VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture

# Victorian State Election Platform 2026

**Aboriginal-led initiatives continue to deliver positive outcomes and can bring about real change where Aboriginal children and families need it most.**

# About VACCA

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) is the lead Aboriginal child and family support organisation in Australia. In Victoria, it delivers justice and homelessness services and is the largest provider of Aboriginal-led family violence services.

We work holistically with children, young people, women, men, and families to ensure they have the necessary supports to heal and thrive. We do this by advocating for the rights of children and providing everyone who walks through our doors with services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.

We provide support services to more than 9,800 children and young people, and their families and carers each year.

VACCA shows respect for observance of and compliance with Aboriginal cultural protocols, practice and ceremony.

VACCA was established in 1976 and emerged from a long and determined Aboriginal Civil Rights movement in Victoria. Today, we continue to act, serve and advocate for the rights of Aboriginal Victorians, especially children, women and families.

VACCA is a statewide service provider. Across our six regions, VACCA operates in 50 locations delivering over 80 programs including child and family services, child protection, family violence and sexual assault supports, youth and adult justice supports, early years, education, homelessness, disability, AOD, cultural programs and supports for Stolen Generations.

We employ over 1300 staff and we are Victoria's biggest employer of Aboriginal people. Our Aboriginality distinguishes us from mainstream services and enables us to deliver the positive outcomes we achieve for our people.

VACCA is guided by Cultural Therapeutic Ways, our whole-of-agency approach to our practice of healing for Aboriginal children, young people, families, community members and carers who use our services, and to ensure that VACCA is a safe and supportive workplace for staff. It is the intersection of cultural practice with trauma and self-determination theories. The aim of Cultural Therapeutic Ways is to integrate Aboriginal culture and healing practices with trauma theories to guide an approach that is healing, protective and connective.

# Acknowledgement

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

We acknowledge the Stolen Generations; those who we have lost; those who generously share their stories with us; and those we are yet to bring home.

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# The Compelling Case for Change: A Message from VACCA's CEO

Victoria's Aboriginal population is young (median age, 24 years) and rapidly growing.

Right now, our state is home to 102,000 – 1 percent of the population. By 2041, the population is projected to grow to 239,136.

Our vision for our children and families is to be culturally strong, safe and thriving.

As we look ahead to the next term of government, we are calling on our political leaders to work with us to dismantle the barriers that currently produce unequal life outcomes for Aboriginal children compared to their non-Aboriginal peers.

Action must span law reform, policy commitment, systems change, sector development (including ACCO sector strengthening), funding transformation and the transfer of resources and power from government and mainstream community sector organisations to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

The solutions in this submission align with the state of Victoria's binding commitments under the National Agreement to Closing the Gap and state-based strategies and outcomes measures.

Backing Aboriginal-led programs delivers compounding, positive outcomes for the Aboriginal community and the wider community. For Victoria, it means meeting commitments under Closing the Gap and Yoorrook while avoiding far greater long-term costs of children cycling through care, courts, homelessness and health systems. It means safety, connection and self-determination for Aboriginal people that creates wellbeing, positive life outcomes and generational change.

**Muriel Bamblett**

**CEO, VACCA**

# Building Aboriginal Capability & Transforming Systems to Close the Gap

## 1 A strong Aboriginal workforce and Aboriginal community-controlled sector to meet increasing demand for culturally safe and effective services

### Recommendation

As one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in Victoria, VACCA seeks $2.671 million in workforce funding a year to strengthen workforce capability and organisational capacity across around 1300 staff and growing. Sustainable workforce investment is essential to ensure the organisation can meet current and future needs, including growing demand for critical services to Aboriginal Victorian children and families.

### Case for change

Victoria's Aboriginal population is growing, and so is demand for critical community services. To continue to deliver Aboriginal-led services for Aboriginal children and families, VACCA's investment in its current and future workforce must also increase.

The Victorian Aboriginal population is expected to double by 2041, according to a 2026 report by Social Ventures Australia (SVA). To meet the relative demand, VACCA's workforce must treble by 2041.

As Victoria's largest Aboriginal community-controlled organisation and biggest employer of Aboriginal people, VACCA delivers programs spanning Aboriginal guardianship, out-of-home care, family services, family violence services, residential care, youth justice, early-years services and community development.

We must simultaneously scale capacity and invest in capabilities, including professional development and training, increase entry-level career pathways for Aboriginal people and systems infrastructure.

Investing in VACCA's workforce has significant and long-term social and economic benefits for Aboriginal communities around Victoria.

The evidence shows that funding the true cost of an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation's service delivery and workforce needs leads to superior outcomes, builds generational change and employment opportunities in the lives of Aboriginal people and their community, and produces long-term avoided costs to government.

Investing in the workforce is central to achieving the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two – Building the community-controlled sector.

### Indicative investment

VACCA seeks $2.671 million in workforce investment a year as an essential enabler of service delivery and to build and retain its Aboriginal workforce.

## 2 An Aboriginal Knowledge and Practice Centre will facilitate cross-sector collaboration and drive better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families

### Recommendation

Establish an Aboriginal Knowledge and Practice Centre to support Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to design and deliver services, strengthen practice, and generate and use their own evidence to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Australians.

### Case for change

ACCOs have deep cultural expertise that guides their work with Aboriginal children and families, yet this knowledge has rarely been formally documented or shared because Western research and evaluation methods were never built to recognise it.

The result is a critical, sector-wide evidence gap that limits innovation, best practice, and the case ACCOs can make for future investment.

In 2019, DFFH commissioned VACCA and the Victorian Aboriginal Children's and Young People's Alliance (VACYPA) and the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI) to consult ACCOs on this exact problem. The clear finding was that ACCOs want a dedicated Centre to capture, build and share Aboriginal knowledge and practice.

A second phase of consultation (2023-24) developed a five-year establishment plan, including ACCO-representative governance, and addressed critical questions of intellectual and cultural property and Indigenous data sovereignty.

VACCA is uniquely placed to deliver this work, with an existing team of Research and Evidence Development specialists leading research evaluation and knowledge translation work.

For government, this is a foundational investment with compounding returns, enabling more effective service delivery while delivering on Victoria's Close the Gap commitment to Aboriginal-led data and knowledge systems.

### Indicative investment

VACCA is seeking funding of $4,878,883 over five years to establish the Centre, with first year funding of $565,053.

# Strengthening Community and Keeping Kids Out of Statutory Care

## 1 A proven Pre-birth Response reducing the number of Aboriginal babies entering care

### Recommendation

Fund expansion of VACCA's Pre-birth Response model to divert Aboriginal babies from entering Child Protection, avoid long-term costs to government and meet growing demand for services.

### Case for change

Aboriginal infants who are subject to an unborn report are removed at almost double the rate of non-Aboriginal infants within their first year of life. VACCA's Pre-birth Response model, combining Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC) and Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies At Home (BUABAH), was trialled, evaluated and found to successfully divert Aboriginal babies from Child Protection.

Through Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC), VACCA delivers a recommendation of the landmark Yoorrook for Justice report, ensuring pregnant Aboriginal women are informed of unborn reports about them by someone skilled to hold this conversation and offer culturally safe support. Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH) complements this with a longer-term, intensive case management response to support families at risk of Child Protection involvement.

An interim evaluation conducted in partnership with the University of Melbourne found that 63% of babies supported by ALCC or BUABAH were discharged from hospital with their mother and remained with her until program close. Without this support, many of these babies would likely have entered statutory care and have continued or repeated involvement across systems into adulthood continuing the cycle of disadvantage, trauma and unnecessary long-term costs to the Aboriginal community and Victorian community more broadly.

Expanding the program into more key regions, extends a proven, evidence-based model to regional families currently missing out, and offers government a clear, high-return investment.

### Indicative investment

VACCA seeks $4.407 million in 2027-28 to provide the model statewide.

## 2 Establish a Place-based Partnership in Victoria and reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care

### Recommendation

Fund Victoria's National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) Priority Reform One commitment to a place-based Partnership in the Latrobe Valley.

### Case for change

Under the National Agreement for Closing the Gap, the Victorian Government made a commitment to establish a Place-Based Partnership (PBP) and a community data project. These two initiatives are key to achieving Target 12, to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.

In April 2023, through a shared decision-making process with Aboriginal leaders, the State Government selected Morwell (Latrobe Valley) as the site for Victoria's PBP and community data project. The work is still at inception phase. The government's initial 12-month investment in the Latrobe Valley PBP and community data project does not acquit Victoria's obligations under the National Agreement.

The community is strong and resilient and has the solutions.

Like other jurisdictions, Victoria will need to make a long-term investment in community-led solutions identified through the PBP and the community data project to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in the Child Protection system.

Victoria is lagging every other Australian state and territory in standing up a PBP and a community data project, even though it has the highest rate of Aboriginal children in out of home care.

For more information about the partnership, see: https://www.latrobevalleykooriepartnership.org/

### Indicative investment

$10 million over three years for ACCO-led intensive case management for prevention and early intervention.

## 3 VACCA's Nugel program is diverting kids from re-entering the statutory system, and doubling reunification rates for those in care

### Recommendation

Fund growth for VACCA's Aboriginal-led Nugel program, and support children in the system to reunite with their families when it is in the best interests of the child to do so.

### Case for change

Aboriginal children in Victoria are 7 times more likely to face a child protection investigation and 22 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children.

Nugel Community Protecting Boorais (CPB) provides an Aboriginal-led and culturally safe approach to responding to child protection reports, providing a more effective alternative to the mainstream child protection system that is not working for our families. Nugel CPB is contributing to the sustained safety of Aboriginal children, with families supported by Nugel CPB found to have reduced likelihood of re-entering the system in the future (compared to those in mainstream child protection). Nugel CPB is also reducing the amount of time Aboriginal families are in the statutory system (including in out-of-home care).

VACCA's Nugel program provides a statutory child protection service to up to 792 children at any given time. It was found to achieve a 24% reunification rate, which is double the Department's 12%. It results in lower rates of children moving to long-term orders, greater family engagement in decision-making, and stronger parental participation in court. Families describe our practice as more culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, timely and responsive.

Every child diverted from the statutory system or reunified rather than placed in long-term care represents life-changing outcomes for children and families, as well as substantial avoided cost to government in placement, court and downstream spending.

### Indicative investment

VACCA seeks $11.74 million to grow our Nugel (Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care) program in FY2027/2028.

## Walking Alongside Families: A Story of Safety, Strength and Self-determination

VACCA's Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais teams accepted a child protection report concerning a young family with a new baby who were experiencing family violence. Both parents had disabilities and complex trauma from growing up in the child protection system, with limited opportunities to develop healthy relationship skills.

Mum was determined to keep her baby safe at home and actively engaged with VACCA's family violence and Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies At Home (BUABAH) program staff, as well as mother's groups. Despite efforts to support dad's engagement and facilitate safe family time, he continued to use violence against mum.

As mum's trust in her various supports grew, she developed a stronger understanding of the impact of the violence on her and her baby and recognised the patterns of abuse she was experiencing.

Having decisionmakers and community-based supports operating together as a continuum of care, VACCA's BUABAH and Nugel-Community Protecting Boorais teams as well as another ACCO, walked alongside mum and baby who entered refuge accommodation. They are now safe and thriving.

With support that's centred in culture, trauma-informed and that facilitates self-determination, statutory intervention can be avoided, and more families can thrive.

# Keeping Children Connected to Culture, Kin & Country and Creating Generational Change

## 1 Family-finding services connecting Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to family and their sense of self, assisting their healing process

### Recommendation

Restore and grow funding for VACCA's Kinship Finding program, which connects Aboriginal children in out-of-home care with family and culture through two research streams: Family Finding and Connection to Mob. Increased funding will clear existing waitlists and meet demand that has grown sharply since the program began.

### Case for change

Since VACCA's Kinship Finding program launched in 2021, the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care has almost tripled, from around 1,000 to 2,996 in 2025. Yet funding for the program that connects and returns these children to family and culture has been cut.

The program does two distinct, essential jobs. Family Finding urgently locates living relatives who can offer placement, care or ongoing contact within a tight three-week window. Connection to Mob undertakes the long-term genealogical work needed to reconnect children with their mobs and cultural heritage, repairing links broken by events including the Stolen Generations.

Demand has outpaced funding, despite the program already exceeding its own targets.

Every child connected to family avoids the higher cost and higher harm of growing up without that connection and protection.

### Indicative investment

A total of $1,295,395 a year.

## 2 Piloting an Aboriginal model of out-of-home care: Raising Boorais Together

### Recommendation

Fund a three-year pilot, Raising Boorais Together (RBT), an alternative model of care for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to reduce the amount of time in care and support strong and thriving young people.

Delivering Aboriginal models of care is a commitment under Wungurilwil Gapgapduir, and with the support of the Department, RBT was developed by VACCA with several ACCOs across Victoria. A $6.04 million total is being requested to deliver the pilot model over three years.

### Case for Change

Aboriginal children are removed from their families at 22.5 times the rate of non-Indigenous children, yet the models of care that they enter remain largely under-resourced to meaningfully sustain the vital connection to culture, community and Country that Aboriginal children need to thrive, feel safe and supported.

The pilot funds a Circle of Care of eight to 10 placements, delivered with a cultural mentor, enabling critical cultural support, and a built-in developmental evaluation to generate the evidence base for future scale-up.

Enhanced cultural support and family involvement are expected to help children exit out-of-home care earlier, reduce costly placement breakdowns, and lower the likelihood of later contact with the justice system. Each of these stages represents significant long-term avoided costs, as well as a better outcome for the child.

This is a modest, time-limited investment to test and evidence the model government has already committed to delivering. It is giving government that chance to back a genuinely self-determined alternative to the current system, with the evaluation built in to prove its case for full-scale investment down the track.

### Indicative investment

$6.04 million over three years.

## 3 An Aboriginal model of Residential care that reduces the amount of time kids spend in care

### Recommendation

Resource an Aboriginal model of Residential care for young Aboriginal people so that they 'emerge strong' and stay strong.

### Case for change

Since VACCA implemented Gamadji Balit ('Emerge Strong' in Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung language) in 2024, children are spending less time in residential care and returning home sooner.

Gamadji Balit's success hinges on increasing our Aboriginal workforce and providing the culturally grounding resources, connections to local community and to Country that safeguard our young people now and sustain them into the future.

VACCA is delivering this culturally responsive model despite operating within a standard funding framework that makes no allowance for these vital elements. We created additional identified positions, like Elder/Older roles who provide foundational care and cultural safety.

VACCA's Research and Development team has established measurement frameworks to build a strong evidence base that's demonstrating positive outcomes and impacts for children, young people and our workforce.

Additional funding is required to fully realise the model and increase the positive change, as well as deliver on the Aboriginal models of care commitment under the Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Children and Families Agreement.

### Indicative investment

$1,951,664 per year

# Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage

## 1 Moorumbina Mongurnallin – stopping the trajectory of from-care to homelessness

### Recommendation

Moorumbina Mongurnallin, in Frankston, is more than temporary housing for young Aboriginal people (18 to 21) leaving out-of-home care or at risk of homelessness. It provides crucial cultural, personal development and vocational supports to facilitate thriving independence for our young people leaving care and it requires funding to optimise and continue this support in future.

### Case for change

Aboriginal Victorians are dramatically over-represented in the youth homelessness crisis. Victoria recorded one of the highest numbers of people accessing homelessness services in the nation. Half of them were under 25 years of age.

There is a direct trajectory from out-of-home care to homelessness.

- Aboriginal children in Victoria are 22 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children.
- Of the 2,703 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, 35% experience homelessness after turning 18.
- Within a year of leaving care, half of all care leavers face unemployment, involvement with the justice system, homelessness or become a new parent.

These outcomes carry significant, compounding challenges for individuals but also significant, compounding costs to government across health, justice, housing and welfare systems for decades.

Moorumbina Mongurnallin breaks this cycle before it starts, providing on-site mentoring, programs that strengthen cultural identity and connection, and a dedicated practitioner working to secure long-term housing before a young person exits.

Program costs are under half a million dollars a year for a proven intervention averting a lifetime of downstream cost and relieving pressure on services.

### Indicative investment

$487,400 per year to deliver culturally affirming housing supports.

## 2 Culturally safe, trauma-informed education supports to close an access gap and improve outcomes for Aboriginal students

### Recommendation

Fund VACCA's education-support programs and resource the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to enable Aboriginal children across Victoria to have equitable access to support and pathways to stronger futures.

### Case for change

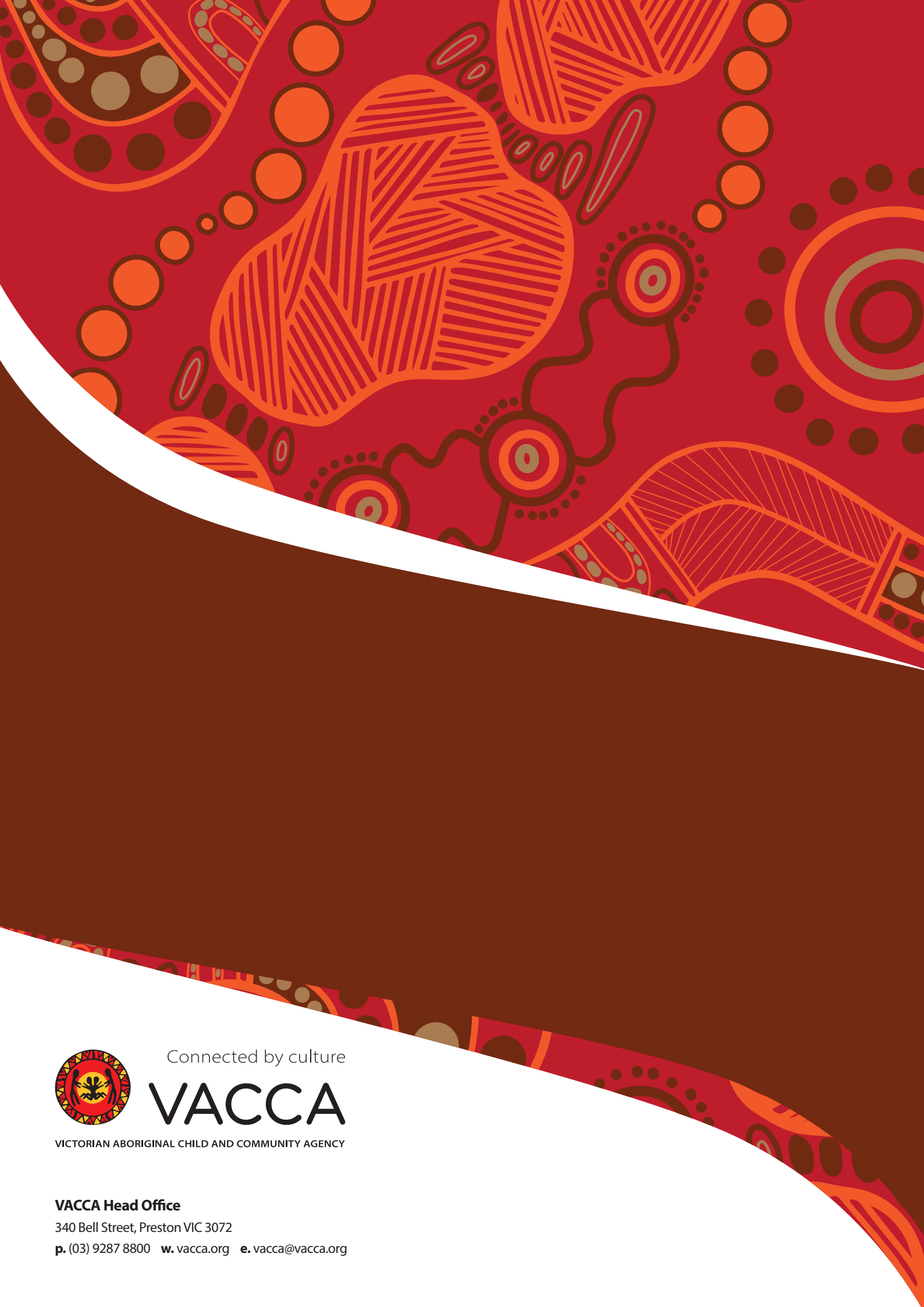
Aboriginal children and young people face structural impediments not experienced by others, with racism and lack of cultural safety undermining their educational success, impacting on attendance and NAPLAN results.

There must be a commitment to:

1. Sustained and increased funding for VACCA's Strong and Deadly Boorais and Education Supports for Children in Care programs, beyond the pilot period (June 2028), to expand the programs' footprint to statewide and open capacity to support children outside statutory care.
2. Reforming the Department of Education's Navigator program, supporting disengaged young people, to ensure Aboriginal children seeking support are directed to an Aboriginal-community controlled organisation.
3. Establish a centralised Education team at VACCA, beyond program delivery, to coordinate culturally safe practice, delivery and reporting, and ensure that no child misses their right to safe and inclusive education.

### Indicative investment

$6.45 million a year to support all Aboriginal children and young people who need it.



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