services to the Community. VACCA has grown from an agency of less than 20 staff in its formative years to its current staffing of just over 300. We are currently located across Victoria with our larger service sites located in the north, south, east and west of Melbourne as well as in inner Gippsland and we are able to respond to a variety of needs of these Aboriginal Communities. VACCA offers a range of culturally relevant, quality services in each of these areas.

VACCA has significant experience in the delivery of services across the universal, specialist and statutory platforms including:

- Information, advice and referral services
- parenting services
- financial literacy services
- intensive child and family services and out-of-home care services
- education support services
- cultural and Community strengthening group programs
- clinical healing programs across all service types
- family violence services, including crisis accommodation, outreach and case management
- homelessness services
- drug and alcohol services (in development)
- Stolen Generations services
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse support service
- Group based programs

- Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) (this service provides an Aboriginal perspective on risk to Child Protection)

VACCA is governed by a Community elected Aboriginal Board who set the direction for the organisation's strategic plan and the programs and services we deliver to the Aboriginal Community in Victoria. The Board also monitors and provides oversight to the compliance management of services.

We have a proven track record in successfully managing, developing and implementing large scale complex projects, such as the development of the Aboriginal Cultural Competence framework, the Culturally Informed Addendum to the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Standards Evidence Guide and the Orana Gunyah Crisis Accommodation and Support Service – a state-wide culturally appropriate service response to Aboriginal women and children escaping or experiencing family violence based in Morwell, Victoria. Our staff are highly skilled in undertaking culturally appropriate case planning processes that identify objectives and goals of intervention. Notably, the Department of Health and Human Services has commissioned VACCA to develop a range of service models for other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across Victoria, for example, Case contracting guidelines for Aboriginal agencies, Aboriginal kinship care service model and Aboriginal therapeutic foster care model.

VACCA is a leader in the development of cultural resources that support mainstream organisations and government and non-Aboriginal staff and carers to build cultural sensitivity and to deliver culturally relevant and informed services for Aboriginal children and families. Examples include:

- Building respectful partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services (2010)
- Aboriginal cultural competence framework (2008)
- Working with Aboriginal children and families: a guide for child protection and child and family welfare workers (2006)
- Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care
- Culturally Informed Addendum to the DHHS Standards Evidence Guide (2015)

Furthermore, VACCA has a strong record of engaging in a partnership approach when working with governments, community services, research institutes and the Aboriginal Community. Our leadership role and the development of partnerships over time have influenced systematic change and contributed significantly to our evolution as an agency.

VACCA believes that all children have a right to feel and be safe and to live in an environment that is free from abuse, neglect and violence. VACCA is committed to promoting and upholding the right of Aboriginal children to maintain and celebrate their identity and culture,

recognising that connection to culture is critical for children's emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

## **Introduction**

VACCA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria. The Terms of Reference of the Royal Commission, which importantly make specific mention of children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, aims to ensure that we have a comprehensive view of family violence in Victoria at the end of its twelve month investigation. We welcome the focus on service systems and how they can better coordinate and collaborate for better results. We believe that these issues are vital to improving the safety, health and wellbeing of all Victorian children and their families.

VACCA's submission is based on our unique position as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) which provides services in both the family violence and child protection areas and more broadly to vulnerable community members. Our submission focuses on areas where VACCA believes our knowledge and experience enable us to make a valuable contribution. As such, our submission will respond to select issues outlined in numbers 1-3 of the Inquiry's terms of reference under the umbrella of number 6; that is:

1. *Examine and evaluate strategies, frameworks, policies, programs and services across government and local government, media, business and community organisations and establish best practice for:*
  - a. *The prevention of family violence;*
  - b. *Early intervention to identify and protect those at risk of family violence and prevent the escalation of violence;*
  - c. *Support for victims of family violence and measures to address the impacts on victims, particularly on women and children; and*
  - d. *Perpetrator accountability;*
2. *Investigate the means of having systemic responses to family violence, particularly in the legal system and by police, corrections, child protection, legal and family violence support services, including reducing re-offending and changing violent and controlling behaviours*
3. *Investigate how government agencies and community organisations can better integrate and coordinate their efforts;*

*Considering*

6. *The needs and experiences of people affected by family violence with particular regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

Our submission offers the following observations, issues, recommendations and priority actions particularly as they pertain to the Victorian Aboriginal community in which we work.

## **Family violence in the Aboriginal community**

Family violence is never acceptable and it causes great harm and hurt. Family violence is not a part of, and never has been a part of, Aboriginal culture and it undermines the pivotal role families play in protecting our children, and passing on our culture. Aboriginal cultural ways are based on strong families and kinship systems. Particularly in an Aboriginal context the impact of family violence is felt throughout extended families, kinship networks and community. VACCA and indeed our community is strongly concerned about the impact of violence on children and their levels of exposure to violence.

It is important to understand family violence from an Aboriginal perspective. The agreed definition of Aboriginal family violence is that provided by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report:

*An issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one on one fighting, abuse of Aboriginal community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide (2003, p.123).*

The Aboriginal definition of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in the mainstream context. Family violence includes intergenerational violence and abuse, and its impacts on extended families and kinship networks. Community violence is an ongoing concern within Aboriginal communities across Victoria. This violence contributes to overall levels of violence reported by Aboriginal people and the trauma experienced within families and kinship groups. Another key consideration is that an individual can be both a perpetrator and a victim of family violence.

Family violence service providers and the broader family violence and intersecting sectors need to have an understanding and be more inclusive of the Aboriginal definition to ensure the delivery of culturally sensitive and respectful services to the Victorian Aboriginal community.

### **Overview of family violence statistics**

Whilst the data for Aboriginal children is stark when compared to all Australian children we know however that there are many Aboriginal children who are doing well. All the evidence suggests where there are strong Aboriginal families with strong networks and strong cultural base children thrive.

The number of Aboriginal children in the community that are exposed to violence is deeply concerning and is significantly over-represented compared to non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal Australians experience violence at rates well above those of non-Aboriginal

Australians and a greater proportion of violent incidents in Aboriginal communities are family violence-related. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Final Report included that *“1 in 3 Indigenous people are the victim, have a relative who is a victim or witness an act of violence on a daily basis in our communities across Victoria”* (2003, Foreword).

- One in five Aboriginal young people aged 15 to 24 years have experienced physical violence in the last 12 months. Only one in three young people reported their most recent experience of violence to police (DEECD, 2010). Aboriginal people in Victoria are eight times more likely to be a victim of family violence. Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to be victims of family violence than non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal people are hospitalised as a result of partner violence at 34 times the rate of non-Aboriginal people. Family Violence escalates to homicide in Aboriginal situations at double the rate of non-Aboriginal family violence. Aboriginal women are 25 times more likely to be killed or injured because of family violence than non-Aboriginal women.
- The number of Aboriginal women reporting violence by a current partner were 1.2 (NSW), 1.6 (SA) and 2.2 (NT) times the rates for non-Aboriginal women. The number of Aboriginal women reporting sexual assault by a family member were 1.4 (QLD), 1.5 (NSW and SA) and 3.8 (NT) times the rates for non-Aboriginal women. These figures cannot be provided in Victoria as the police incident data is not available, an issue in itself.
- In 2012-13, the rate of Aboriginal children and women aged 10 years and over accessing Specialist Homelessness Services and escaping family violence (359 clients per 10 000 population) was 10 times the rate for female non-Aboriginal clients (34 clients per 10 000 population).
- Aboriginal people are disproportionately victims and offenders in homicide incidents. The rate of both victimisation and offending by Aboriginal people was approximately five times higher than that of non-Aboriginal people (Bryant & Cussen 2015). The majority of Aboriginal homicides occurred between family members in the context of domestic conflict.
- A recent SNAICC study found that Aboriginal children were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical violence against their mother or stepmother than non-Aboriginal children. 42% of Aboriginal young people reported witnessing violence against their mother or stepmother compared with 23% of all children.

### **Causes of family violence in Aboriginal communities**

The legacy of colonization, has continued to impact on Aboriginal people today. Currently, children who are removed from their families are known to experience poor social, physical, psychological, economic and well-being outcomes.

For Aboriginal people the legacy of colonization and Stolen Generations means disadvantage at a whole of community level.



There are a number of vulnerabilities that increase the likelihood of people being victims or perpetrators of violent offences and these factors are more pronounced for Aboriginal people.

The data is unequivocal, Aboriginal people continue to experience high levels of disadvantage compared with the non-Aboriginal community (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Bowes & Grace, 2014; Close the Gap, 2014; Council of Australian Governments, 2009; Lohar, Butera & Kennedy, 2014; Price-Robertson, 2011). This is an important contributing factor to the over-representation of family violence in the Aboriginal community.

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIS)*, identifies that family stress (experienced by self, family or friends) is high in Victorian Aboriginal households, with nearly 80% experiencing one or more life stressors (this is almost double that for non-Aboriginal households). Further it notes that stress related to mental illness, serious illness and alcohol and drug related problems are more likely to be experienced by Victorian Aboriginal people. There is a growing prevalence of alcohol and substance abuse among Aboriginal young people, particularly in the areas of Gippsland and western Melbourne.

Racism is one of the causes of family violence because it is a contributing factor to high levels of distress within Aboriginal communities, which may lead to substance abuse, self-harm and violence. This means that ongoing racism limits the effectiveness of prevention activities.

The impact of past policies and practices on Aboriginal people, colonisation, dispossession, loss of traditional land and language, loss of culture, loss of traditional social structures and controls including child rearing practices, and break down of traditional gender roles, and racism, contribute to the ongoing social and economic disadvantage within Aboriginal communities, which in turn is linked to the risk factors for violent behaviour (Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework).

Aboriginal communities are disproportionately impacted by violence. Family violence within Aboriginal communities must be understood within the context of colonization and its impacts and past policies of forced removal of Aboriginal children and assimilation as it is this history still impacting today combined with structural inequalities of poverty and systemic racism that contribute to the over-representation of family violence within Aboriginal communities. This also means that to address this over representation both poverty and racism experienced by Aboriginal communities needs to be addressed to see meaningful and lasting change to the devastating family violence statistics and its impacts on children, women, men and communities.

### **Family violence, Child Protection and out of home care systems**

Today, Aboriginal young people continue to be over-represented in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems. In Victoria, current rates of Aboriginal child removal are greater than across other jurisdictions. Taskforce 1,000 was established early in 2014, based on the

approximately 1,000 Aboriginal children and young people currently living in out-of-home care in Victoria<sup>1</sup>. This has risen dramatically in the last five years; in 2008 there were 660 Aboriginal children in out of home care.

The following data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS, 2014) highlights the significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in Victoria's protection and care. In Victoria Aboriginal children were:

- almost 10 (9.4) times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be the subject of a child protection substantiation (68.6 compared with 7.3 per 1,000 children)
- over 15 (15.6) times more likely than non- Aboriginal children to be on care and protection orders (82.0 compared with 5.3 per 1,000 children)
- more than 15 (15.7) times more likely than non- Aboriginal children to be in out of home care (69.5 compared with 4.4 per 1,000) (AIHW, 2014) at more than twice the rate of non-Aboriginal young people.

Unless children and young people are able to heal from their own experiences of trauma, many will go on to recreate these conditions and the cycle of intergenerational trauma will continue<sup>2</sup>. The VERSO report into children living in residential care found that children who had access to therapeutic interventions had demonstrably better outcomes than children without this intervention (VERSO Consulting 2011).

Family violence and alcohol and drug use are the key factors in Aboriginal children coming into the care of DHHS (Taskforce 1000). Family violence is one the predominant contributing factors driving child protection intervention and the removal of children from family and placement in OOHC.

Children and young people's experiences of family violence prior to entering OOHC extend across the spectrum of family violence and through all stages of child and adolescent development. Children's exposure to family violence often falls into the area of cumulative harm. Within the OOHC environment manifestation of the trauma that they have experienced includes poor relationship skills, poor emotional regulation, poor attachments and anti-social behaviour.

For Aboriginal children placed in out of home care due to family violence this all too often results in removal from kinship groups, community, culture and land; these are factors that contribute to resilience and healing. Aboriginal children are also removed younger and for longer periods of time than non-Aboriginal children exacerbating loss and disconnection.

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<sup>1</sup> *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture, a five year plan for Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care, Commission for Children and Young People 2013*

<sup>2</sup> *Growing Children Up Strong and Deadly: Healing for children and young people, Final Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Act of Recognition Review Panel September 2014*

Children and young people who have experienced family violence are at an increased risk of perpetrating violence and/or ending up in violent relationships themselves. Also those that have experienced sexual abuse are at an increased risk of perpetrating violence or being in violent relationships. Given the high prevalence of children and young people in OOHC having experienced family violence, the State, as their parent, has a responsibility to implement strategies to support young people to recover from their experiences and to make healthier choices for themselves so as to reduce the incidence of violence and break the intergenerational patterns.

Aboriginal children are in care longer once they are removed and there has been poor investment in reunification services for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal services if resourced are able to undertake intensive work to reunite children. This is based on our knowledge of the families, their underlying issues and the capacity to target interventions that can effectively engage our vulnerable families.

### **Family violence and children's rights**

Although victims of the violence themselves, mothers are expected to keep their children safe from the perpetrator and are often blamed and sanctioned for putting themselves and their children at risk.

Within the mother-child dyad there can be considerable overlap between the needs and interests of mothers and the needs and interests of children. However there are instances in which the needs and interests of child and the needs and interests of mother can come into conflict. Such conflict may be evident to the mother but it may be the case that a mother who is the victim of family violence may have her cognitive and affective capacities so diminished that she can no longer reliably identify or protect the needs and interests of her child nor provide good quality caregiving (Johnston, 2006). Issues like depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and learned helplessness are possible outcomes for victims of family violence and can undermine a mother's cognitive and caregiving capacities (Johnston, 2006). Even in cases where it is in the clear interests of children that they be removed from the presence of the perpetrator, female victims may not have a desire to leave their violent partner (e.g., economic or emotional dependence, lack of confidence and self-esteem, a belief leaving will deprive their children of important contact with their father) (Harne, 2011). In such cases a mother's needs and interests may conflict with the rights and long-term interests of her children.

### **The rights, interests and needs of mother and child in the context of family violence.**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that children, on account of their unique developmental vulnerability, require a level and type of care and protection that is categorically different from that of adults (United Nations, 2010a) and therefore have child-specific rights.

The adoption of a child rights perspective to family violence will provide more weight to the wishes of children than has previously been the case (Harne, 2011). While recognising that the interests of children and their mothers will very often coincide, a child-rights based perspective is able to (i) articulate that even where they coincide such interests originate in the different needs of the parties and (ii) where they conflict it is the best interest of the child that are to be regarded as the priority.

### **Impact of family violence on children**

The impact of family violence on children and future generations should never be underestimated:

- Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of family violence.
- Family violence is present in the majority of reports made to Child Protection.
- Experiencing violence in childhood is a significant risk factor for being both a victim and a perpetrator of violence in adulthood.
- Family violence is a key factor in the high rates of Aboriginal children in out of home care.
- Family violence is a factor in approximately fifty percent of notifications for Aboriginal children in the child protection system.
- Impact Victoria Police Code of Practice for Family Violence; Importantly acknowledges that children do not need to be physically present in order to suffer consequences of Family Violence.
- The Victorian Family Violence Task Force Report identified that it is widely recognised and acknowledge that family violence adversely affects the social, cultural, health, emotional, and economic well-being of Aboriginal people, families and communities.
- Impacts of being exposed to FV – psychological and behavioural impacts; health and socioeconomic impacts; inter-generational transmission of violence.

The true extent of children's exposure to family violence is difficult to know. Reason for this is under-reporting both of family violence in the first place and when reporting family violence not reporting Aboriginality, in both cases due to fear of family separation given the history of government removal of children.

### **Learnings from VACCA's service provision**

VACCA's family violence workers report that in their experience working with Aboriginal women affected by violence, the majority of them want to stay in the relationship, they do not want the relationship to stop, just the violence. They also report that many women will not seek the support of mainstream family violence services because they fear child protection involvement and removal of the children.

### **VACCA's Orana Gunyah (welcome, place of shelter)**

An example of a culturally safe multi-pronged service approach from Victoria is VACCA's Orana Gunyah, (meaning welcome, place of shelter); a state-wide Aboriginal women and children's crisis accommodation and support service based in the regional centre of Morwell and servicing regional and rural communities as well as urban areas. VACCA provides a culturally appropriate service response to women and children escaping or experiencing family violence. The service is a holistic approach based on the principle of focusing on Aboriginality as a critical protective factor. The facility, run by VACCA in partnership with Community Housing Ltd, provides modern, secure and comfortable short term accommodation for up to five women and their children at a time. It enables on site access to support services for women and children (case management, advocacy and referral to other services such as housing, court support, health services, Centrelink, counselling). The program includes a children's worker and also provides outreach.

The refuge has had 36 women stay since opening in May 2014 (as of May 2015). The length of stay varied from one night to 15 weeks, with an average stay of 4.5 weeks. Three women have stayed at the refuge twice. Eighty percent of the women have children; between one and five children and the children range from infants to adolescents. All women were receiving Centrelink payments. Prior to staying at the refuge, women were living in locations around the state including metropolitan Melbourne, regional centres and rural Victoria. Only five percent of women had family violence as their only issue in their lives. The range of issues women experienced included; substance abuse (present for the majority of women and included alcohol, cannabis, ice, addiction to prescription medication and on the methadone program); financial. Sexual assault, housing, mental health issues, DHHS Child Protection involvement, legal concerns, disconnection from land, disconnection from culture and isolation.

Given the range of issues the women experienced the range of services provided by VACCA was equally wide-ranging and included counselling, housing, advocacy, brokerage, legal support, court support, financial support, mental health, child care, parenting support, women's group, children's programs, youth support, recreation, drug and alcohol counselling, medical, reconnection to land, reconnection to culture, identity support, relocation, Lakidjeka ACSSAS, disability support and referrals including interstate referrals. Importantly 80 percent of women left the refuge to a stable and safe accommodation options. Only five percent had no contact with family members and 85 percent had regular contact with family. Seventy-seven percent of women described their relationship with their Aboriginal family as good or positive. Fully self-contained units – stops creation of tension, children and their mum have their own space and privacy.

### **VACCA's North Metropolitan Family Violence Program**

VACCA North Metropolitan Family Violence Program reported that 100% of the women supported by the service in the last twelve months had their own or other children in their care. Of these children, just fewer than 50% of the children were aged between 0 and 5 years, this being the key developmental years for children. More than 50% of these women remained in the relationship with their violent partner, returned to their violent partner, or re-partnered with another violent partner. This raises serious concerns for VACCA.

VACCA's Northern Family Violence Program reported that less than 25% of Aboriginal women in contact with their service understood the serious harm violence was having upon their children. This is an issue that needs to be addressed if we are to prevent or reduce family violence occurring within the Aboriginal community.

### **Key issues identified by VACCA's family violence teams:**

#### **Northern**

- There are mistrust issues of Police and authority figures for Aboriginal people and this tends to result in Aboriginal women not reporting incidence of family violence.
- System fear – repercussion for making the call – people ending up in prison etc. We have a criminal justice response – women having to be witnesses etc. Should women be given the choice of when to make statements etc.
- All the responsibility and accountability is currently on the women victims.
- Secondary services can have a role in ensuring that women are able to access supports when they are distrusting of police
- If women can build relationships with the 'system' or representatives of them they may be more willing to seek help before situation escalates.
- Need a community driven approach to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.
- Male perpetrators being able to see and understand the impacts that violence has on children.
- Need a therapeutic approach to address underlying issues.
- Elizabeth Morgan house is a strong model – it has 4 units rather than one share house.
- The age that sons of women victims are allowed to stay in the refuge – teenage boys unable to stay and the alternative is that they need to go into a youth home or remain with the perpetrator.
- Family and relationship counselling – needs resourcing.
- Tougher and timelier responses to breaches.
- Family tensions – lateral violence – dropping kids off for accesses.
- Help lines for women to call to discuss options – safety planning etc.

- Sitting at existing services and being available for women to meet with – less obvious places so that they are not at risk or seen by Community when accessing this help.
- Need to be able to provide different responses to families – especially recidivist families.
- Identifying strengths and highlight and build on these.
- Family law system can and at times is used by men to further abuse women. Another system that is not safe and therefore not used by Aboriginal women.

### **Gippsland**

- Seeing more women as perpetrators; needing to protect oneself and keep yourself safe. Sense of brought up fighting (racism and discrimination – unable when young to fight with words and thus learn to fight with fists – resort to violence).
- Aboriginal young people now being taught to walk away
- Racism always a presence – ready to pounce.
- L17s that police have identified as Aboriginal females are sent to VACCA – police however do not always ask and sometimes assume based on surname. This has resulted in L17s being sent to VACCA for non-Aboriginal people or L17s for Aboriginal people being sent to other services instead of VACCA.
- Gippsland family violence team cover Latrobe and Baw Baw councils only; this is a service coverage issue for Aboriginal family violence services.

### **Unmet needs as identified by VACCA's Northern and Gippsland family violence teams:**

- Teenagers (16 to 17) who are victims or perpetrators of FV (for example to siblings, parents). No services have responsibility for providing support to them.
- Northern family violence team; only have targets of 45 episodes a year, there is the demand to double this.
- Orana Gunyah; unmet needs are many, attempt to refer who we can to Mildura or Elizabeth Morgan House as they cater for our women and children if we do not have any vacancies (mainstream refuges are experienced as culturally unsafe and Aboriginal women do not or are reluctant to attend). Could increase to another five units which would make our service a bigger option therefore we could take in more families.
- Local police do not always ask about Aboriginal identity which has led to L17s being sent to incorrect services. There are times that Aboriginality is left off the L17 because women don't want community knowing their business; they feel by going to a mainstream service it might be better.
- Needing to detox or have unmet mental health issues and are not able to get into the Flynn Ward.
- Gaps can be mental health and this can always be hard, we accept women with at times limited information, in time we may identify mental health issues that can be very severe.

- Accessing services in an appropriate time frame is at times very difficult which is distressing for all concerned not to mention it can cause some safety issues for staff and other residents.
- Drugs are an issue we face almost daily; getting women into Detox is very difficult.

### **Outcomes of supports**

- Provide referral information to men only – no direct work. VACCA's family services work with families affected by family violence would do work with the men in the context of the family.
- When working with families around reunification will work separately with the women. Continue to be guided by the woman around the reunification. Provide safety support for mum and the children.
- Have not seen any success with men's behavioural change programs; only a few of the families they have worked with have accessed this service.
- Outcomes for Orana Gunyah have been very good, some great success stories where the women and children have now been housed and with the support given while in residence they are all stronger and able to change their own lives free from violence and all the rest that go with it.

### **Practice principles**

- Have an educated approach to an Aboriginal family violence model as opposed to a feminist model; we are aware of the gender issues however we need to be pro women, pro men, pro families, pro children.
- Culture as a strength and family and child focused.
- Cultural aspects are built into everything we do including; children's advocate does specific activities with the children and women's group activities like weaving and outings to culturally significant sites.
- We work in a very holistic supportive way empowering women and children to grow and accept that they have rights. Encouraging them that they are very worthwhile and can survive after the Violence has ended, we are culturally appropriate with children's programs, women's groups as well as guest speakers and Elders who come in and talk.
- Able to work with women when men are still in the home. This does generate different outcomes as they are able to work on reunification.
- Have different levels of capacity; lower numbers and work with greater complexity. We are able to work on issues that mainstream services may not; for example spending 5 hours to assist get ID to then help with housing.
- If other services are needed (e.g. drug and alcohol) the staff will, where possible, approach Aboriginal supports first.



### **Local systemic responses to family violence**

- System fear and Police attending in uniform and the need for an Aboriginal advocate, children advocates.
- Housing – needing to relocate or feel safe in their own home by changing locks; not funded for this work (e.g. moving, locks). Need referral pathways for housing support. Need additional refuges.
- L17 process – these are not always served on the men. Police should not send L17s for minor issues.
- Similar issues to Gippsland in relation to Aboriginal identity – some people chose not to identify and also police may not ask.
- Counselling can be court ordered for the woman however it is difficult to find counselling at an affordable level.

### **Resourcing needs**

- Funding for specific supports to sit alongside family violence
- Brokerage; it would be good to have some brokerage so we can help our women set up house in their new area, most have nothing other than the clothing they arrive with so have to start from nothing. This can add pressure and it can make a women feel this is way too hard to start from nothing again, they go back and put up with the abuse which to them seems easier to do.
- Have a worker to work with men – from a strengths based approach – and focusing on healthy relationships.
- Chronic housing shortages; both at crisis options, short-term options and long term public housing availability and waiting periods.
- Better staffing – two workers across all the North area and one in the West. This means that they become crisis driven in their work and unable to do more early intervention work. Also have lots of commitments – meetings (L17, HRRC, RAMP). Would like to be able to do group work.
- Inconsistent service provision dependent on location; for example drug and alcohol detox services are limited in regional areas..
- Detox services are in Melbourne however often women will need to leave detox early due to not having supports to look after their children for extended periods of time.
- The Flynn Ward provide Mental Health support – in-patient – however it is difficult to get women in and there is no Mental Health outreach support. VACCA left managing the ‘gap’ and are not necessarily skilled to provide this level of Mental Health support.

### **Integration: Joint Triage of L17 reports involving children**

The Police Code of practice requires that any L17 reports in relation to children be sent to a Child FIRST or Child Protection Service. For the last 2 years, in the Northern Metropolitan Region, police have sent all L17 reports to DHHS Child Protection. Twice a week, a joint triage process occurs between Berry Street’s Family Violence Service, Child Protection and the two

Child FIRST services that cover the Northern Region. VACCA attend this triage only when L17s for identified Aboriginal families are being presented. This process enables an allocation of each case considering whether the family already has an engagement with one of the services, as well as an initial assessment of risk on the basis of focused information sharing. Funding for this pilot is as follows; Berry Street 1 EFT, each Child FIRST and Child Protection is funded 0.6 EFT and VACCA receive no funding. Due to resource issues and capacity of staffing there is a 'cap' on the number of L17s that are triaged at each meeting. Currently DHHS Child Protection as the lead agency determines which L17 reports are listed for consideration Child Protection remove L17s from the triage list if they:

- Are a current client of Child Protection
- Contain a level of information that results in Child Protection deeming the need for investigation without the need for any further information.

### **Learnings from VACCA's work with adult clients**

Since being funded to provide support services to Aboriginal survivors of child sexual abuse within institutions, our program has taken thirty referrals. Nearly all the adult men we work with through the support services provided through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse admit to having perpetrated family violence which has led to most of them being unable to sustain healthy partnerships and/or relationships with their children and all the women have been subject to family violence. The other really concerning issue is that from VACCA's experience working with children and young people with sexually abusive behaviours; past sexual abuse is not necessarily in their history but very early (0-3 years) exposure to family violence is.

### **Examples of what is currently working well**

***Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPF)***: was established to oversee the development and implementation of a ten-year Partnership Agreement between the Victorian Government and Aboriginal Communities to address Aboriginal family violence together. The partnership forum is for ongoing, high level dialogue between Government departments and Aboriginal communities about the needs of Aboriginal communities in confronting issues of family violence.

***Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan 2008-2018***: was developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to address family violence in the Aboriginal community. It outlines a ten year vision, objectives and specific actions that need to be taken to make Victoria a safer place for Aboriginal families. Its intent is to guide, inform and direct joint efforts of the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government to reduce Aboriginal family violence. It provides a strategic framework to assist services that address Aboriginal family violence in the short, medium and long term. The plan identified the need to establish

local responses that have strong links to the community. More investments are needed in these areas and their needs a committed government investment in the ten year plan.

***Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (IFVRAG)***: were developed to engage communities at the local level, to encourage them to take ownership of family violence and to continue the community conversations to address the problem and its associated issues. The IFVRAGs provide an opportunity for individuals, families and groups in communities to receive the support they need to come together, discuss and develop solutions for family violence issues in their families and their communities. There are 11 IFVRAGs established across the state, to raise awareness of issues of Aboriginal family violence within local communities and to develop local solutions to prevent and respond to local issues of family violence.

***Koori Police Protocol***: Victoria Police and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service worked with Aboriginal communities to develop protocols for responding to family violence. The protocols aim to improve response to family violence incidents, improve Aboriginal community confidence and increase referral to support services. Protocols have been launched in three regions.

There has been a noticeable change over the last ten years with a greater awareness of family violence within Aboriginal communities. Family violence is more readily acknowledged as a problem within community and this has lead to people having greater confidence in reporting family violence. There is still much work to be done in this area, and still a common example that Aboriginal victims will not report family violence until it has escalated to a much more serious level. Family violence units within police and Police protocols have both contributed to these outcomes.

### **Priority action areas to address family violence in the Aboriginal community**

#### **Community awareness and education, prevention and early intervention**

A public health approach to prevention of violence needs to be sustained and needs to target the Aboriginal communities particularly. There are examples of local community initiatives including targeted through football clubs and through local media that need to be expanded.

- Community education is the key to raising awareness of family violence and the impact it has on our families and communities. We believe it is imperative to build a positive vision in Aboriginal communities, based on strong family values and cultural practices and to use holistic approaches to address Family Violence.
- Culturally strong sporting groups and carnivals, arts programs and youth groups are powerful way of increasing community awareness and education at the local level.

- Group programs with a cultural strengthening element. These must be community lead, and community delivered.
- Healthy relationships education for all children and young people. This needs to be provided within the school setting and also targeted for OOHC population and specific for Aboriginal children and young people.
- Implementation of comprehensive sexual health and relationships education programs for children and young people. These can be provided through schools. Also a specific need for this for children and young people in the out of home care system who may be disengaged
- Also needed for parents and carers. The VACCA and Child Wise Publication, Yarning Up on Sexual Abuse (included as Appendix 1) is a useful resource. With the required funding VACCA would like to update this resource and develop associated training packages specifically for Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care and for parents, carers and workers.
- Schools need to inclusive of Aboriginal history and culture.
- There has been a strong uptake of Aboriginal white ribbon ambassadors in Victoria, with 50% of all Aboriginal white ribbon ambassadors in Victoria
- Need for early intervention and education programs for boys who have been exposed to abuse and violence. This can be particularly relevant for boys who have been placed into out of home care due to experiencing family violence and may not have the opportunities to interact with or be mentored by strong men who actively reject violence. For Aboriginal boys, group cultural programs incorporating the use of Elders can be an effective and powerful approach.
- VACCA received funding a few years ago to develop resources for young people on staying healthy. The young people were adamant that resources on stopping family violence were a priority. Community publishing, the development of community film documentaries are examples of resources.
- Aboriginal people are overrepresented as users of tertiary services such as justice and child protection. However Aboriginal people are under-represented in service usage of universal and secondary services.

### **Aboriginal services for Aboriginal community**

We need to invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). ACCOs are well placed to deliver prevention, early intervention and support services. These services are well connected to their communities, know particular families of concern and able to more effectively engage. Our practice approaches incorporate understandings of the impact of past policies on families today, understand how intergenerational trauma and racism must be addressed as part of effective responses. We know that providing Aboriginal services for the Aboriginal community is what works. This is clearly articulated in the recent Child Family Community Australia paper *What works in effective Indigenous community-managed programs and organisations* (Morley, 2015). Through review of available literature about 'community-managed programs' and 'community-managed organisation' the paper identifies

factors common to successful community-managed programs and organisations were identified. Community-managed programs are those where an Aboriginal community has decision-making control and responsibility for the implementation (Morley, 2015). Those common factors that were identified in successful community-managed organisations and programs are:

- Ownership of and control over decision-making is held by the community,
- Culture, including an understanding of local context, history and community leaders is central to the program,
- Local Aboriginal staff work on the program or in the organisation,
- Good corporate governance exists,
- Aboriginal staff are working on programs and existing capacity is harnessed,
- Trusting relationships with partners are established,
- There is flexibility in implementation timelines. (Morley, 2015).

### **Aboriginal healing for children, women and men impacted by family violence**

Healing which is trauma-informed and culturally informed needs to be provided for Aboriginal, children, women and men impacted by family violence. Trauma-informed, cultural healing programs will help increase community safety and wellbeing. Healing should be understood and addressed, not within the individual pathology model, but in the context as understood by the Aboriginal community. Only when the broader issues of trauma, dispossession, racism, and social and economic disadvantage are addressed can family violence can be addressed.

A holistic Aboriginal professional practice and service approach begins with the principle of focusing on Aboriginality as a critical protective factor. It seeks to provide for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of women and their children in the context of their family and community and also their history of grief, loss and trauma.

VACCA's holistic practice recognizes the role and importance of Aboriginal culture including the influence and strength of family and community in people's lives. For communities to heal, a process of strengthening customs and practices and relationships between family and kin is required. Connection to culture brings healing (VACCA, 2015).

We need to provide holistic, family healing. Only when all in the family unit are healed will change be achieved and sustained. Professor Emeritus Judy Atkinson (2002, 2013) highlights the importance of establishing cultural safety, strengthening cultural identity and the importance of sense of spirituality and use of ceremony for achieving healing. Trauma-informed and culturally responsive healing services need to be provided to children and young people who have experience family violence, victims of family violence and perpetrators of family violence. Only by providing services to children, women and men, can genuine, sustained change be achieved. This is critical given we know that victims often do not leave or leave and then return to their violent partners, and/or that perpetrators will re-partner and therefore continue to inflict violence. The inter-generational nature of family

violence is another reason why healing services must be provided to children, women and men.

In terms of the International Covenant on the Rights of the Child, Australia has agreed to: provide social programs for the necessary support of the child and carers of the child (Article 19) and; governments shall take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims (Article 39)

So government needs to ensure that victims are not further victimised by a lack of culturally competent therapeutic responses to our children's needs. We have a western system for western culture that does not include Aboriginal ways of healing. As Aboriginal health expert Dennis McDermott points out, in the main western approaches to dysfunctional behaviours focus on a negative, 'deficit approach' that ignores social, historical and cultural aspects, including resilience. It fails to recognise contemporary consequences of trans-generational trauma, particularly the effects of the Stolen Generations.

In relation to children, women and men we need to find culturally appropriate ways of delivering therapeutic strategies. Examples of such models include:

- Young girls singing groups: provide contact with community and specifically relationships with other children in community.
- Elder Aboriginal men taking young boys out for the day to visit cultural sights and talk about them, again this focuses on forming of relationships.
- Return to country programs and cultural camps on country.
- Art therapy, art is a way of life, a way of telling story and integrating trauma in their life narrative, and is healing.
- The telling of stories is an importance part of Aboriginal culture and can be a powerful resource in assisting Aboriginal women to heal.
- Self-regulation through use of clap sticks for Aboriginal girls and young women and learning the didgeridoo, and its focus on breathing for boys and young men.
- For parents and carers or infants and young children emotional regulation for both mother and child can be strengthened though use of rocking chairs, and this simple intervention has been used with powerful results during parents access visits with their children.
- Culturally specific group program such as possum skin cloak making programs (VACCA, 2015).

### **Resourcing Family Violence Services based on demand**

Victoria Police data has indicated that reporting of family violence incidents to police has increased by 83% over a four year period from 2009-10 to 2013-14. The Magistrates Courts have stated that finalised Family Violence Intervention orders (FVIO) have increased by 49% over this same four-year period.

Family violence services have not been funded in a way that reflects this increased in demand, resulting in services having unmet need. Adequate ongoing resourcing urgently needs to be addressed.

We need to resource family violence services, including Aboriginal family violence services, on a criteria of demand based funding. Until this is achieved the sector will never be able to provide adequate service responses.

### **Therapeutic residential programs**

There is a lack of men's time out services for men to access when safety notices has been issued. These are needed to ensure family safety and to ensure the onus is not placed on victims to move to achieve safety. Having culturally respectful time out services for Aboriginal men and by resourcing family violence workers within these settings can help with accountability and healing. This option also removes burden from family housing violent men, where messages provided to men may not encourage accountability and may assert influence on women to allow their partner to return home, placing women and children at risk. Time out services should be available as both a prevention option and at time of crisis. These residential options need to be well-resourced to ensure perpetrators can access required services. There needs to be a reinvestment in time out residential options being provided at no cost after a number of Aboriginal hostels having been shut down over the years.

### **Programs for women and youth perpetrators**

The victimisation of women and exposure of family violence has increased the prevalence of women who use violence, in their relationships, with their children and in their communities. In the area of Gippsland, a third of police family violence reports involve females as perpetrators. There is a strong link between Aboriginal women's offending patterns and their exposure to family violence and history of child maltreatment. Aboriginal women continue to be over-represented in the justice system and this is escalating and in the context of higher levels of family violence and the lack of diversionary options for Aboriginal women. Holding Aboriginal women on remand and in custody during pre-sentence periods can have crippling, long-term effects on their families and the broader community, and this is in the context that less than 15% of Aboriginal women in Victoria on remand ultimately receive custodial sentences. It is also known that substance and alcohol misuse leads to unsafe behaviours, including violence, and can directly impact on a parent's ability to care and protect their children.

VACCA is conscious that young people, women and men can be both victims and perpetrators. They are both in danger and a danger themselves. We need a focus on creating protective measures that are stopping and not spreading the problem. McDermott (2012) posits that the approach must be to:

- strengthen resilience
- use Koori ways such as 'Deep Listening' which involves self- reflection /contemplation and 'Listening' to the silence, in other words, to what's *not* being said as well as what's *being said non-verbally*
- the approach must be based on cultural competence and cultural safety and build environments for change.

There are no existing culturally responsive services for Aboriginal women who are victims of and/or who use violence, or who need cultural healing while or after accessing family violence case management service. There is also a lack of services for youth who are perpetrators (usually against mothers or elders in the home).

### **Men's behaviour change programs**

It has been the practice experience of VACCA's family services programs that there are problems with mainstream men's behaviour change programs, most notably that it does not engage men and does not lead to required or sustained changes, rather men can turn up, but not participate or not participate actively. These programs are not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal men; being run by male and female co-facilitators makes these program models culturally not appropriate for Aboriginal men.

The Latrobe Community Health Service (LCHS) CHOICES program is an example of an effective, culturally safe and culturally responsive Aboriginal men's behaviour change program. The elements of the program include:

- 12-15 week program
- Two male facilitators (this is an exemption from NTV as standards say there is to be one male and one female facilitator; this exception provides cultural safety and cultural appropriateness to the service delivery model)
- 5 to 7 participants at a maximum
- Culturally informed *Walking the journey to becoming a man*
- Choice, responsibility and accountability for own actions
- Objective is to keep women and children safe by changing behaviours of men
- Referrals include; Self referrals, courts, corrections and VACCA.
- Found that women were not responding well – funding for women's CHOICES to do work with women so that they could go on the journey at the same time as the male perpetrators – women and men's business is in Aboriginal communities to be kept separate.
- Voluntary program – if it is court ordered for a man to complete behaviour change program he needs to go to Melbourne.

Ignoring the healing of men, not only ignores the need for healing in perpetrators but is also a disservice to affected women and children. Aboriginal men have a lead role in their community in addressing violence. We need to resource programs that gives men a voice and space to be able to have men's conversations about taking responsibility for violence in their Community including, recognising all forms of violence, changing attitudes towards violence, and supporting each other to change their own and the behaviours of others.

Programs are needed that focus on men and young men; it has a preventative focus and a focus on strengthening men through culture and healing. Through such projects men from



collectively take a lead role in addressing violence to increase the safety and wellbeing of families.

Many family violence programs focus at the tertiary end of violence, when violence has occurred. This by itself is not effective as violence in Aboriginal Communities continues to be prevalent. The Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 10 year plan identifies the need for a holistic approach to addressing violence. Connection to culture, healing, engagement of men, self-esteem as capacity building, and community led initiatives are identified as being some key elements of good practice for effective family violence programs and need to key elements of healing programs.

The rates of family violence in the Victorian Aboriginal Community are alarmingly high and increasing. Healing programs are needed that address the risk factors that can lead to Aboriginal men engaging in violent behaviour and increase the protective factors that are important for men to be strong and proud and take a stand against violence in their own family and other families.

VACCA understands that to stamp out family violence in our community, men as well as women must take a lead role, and interventions must be holistic to be effective. Working in the family violence field we have firsthand knowledge of the devastating impact family violence has on Aboriginal men, their partners and children and that more focus and support needs to be given to Aboriginal men. The importance of men's programs in addressing violence in the Community needs to be reflected in adequate resourcing.

To prevent family violence attention needs to be paid to addressing the behaviour of men. It is our view that whilst one on one counselling can be effective it is often better to design men's programs to be group based and activity focused in areas that engender pride and connect them to traditional cultural roles. For example, it could be running camps with respected Elders. For women group based activities also resonate. These groups need to be cultural embedded. For example, VACCA's Koorie FACES parenting program has specific modules on understanding the impact of the past policies on families today, understanding and responding to grief and loss. Its approach is all activity based and puts the parents in the position of experts to finding their family solutions. This model works and should be adapted for family violence.

There is a great need for such programs in the Aboriginal community. It can be difficult to engage Aboriginal men in men's programs. This is for a range of reasons including; services having too narrow a focus; staff working in isolation from one another; and a difficulty in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal men to positions. Furthermore, programs for Aboriginal men often focus on identifying and addressing the risk factors prevalent in their lives including antisocial and harmful behaviours such as excessive alcohol use, illicit drug use, money issues, relationship and conflict issues, to address the violence. While important

conversations, if they are not delivered with strengths based focus, these programs can reinforce feelings of guilt, shame and hopelessness which can further alienate men.

Recent research on family violence suggests that given that the majority of Aboriginal people are not violent, even though they are exposed to the same risks and come from the same communities as those offending, that far more attention needs to be given to interventions and programs that reinforce the strengths and protective factors in Communities.

Aboriginal men's healing programs need to build on the learning's of other men's projects that have been run, such as Brother's Day Out. While these programs are very important and valuable for men, they only come around once a year and are funded for one to two days. However a longer term program that includes some of the themes in these days and incorporates men's business is important for men's wellbeing. In developing a program that runs over an extended period and that connects men to each other through culture without pressure or focusing on the aspects of their lives they feel shame about, men can meet together in a safe and welcoming environment and build upon their strengths through culture and learning, led by Senior men and Elders in the Community. Culturally based activities are a key way of engaging men. For example, having Aboriginal male Elders take men and boys on overnight camping trips to collect wood to make cultural artefacts, to have the time to pass on cultural mores about means traditionally roles, learning about how' they can prevent and /or reduce the violence occurring in their lives and the lives of their families.

The anticipated outcomes of such programs would directly support the objectives of the Indigenous Family Violence Ten Year Plan. Anticipated objectives would include:

- Supporting strong, robust and healthy families to be able to provide safe, nurturing environment
- intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence
- Increase the accountability of perpetrators of family violence within Aboriginal communities.
- Increasing healing opportunities
- Men to come together regularly to be involved men's business.
- Creating a stronger peer support network for men
- Connecting and teaching men culture and increasing the protective factors of men
- Showcasing and celebrating the men's achievements in a family day and community gathering, celebrating the role of men as fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, grandfathers in families and community.
- Strengthening and giving voice to the leadership of men in community
- Creating opportunities for young men to be around positive role models, particularly young men from single parent families, to take strength from and learn about the role of men in the family and Community through men's business.
- Increasing awareness of family violence and taking responsibility for violence in the community

- Identifying the types of violence that exists within community
- Developing other ways to respond to or manage conflict in the family and community other than through violence
- Identifying how men can support their brothers, cousins, uncles, fathers to walk away from violence
- Identify how they can support the women in their family and community to respond to conflict other than through violence.

### **Helping Agencies better collaborate and coordinate their responses**

It is critical that we have a joined up approach between family support and family violence services. Also there is a disconnect between the sectors of family violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, disability, justice, child welfare and homelessness. There needs to be a set of agreed upon principles and a framework across all the sectors to ensure regardless of which service a person engages in there is at the minimum a basic assessment of whether family violence is an issue.

There is a real need for improved service responses. Service responses across sectors need to be co-ordinated and integrated. A key example where this needs to occur is between women's support services and men's behavioural change programs. Specialist family violence services will never be able to meet all the demand and we need strong partnerships and collaboration across the service system. Family violence, family law and child protection reforms to ensure that the rights of women to raise their children are not compromised by family violence or child protection interventions. Effective family violence responses require collaborative practice and partnerships with Victoria Police and Child Protection.

The interface between child welfare and child protection systems, and the various courts is important in seeking to strike the right balance between adequate victim protection and strengthening male accountability. VACCA's family violence programs would like to have better relationships with the full complement of men's services.

Effective measures against family violence need to affect many services including the courts, police, child protection and support services. It will also mean a safer community where children and women will be safer.

### **Housing**

There is a clearly acknowledged lack of short-term crisis accommodation, affordable housing in Victoria and a lack of housing services. In the context of family violence this deters victims of family violence from leaving violent relationships and increases the risk of victims of family violence (and their children) becoming homeless. There is a critical need for more public housing and supported housing options for women and children who have experienced or are experiencing family violence. Orana Gunyah is a best-practice model where women and children can stay as a family unit and be connected into a range of services during their stay.

What is also needed is time out residential facilities and affordable housing options for perpetrators to ensure they remain engaged with support services and thus reducing risk of further violence.

Systems shortfall, for example housing, is denying a basic human right. Given that financial control is often a part of family violence, escaping family violence can result in victims and their children being made homeless or women choosing to stay in unsafe situations to avoid the only alternative of becoming homeless.

### **Mainstream service improvements: Culturally sensitive and culturally respectful services**

The intergenerational impacts of colonisation and the legacy of assimilation policies that led to the Stolen Generations have understandably resulted in Aboriginal communities being highly suspicious of mainstream and government attempts to develop collaboration.

Currently there are examples of police working collaboratively and respectfully with the Aboriginal community, but this varies from local area to local area and often depends on individual police officers rather than a more systemic response.

There also needs to be measures put in place to increase the uptake of mainstream services by Aboriginal families. The Victorian Auditor General's report on Accessibility of Mainstream Services for Aboriginal Victorians (2014) identified barriers to access of mainstream services provided or funded by government included a lack of culturally safe services, a lack of awareness of available services, racism, shame and fear, complex administrative processes and affordability.

Culturally sensitive and respectful service delivery is one of the most important prerequisites to providing an effective and efficient service to Aboriginal Australian people and is a major challenge for mainstream service providers. Agencies who are working with Aboriginal people need to understand how and why violence occurs within Aboriginal communities, and have a basic understanding of Aboriginal approaches to dealing with family violence. Our belief is the mainstream heavily gendered power and privilege approach does not fit for Aboriginal perpetrators of family violence and therefore it is no surprise that programs through this lens do not result in any change in those perpetrating family violence.

It is critical that all organisations understand that their services must be client driven and promote self-determination and enhancement of self-management within our communities, to address the various issues associated with Aboriginal family violence. At minimum real, sustainable, respectful and equitable partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and communities need to be developed and maintained.

Training needs to be provided by Aboriginal organisations and needs to be provided in an ongoing capacity. There also needs to be an accreditation process that involves Aboriginal organisations in the accreditation of cultural awareness and training to increase

understanding and improve engagement. Standards need to be developed and audits undertaken that assess this. The DHHS Services Standards Evidence Guide Culturally Informed addendum has been developed by VACCA for use alongside the existing Human Services Standards and *Human Services Standards evidence guide* to help organisations prepare and participate in internal and external reviews against the Human Services Standards. The addendum incorporates and builds on the former Department of Human Services Aboriginal Cultural Competency Framework (ACCF) 2008 and the seven key access criteria for effective service design detailed in the Victoria Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF). Collectively this supports the application of an Aboriginal cultural lens to the four service delivery Standards.

The addendum is inclusive of the breadth of human services delivered by the department and funded or registered organisations and provides examples of evidence indicators to support:

- the cultural awareness of service providers and independent review bodies in the application and review of the Standards
- the ability of service providers and independent review bodies to assess the cultural competency of their organisational structure, practice and strengthen their workforce capabilities
- Aboriginal clients experiencing the same culturally appropriate and inclusive service, irrespective of the service provider they access
- improvements in service delivery and outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Service providers are encouraged to use the addendum and resource tool to develop their own systems and processes. Independent review bodies will also use the addendum as part of conducting reviews (DHHS Culturally Informed Addendum, VACCA, 2015; Appendix 3).

### **Data collection, sharing and reporting issues**

Data improvements are essential if we are going to be able to accurately assess whether family violence is increasing or decreasing within Aboriginal communities. The lack of reliable data is at both state and regional level. In Victoria we are not collecting data that is being collected in other states. We need to get better at collecting the required data.

The 2013-14 Victoria Police Crime Statistics report indicates that there were 65,347 Family Incident Report(FIR) recorded in Victoria. 31,856 of these had a non-Aboriginal status, 2,135 had an Aboriginal status and the remaining 31,356 had the Aboriginal status of 'unknown'. Caution is therefore required in utilising and interpreting this data given the large number of FIRs where the Aboriginal status of the victim is unknown.

Not having the required data collection, sharing and reporting impacts on the system's capacity to keep Aboriginal women and children safe as it makes it difficult to be able to demonstrate whether programs are effective in reducing family violence within Aboriginal communities.

## **Recommendations**

### **Awareness and education**

1. The impact of family violence on children and their developing brains is not well understood by the Aboriginal community. The development of cultural resources to support families and young people understand and address the impact of family violence is necessary.
2. Awareness and education programs and campaigns that address racism experienced by the Aboriginal community be implemented.
3. Primary and Secondary schools to include healthy relationships awareness and education programs. These need to be culturally respectful of Aboriginal students.
4. Programs for young people in out of home care who have experienced family violence.
5. There is a need for a focus on men as fathers and need to target boys and young men who have been exposed to family violence and do not have strong male role models in their lives
6. Support and ongoing investment into cultural strengthening, community-led sporting and art activities that promote family violence awareness and education in culturally respectful and safe ways.
7. This Royal Commission and the increased awareness of family violence will likely increase demand further. It is essential therefore to ensure that additional resourcing of specialist family violence responses is available to support people making those disclosures noting that this will likely include children and young people. Given VACCA's relevant work in this area it should receive funding to provide this support or Aboriginal children, young people and families.

### **Service model**

8. The development of culturally appropriate ways of addressing family violence associated with the Aboriginal community, including service models.
9. Develop an articulated service model for family violence from prevention to tertiary responses, including support and healing services.

10. All those affected by family violence should receive a trauma-informed and culturally safe family violence response across the service system from universal, secondary and tertiary services. We cannot focus on only children or women or men and expect to see a sustained impact.
11. Increase resourcing at the prevention and early intervention and family support services. These services include family violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, disability, justice and homelessness. Enhanced capacity and resources for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop and implement family violence prevention and early intervention programs.
12. Service responses across the continuum of service delivery should see safety as the beginning of our intervention of enabling women and children to live violence free, not the end goal. We need to help women and children heal, develop resilience and address their wellbeing so they do not return and accept abusive relationships.
13. Service responses need to address children, women and men both in the context of victims and perpetrators. Addressing all their needs is critical to see inter-generational change.
14. Priority given to services for children and young people as there is very little attention played to the child to help them address their issues and make sense of their experience. Aboriginal child specific responses are required.
15. There is a need to have Aboriginal specialist family violence workers to accompany police on initial visit and provide crisis intervention be available to attend hospitals as part of the tertiary response. There is a role of an Aboriginal advocate and a children's advocate. This increased investment in universal services, needs to be provided in conjunction with an appropriate referral and case management approach.
16. Increased resourcing for outreach and after hours services are required.
17. Post separation is the period when services need to be resourced to involved for longer periods of time.
18. Funding for a specific mental health position within ACCOs is required to deliver these services and ensure strengthened responses.

19. Additional funding is needed so that current Aboriginal family violence programs can provide group based family violence services.
20. In many instances L17's relating to Aboriginal victims are automatically being referred to mainstream services. Aboriginal people should be given the option of whether they want to access mainstream services or Aboriginal services.
21. The development of cultural resources for workers, including training, is required as part of an all-encompassing response.
22. There needs to be increased funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to expand culturally specific services. In particular expansion of Aboriginal specific intensive family services and family violence that work together need to be funded in all areas with a high Aboriginal population.
23. Funding ACCOs to provide a liaison role assisting in referral and support to mainstream is a key element. This needs to be done in conjunction with mainstream organisations providing a culturally appropriate service.
24. Increased cultural awareness and understanding education for universal services including police.
25. Integrating specialist family violence knowledge and practice into police, child protection, and health and community service systems needs to be a major reform priority. The interface between child welfare and child protection systems, and courts needs to be coordinated. Working together across sectors and professions working provides best results.
26. This allows for learning across disciplines about roles, responsibilities and capabilities and also brings the service system as a whole to the task of responding to family violence.
27. Local responses to family violence services and integration are needed that are sensitive to the specific contexts in rural, regional and metropolitan areas: Need to develop local responses in local community.
28. Aboriginal perspectives are not being included in whole of government reforms across homelessness, family violence, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health, disability and vulnerable children policy. There are no formal mechanisms in place to inform,



engage and collaborate with the Aboriginal services sector. There needs to be a comprehensive plan that builds the sector that aims to have more Aboriginal people with qualifications delivering services to Aboriginal people.

29. Need to directly address structural inequalities including poverty and systemic racism experienced within the Aboriginal community before we can expect to see sustained changes given intergenerational nature of family violence within the Aboriginal community and acknowledgement of its link to violence of colonization, past policies of forced removal and assimilation and the ensuing poverty and racism that exists today.
30. Increased support and initiatives for Aboriginal family violence workers wellbeing to prevent and minimise vicarious trauma and burnout. The work is taxing and especially for Aboriginal workers working within their communities.

### **Funding models**

31. Culture costs: Aboriginal children who have experienced violence and abuse and require cultural strengthening healing programs and this needs to be acknowledged in all Aboriginal healing services provided by Aboriginal organisations.
32. Self-determination is critical to effect change for Aboriginal communities and so meaningful progression of self-determination for Aboriginal community-led services responses is required. Aboriginal services are best placed to provide services to the Aboriginal local community. Aboriginal community lead, designed and delivered services across the service system continuum are required. What is needed is for Aboriginal services to be resources to provide community lead solutions.
33. There are current and past examples of successful services that do not receive ongoing funding. We need to fund evaluation and research so that we can continue to fund what can be demonstrated to achieve positive results. Short-term funding, insecure funding or funding of pilot programs only, all undermine ability to achieve positive outcomes. Successful programs need to be provided with funding flexibility and funding certainty.
34. Flexible and well-resourced brokerage is critical for Aboriginal family violence services to provide holistic approach and impact on economic disadvantage within the Aboriginal community.

### **Research and evaluation to ensure we are providing evidence-informed responses and programs**

35. No single data source is able to provide a comprehensive overview of Aboriginal family violence. There therefore needs to be an investment in improved data collection and monitoring of Aboriginal family violence data at a state and regional level. There is also a need for improved data collection systems from Government, Police and mainstream service to better inform service responses.

36. Models of promising practise be reviewed and considered for learnings and/or implementation within Victoria:

- The Northern Metropolitan region Joint Triage of police L17 reports involving children should be rolled out as a state wide response. Joint triaging of L17s that include Aboriginal children with VACCA, Berry Street's family violence services and DHHS Child Protection and Child FIRST. VACCA is the only service in this partnership that is unfunded for its role. This is an effective model of system collaboration and should be implemented in each region across the state and include an Aboriginal response, with each service provider funded for their role.
- VACCA's Family Violence prevention and Response Model pilot (see Appendix 2)
- The Family Violence Prevention Model
- Safe at Home, The Tasmanian Government's integrated whole of government response to family violence.

37. Recent relevant evaluations be reviewed and considered for learnings within Victoria:

- The Koorie police protocol evaluation
- The mid-term evaluation of the Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Aboriginal families and communities 10 year plan 2008-2018.

## **Conclusion**

Family violence has no part in traditional Aboriginal culture nor in contemporary cultural expressions. It is important to note that the large majority of Aboriginal families are not experiencing family violence and are in fact thriving. It is important to learn from these families and why and how they are achieving success. From VACCA's experience these are families who have built strong kinship support, are well connected to the community and are proud of their Aboriginal identity and have developed a pattern of resilience based on these factors. These are also families who have been able to utilize support services.

Currently we are failing victims of family violence. Children experiencing family violence is a form of child abuse. What we face in Aboriginal child and family services in general and in the family violence context specifically is a lack of investment in treatment models for abused children who have been the victim of abuse and violence. We need to ensure children who

are victims of family violence are not further victimised by a system that does not keep them safe and does not address their healing needs in a developmentally appropriate, culturally appropriate, trauma informed and holistic manner. Changing the way various parts of the system think and act will be one of the challenges in building greater integration and drawing on the learnings from what has gone before.

In announcing this Royal Commission Premier Daniel Andrews stated “There will be a big price tag around the implementation of these recommendations, but Victoria’s women and children are worth every cent”. VACCA would like to see that Aboriginal women and children are included in this sentiment and the strongest way to show that is through investment and resourcing of Aboriginal organisations to provide culturally relevant services to Aboriginal children, women and men to provide healing for Aboriginal communities impacted by family violence.

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**APPENDIX 1:**  
**Yarning Up On Child Sexual Abuse (VACCA and Child Wise)**

**See separate attachment**

## **APPENDIX 2: FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE MODEL PILOT**

### **Model 1      ABORIGINAL MOBILE CRISIS RESPONSE SERVICE**

#### **CONTEXT**

The model requires a whole of community and government response as success can only occur with significant service co-ordination and ownership by Aboriginal communities and a number of key government departments.

#### **BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The service has the two key components: The Aboriginal Mobile Crisis Unit (AMCU) and an intensive case management service.

The Aboriginal Mobile Crisis Unit (AMCU) is a 24 hour metropolitan wide service that will respond to calls from the Family, Police and Child Protection Services (OTHERS?). AMCU will provide an immediate outreach crisis management response. The service will defuse volatile situations where at all possible. If all family members cannot in the short term be kept safe, the service will seek to remove the perpetrator to a safe location. Victims will only leave the family home as a last response. The service will remain involved for a period of 72 hours. The service will comprise of 2 teams of 3 workers. Each team will have a male to be the primary worker for male clients, a female to be the primary worker for female clients and another worker to be child(ren) primary worker. The team leader of each team will ensure a complementary service response is offered to all family members.

A number of agencies would be contracted to provide an intensive case management service. The service will accept referrals from the AMCU and will also make referrals to appropriate services and be responsible for the provision of a 'wrap around' service model. This service will have brokerage funds available to buy in necessary services or resources.

MOU'S will be required with all key players and will require commitment from Police and Child Protection Services.

The Service will be established with a built in action research component.

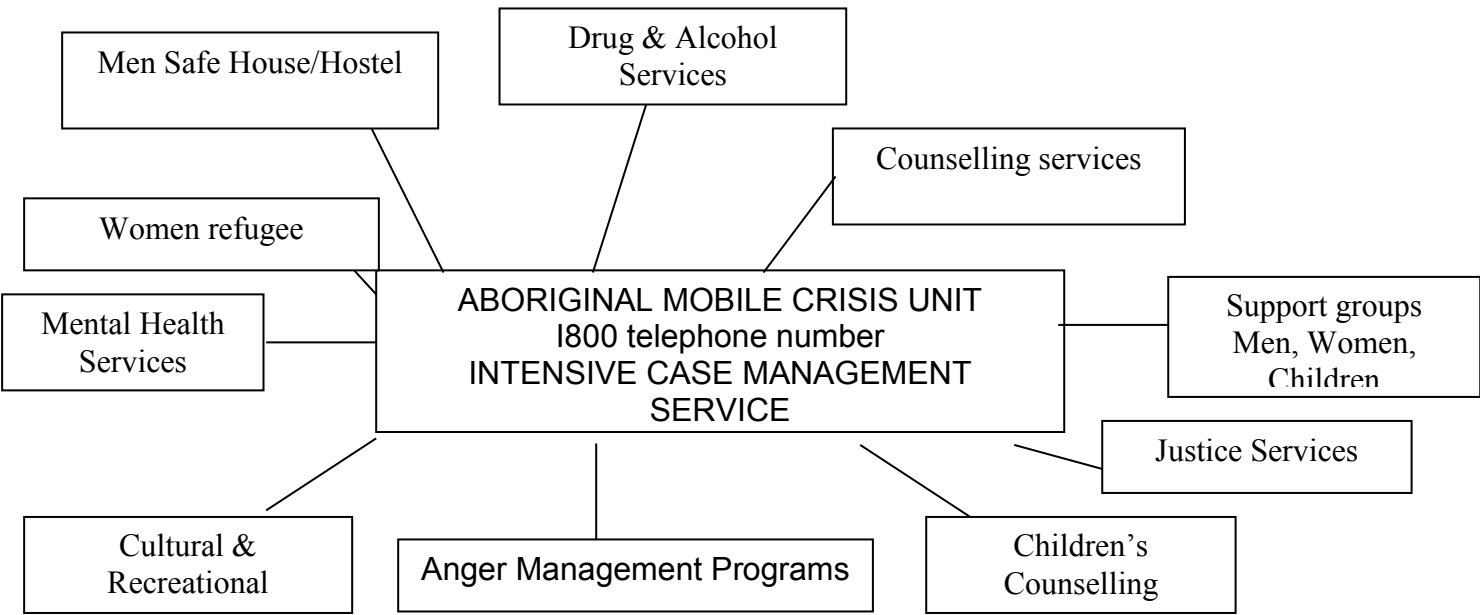
#### **PROGRAM AIMS**

The program aims are to:

- Provide a culturally appropriate response to family violence
- Respond to family violence as it occurs to defuse violent situations, keep all family members safe and if possible to avoid family breakdowns

- Harness the resources of community sector organizations to provide a ‘seamless’ service response
- Break the cycle of abuse within client families

SERVICE DESCRIPTION



Outlined above are examples of the range of key services that will be involved in either the immediate crisis or will be providing ongoing assistance to the family.

**Model 2      INDIGENOUS CHILD AND ADOLESCENT THERAPEUTIC APPROACH (can be expanded to include women)**

**Program Type**

This service will provide a culturally specific response to family violence including physically and emotionally abused Indigenous children and adolescents, and their families.

**Geographical Catchment Area**

The pilot could be based i the North west region of Melbourne where theer is a sizable Aboriginal population and accept state-wide referrals.

**Program Aims**

The Service aims to



- Provide a therapeutic response to meet the needs of Indigenous children and adolescents who have experienced family violence.
- Provide a range of service responses to perpetrators and other members of the child or adolescents family
- Involve significant others in the child’s/adolescent’s life in the development of service and safety plans
- Develop a holistic response to meeting the needs of the child/adolescent
- Involve members of the Indigenous community in the model to ensure cultural relevance and community ownership

**Community responsiveness**

A steering committee made up of Indigenous community members, community services representatives and funding bodies could oversight the service.

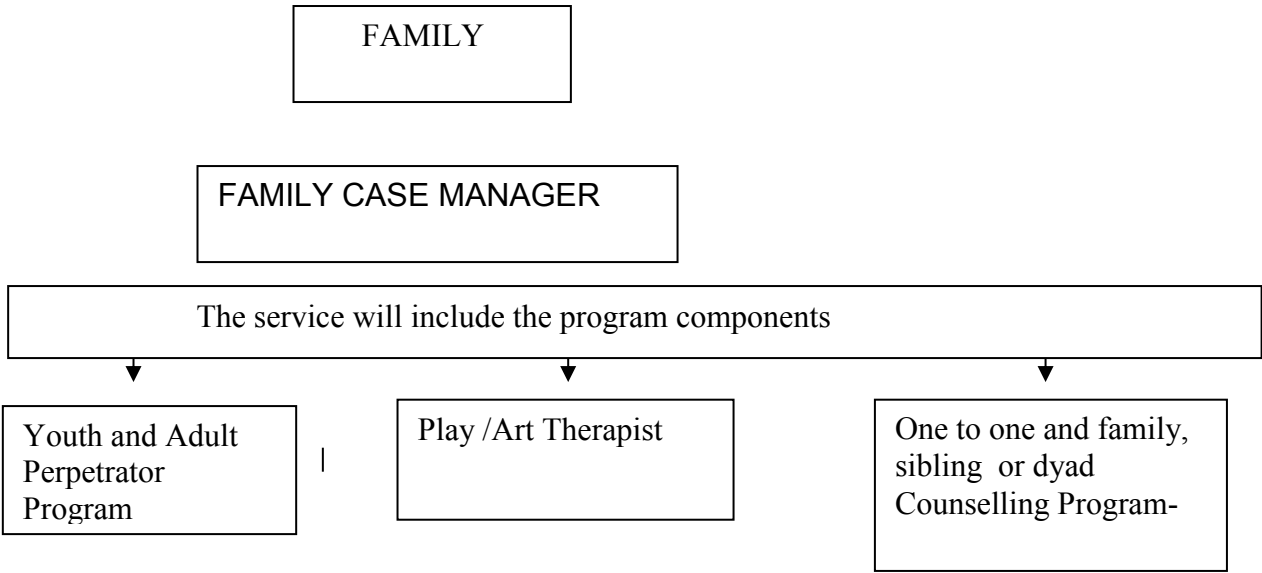
The service would establish clear protocols and MOU’S with key service providers in areas such as police,health, drug and alcohol to ensure a co-ordinated and responsive service approach

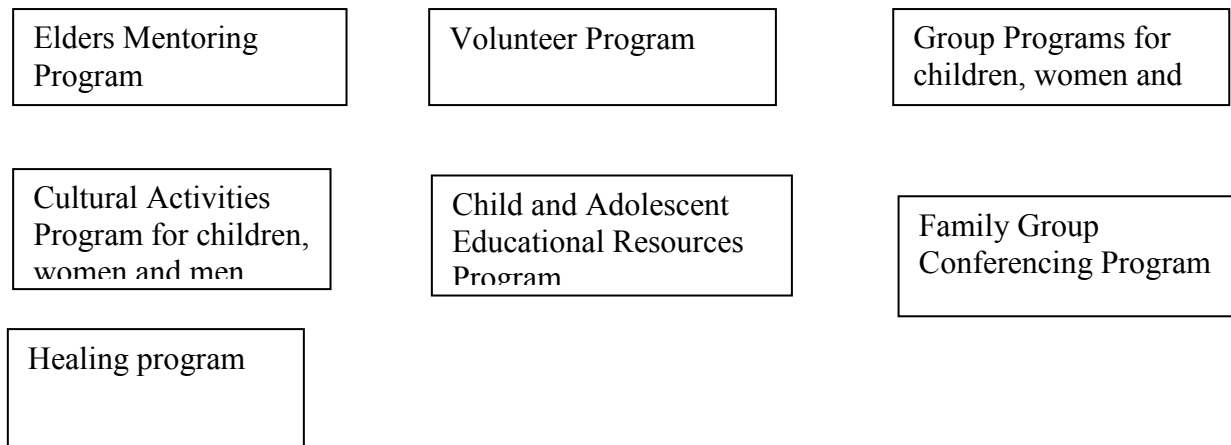
The service would enhance on partnerships with other key Indigenous service providers.

The service would be based on Indigenous values which includes the importance of the family and broader kinship group and community to address family violence.

The service would operate with a clear understanding of the impact of past polices and pratcies and its impact on family fragmentation and the spread of family violence within the Indigenous communities.

**SERVICE DESRIPTION**





## **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH PROGRAM**

**This model requires further scoping. The information provided is to only provide a brief overview.**

### ***1. Family Case Manager***

Each family will have a Case Manager who has responsibility for ensuring service co-ordination to the family. Whilst it is expected that the family will access a number of the services' programs and potentially other external programs, it is possible that the family will only access the case management program if other agencies are providing services but a clear service co-ordination plan is required.

It is expected that many of the families who will use the service will have a range of complex needs. The family Case Manager will maximize a clear service network response to the range of identified concerns such as D & A problems, homelessness, poor school attendance etc. The Case Manager will convene family group conferences. The Case Manager in conjunction with the family and other staff will develop family plans that clarify roles and responsibilities and outline clear strategies to address further family violence occurring. The plan will also specify the action that will be taken if family violence reoccurs or individual family members are considered to be at high risk of violence. It will undertake through assessments of risk and family sterethens.

### ***2. Family group Conferencing Program***

The family Case Manager will convene family conferences and ensure that the kinship family are involved in assisting clients prevent the reoccurrence of family violence.

### ***3. Elders Mentoring Program***

Male and female Elders will be involved to provide mentoring roles, provide cultural advice and information to families that family violence is not culturally acceptable.

### ***4. Volunteer program***

The Service will operate a volunteer program to assist clients with practical problems such as transport to the activities etc.

#### **5. *Family counselling Program***

Each family will have a primary counsellor. Male clients will have male primary counsellors. Counselling can occur on an individual, couple, and family basis or as required.

#### **6. *Art/Play Therapist Program***

A play therapist will be available to offer assistance especially to young children where counselling may not be appropriate. Also, the program will assist parent child interactions through the play/art and using culturally appropriate resources.

#### **7. *Youth Perpetrator Program***

This program will focus on youth perpetrators. Workers will be male and female and will also work with perpetrators' family to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

#### **8. *Cultural Activities Program***

The service will run and/or work closely with other Aboriginal organizations providing cultural activities. It will ensure individual family members are provided the opportunity to be linked into cultural and recreational activities that they both enjoy and engender pride in their Aboriginal heritage and promote self-esteem and in their roles as mothers and fathers.

#### **9. *Child and Adolescent Educational Program***

This program will focus on the educational needs of children and youth referred to the service. It will undertake tasks such as liaison with schools to maximize school attendance and academic achievement and assisting adolescent's access alternative educational and life skills program. It will develop educational resources for use in schools as a preventative measure.

#### **10. *Group Program***

A number of groups will be run depending on clients needs. It is envisaged that men's groups, womens groups, parent(s) children's groups etc will be run. All groups involving men will have male staff involvement. The purpose of the groups will again be dependent on the group cohort but could for example, deal with anger issues, promotion of positive Aboriginal male roles, parenting etc.

#### **11. *Healing Program***

This program will focus on family healing within the context that abuse is not culturally acceptable and that the ongoing safety of the child or adolescent is paramount. It will assist the family develop a range of healing strategies that are based on the families'

needs. For example, it may include referrals to churches for spiritual healing, apology to the family and victim about abusive behaviour etc.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

The Manager of the service would be responsible for its overall functioning. The position will be responsible to the auspice Agencies' CEO. The Service would be established with a built in action research component.

A detailed program structure has yet to be developed.

It will accept referrals from Child Protection Services, Police, the AMCU (if funded) and other services. It will provide a range of services and undertake appropriate referrals to other specialist services. The service will work closely with other violence programs and other services such as drug and alcohol services, employment, housing services, anger management programs etc. The Service will have to access brokerage funds. Both men and women will staff the service. Whilst the service will offer a range of programs, families will access only those programs appropriate to their needs.

## **Model 3 FAMILY VIOLENCE COMMUNITIES AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION UNIT**

### **BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

This unit will focus on raising awareness within the Aboriginal community of the effects and pervasiveness of family violence. The unit will assist primarily Aboriginal organizations decrease the extent of family violence through raising awareness of the problem, training of staff in how to appropriately respond to incidences of family violence, assisting organizations developing of strategic plans to address the issue and through the provision of information to a range of groups.

The unit will work closely with other mainstream and Aboriginal services involved in the field.

### **PROGRAM AIMS**

This unit will provide a range of activities that aim to;

- Create awareness within the Aboriginal community and organizations of what constitutes family violence and that it is not culturally acceptable
- Provide training and training modules to Aboriginal community organizations to develop staff skills and competence in recognizing and working with family violence
- Provide training and develop training packages for mainstream organizations on understanding family violence within the Aboriginal community and on how

to assist Aboriginal families experiencing family violence in a culturally appropriate manner

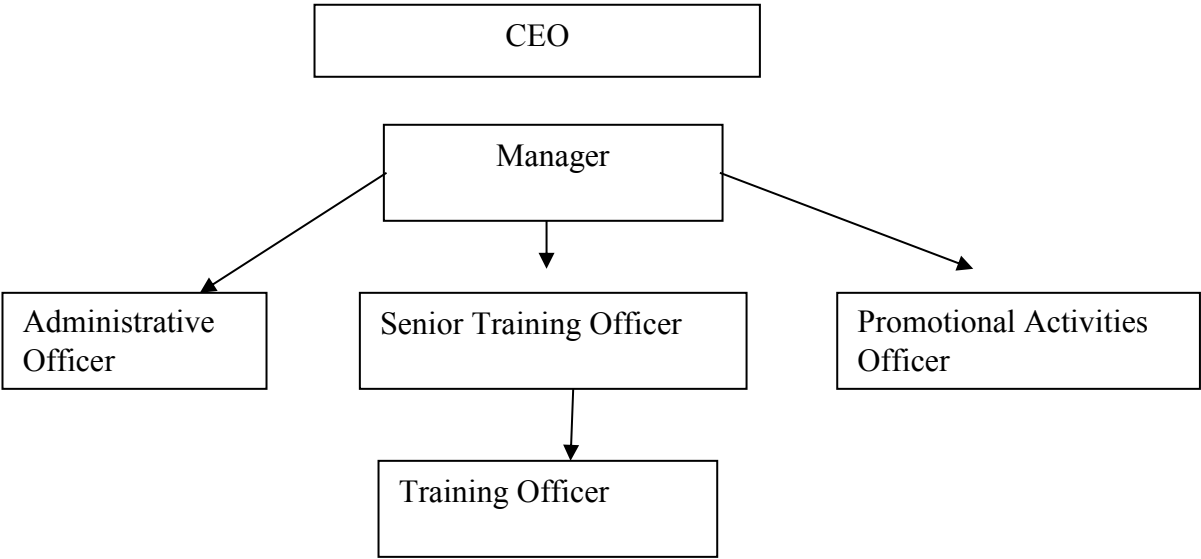
- Assist Aboriginal organizations undertake training in family violence as required
- Assist Aboriginal organizations develop a whole of organization approach to dealing with family violence
- Assist Aboriginal organizations enhance their recruitment practices
- Assist welfare training institutes develop appropriate course content, for example child care courses,
- Assist schools provide appropriate information to young people in regards to Indigenous family violence

**STAFFING**

It is envisaged that the unit will have core staff such as a Manager and administrative support and a senior trainer. It has the capacity to offer secondments to Aboriginal staff in the child and family welfare field to work on specific projects.

The Manager will be accountable to the auspice agencies' CEO. It is expected that the Manager will develop a business plan outlining activities to be undertaken based on having engaged the field in a consultation process to identify priorities.

The Service will be established with a built in action research component.



## **Appendix 3:**

# **Department of Health and Human Services Standards Evidence Guide**

## **Culturally Informed Addendum Resource Tool**

### **Introduction**

This resource tool is designed to be used by CSOs and department managed services in conjunction with the DHHS Standards evidence guide - Culturally Informed Addendum. The tool proposes questions to assist organisations in articulating where they are on the cultural competency continuum and determining where efforts need to be directed. The tool includes specific measureable indicators in the monitoring and evaluation section and these represent the foundations for a continuous quality improvement approach. The indicators support an outcomes focus enabling organisations to move towards measuring the impacts of their service delivery for Aboriginal people. The tool acknowledges that cultural competence is a journey rather than a destination and the suggested indicators are a starting point upon which organisations can build and deepen their Aboriginal cultural competence.

The resource tool also includes reference to useful contextual and practice documents that will assist organisations in meeting the standards and delivering quality services and outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Standard	Approach	Knowledge/Awareness	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>Empowerment</b>  <i>Peoples rights are promoted and upheld</i>  <b>Culture is empowering</b>  <b>Self-determination is a Human Right</b>	<p>Does your organisation have and enable access to the relevant charters that outline Aboriginal peoples' rights to culture?</p> <p>Do your organisational foundation documents (vision, values, strategic plan) include statements of commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and culturally competent practice?</p> <p>Does your organisation have memorandums of understanding, policies, protocols and partnership agreements with local ACCOs?</p> <p>Does your organisation have documents that describe the system for ensuring Aboriginal clients understand their rights to culture and the cultural safety they can expect from the service provider?</p>	<p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers supported to undertake self-reflection processes to explore the impact of their values and beliefs, power and privileges of dominant white culture as a starting point for culturally competent practice?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers supported to understand, (through cultural awareness/safety training and other initiatives), the impact of colonisation, previous government policies and institutional racism on Aboriginal peoples and the continuing disadvantage faced by Aboriginal communities?</p> <p>Do staff/carers/volunteers understand the importance of cultural safety for Aboriginal peoples and how to promote cultural safety in all aspects of service delivery?</p>	<p>Are Aboriginal clients, Aboriginal communities and ACCOs involved in reviews of service quality and is the information they provide build into subsequent service delivery?</p> <p>Do you have feedback mechanisms or data that confirms Aboriginal clients receive and understand information about their rights to culture, cultural safety and local Aboriginal services and groups?</p> <p>Do you have feedback mechanisms with ACCOs to review the effectiveness of MOUs, policies, protocols and partnership agreements?</p>

Standard	Approach	Knowledge/Awareness	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>Access and Engagement</b>  <i>Peoples rights to access transparent, equitable and integrated services are promoted and upheld</i>	<p>Does your organisation display positive Aboriginal symbols in the workplace?</p> <p>Do your organisational foundation and planning documents include strategies for ensuring cultural safety for Aboriginal clients?</p> <p>Do you have a professional development strategy for ongoing cultural awareness training for all board members/staff/carers/volunteers?</p> <p>Does your organisation have processes in place to identify Aboriginal service users?</p> <p>Do you have a system for priority access for Aboriginal clients?</p> <p>Does your organisation work with local ACCOs to identify the barriers to service access for Aboriginal people and strategies to address these?</p> <p>Does your organisation consult with local ACCOs and Aboriginal communities about culturally informed engagement strategies?</p> <p>Is the design of your service information documentation informed by consultation and feedback from Aboriginal clients, communities and ACCOs?</p>	<p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of the importance of displaying positive Aboriginal symbols to demonstrate respect for the First People of Australia and their culture?</p> <p>Have board/ staff/carers/volunteers participated in cultural awareness training?</p> <p>Do staff/carers/volunteers know how to ask about Aboriginal identity respectfully and respond appropriately?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of the services and supports provided by local ACCOs and communities and how to consult and refer to these services?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of barriers to service access for Aboriginal people and strategies to address these?</p> <p>Do staff/carers/volunteers have awareness and understanding of culturally informed engagement strategies?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of cultural mores such as men's and women's business and Sorry business?</p>	<p>Do you have evidence that shows regular engagement and consultation with ACCOs and local Aboriginal communities?</p> <p>Do you have feedback mechanisms to indicate Aboriginal people's satisfaction with the cultural safety provided by your organisation?</p> <p>Do you have evidence that shows participation in cultural awareness training?</p> <p>Do you have evidence that shows implementation of culturally competent practices? (including direct feedback from Aboriginal clients and their family and kin)</p> <p>Do you have data indicating Aboriginal people accessing your service?</p> <p>Do you have mechanisms enabling feedback from Aboriginal people on barriers to service access and engagement?</p>

Standard	Approach	Knowledge/Awareness	Monitoring and Evaluation
	Does your organisation promote the	Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of the	Do you have evidence of participation in



<p><b>Wellbeing</b></p> <p><i>People's right to wellbeing and safety is promoted and upheld</i></p>	<p>importance of cultural connections in building resilience and wellbeing for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Do you seek out the input of ACCOs and Aboriginal Communities in designing and delivering services for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Do you consider how you can ensure cultural safety for Aboriginal people from first point of contact and throughout all service delivery?</p> <p>Do you adopt a holistic approach to support for Aboriginal people where the focus is broader than the individual's presenting issue and includes family, Community and culture?</p> <p>Do you identify and promote the strengths of the Aboriginal kinship system in providing wraparound support for the individual?</p> <p>Is your service delivery to Aboriginal people informed by the collective grief, loss and trauma impacting on Aboriginal Communities as result of past policies and practices?</p>	<p>relationship between cultural connections and wellbeing for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of how to ensure cultural safety for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Are staff/carers/volunteers aware of the importance of adopting a holistic approach and familiar with tools to assist this such as the cultural connections map?<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Are staff/carers/volunteers aware of the strengths of the Aboriginal kinship system and how to engage and involve family, extended family and Community in providing wraparound support for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of the impacts of grief, loss and trauma for Aboriginal people?</p>	<p>cultural competency training and content of training includes focus on relationship between culture and wellbeing, impacts of grief, loss and trauma, cultural safety and holistic approach?</p> <p>Do you have practice evidence of the implementation of a culturally informed, holistic approach for Aboriginal clients?</p> <p>Do you have practice evidence of family, extended family, ACCO and Community involvement in providing wraparound support for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Do you have evidence of positive impacts of your service delivery for Aboriginal clients? (Interviews with clients, family and kin indicating satisfaction and positive outcomes; focus groups; feedback from ACCOs)</p>
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Knowledge/Awareness</b>	<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>

<sup>3</sup> See page 27 of Culturally Informed Addendum

<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p><i>People's right to choice, decision making and to actively participate as a valued member of their chosen community is promoted and upheld</i></p>	<p>Does your organisation ensure that the cultural background, history, Traditional rights and ownership of Land of Aboriginal clients are identified, acknowledged and valued?</p> <p>Do you acknowledge and respect the spiritual connection and affiliation Aboriginal people have with the land?</p> <p>Do you support Aboriginal people to identify, connect and practice their culture?</p> <p>Do you have positive and respectful relationships with local ACCOs and Elders to facilitate Aboriginal clients Community connections and participation?</p> <p>Do you ensure Aboriginal people are informed about and supported to access Aboriginal services, Community resources and cultural events and activities including sports, music and arts?</p> <p>Do you use collaborative approaches to choice and decision making for Aboriginal clients involving family, Community, Elders and ACCOs where appropriate?</p>	<p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of the importance of identifying, acknowledging and valuing cultural background, history, Traditional rights and spiritual connection and affiliation with the land for Aboriginal people?</p> <p>Are staff/carers/volunteers knowledgeable about how to support Aboriginal clients to identify, connect and practice their culture?</p> <p>Are board/staff/carers/volunteers aware of local ACCOs, Community resources and cultural events and how to assist Aboriginal clients to access these services and supports?</p> <p>Do board/staff/carers/volunteers participate in networks and meetings with ACCOs and local Aboriginal Communities and understand the importance of positive, respectful relationships in facilitating positive outcomes for Aboriginal clients?</p>	<p>Do you have feedback from Aboriginal clients indicating satisfaction with the support they received to reconnect, maintain and strengthen family, kin and Community ties and connection?</p> <p>Do you have evidence of networks and pathways with ACCOs and local Communities that have assisted Aboriginal client's active and ongoing Community participation?</p> <p>Do you have positive feedback from ACCOs about your services support of Aboriginal clients' cultural and spiritual connections?</p> <p>Do you have evidence that Aboriginal people have been actively supported to participate in their chosen community?</p> <p>Do you have evidence of Aboriginal clients' participation in cultural and spiritual activities?</p>
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## Useful Documents

1. *The Community Guide to the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2010 at [www.humanrights.gov.au/declaration\\_indigenous/index.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/declaration_indigenous/index.html)
2. *Un Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Article 15* - This provides the relevant context for Aboriginal peoples rights to culture
3. *Attorney-General Department Human Rights Public Sector Guidance Sheets – Rights to enjoy and benefit from culture at:* [www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/HumanRights/PublicSectorGuidanceSheets/Pages/Righttoenjoyandbenefitfromculture.aspx#1what](http://www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/HumanRights/PublicSectorGuidanceSheets/Pages/Righttoenjoyandbenefitfromculture.aspx#1what)
4. *DHS Aboriginal Cultural Competency Framework 2008* at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/.../Aboriginal\\_cultural\\_competence\\_2008.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/.../Aboriginal_cultural_competence_2008.pdf)
5. *The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018* Building for the future: a plan for Closing the Gap in Victoria by 2031 at <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework>
6. *The Victorian Government Aboriginal Inclusion Framework 2011* available at [www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/aboriginal-inclusion](http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-affairs-policy/aboriginal-inclusion)
7. *DHS Enabling choice for Aboriginal people living with disability – Promoting access and inclusion* at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/.../cald\\_enabling\\_choice\\_pdf\\_080211.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/.../cald_enabling_choice_pdf_080211.pdf)
8. *Building Respectful Partnerships* The commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competency in Child and Family Services VACCA 2010
9. *Trauma informed services and trauma specific care for Indigenous Australian Children July 2013* Judy Atkinson Resource sheet no.21 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse at [www.aihw.gov/closingthegap](http://www.aihw.gov/closingthegap)
10. *Know ya Rights* A booklet for young fellas in care about your rights VACCA
11. *Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in out of home care* VACCA
12. *Charter for children in out of home care 2013* various resources including resources for Aboriginal children and young people at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/charter-for-children-in-out-of-home-care](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/charter-for-children-in-out-of-home-care)

**'Talk it out 'Aboriginal Cultural Competence Self Reflection Resources** available from St Luke's contact

