



VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD
AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture

Closing the Gap – Stronger Together

Maternal and Child Health Conference 2025

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Presentation overview

Focus

- Working together to support Aboriginal families pre and post birth
- Early intervention to prevent Aboriginal infants entering the child protection system

Topics

- Child Protection Data
 - ACCOs delivering child and families services
 - Reconsider making child protection reports
 - VACCA's Pre-birth Response model
 - VACCA Family Services
 - What you can do
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- A decorative Aboriginal art pattern is located in the bottom right corner of the slide. It features a series of concentric, overlapping circles and arcs in shades of orange, red, and white, creating a dynamic, swirling effect.

VACCA SERVICE FOOTPRINT

Early Years,
Education &
Youth Programs

Kinship Family
Finding &
Cultural Support

Out of Home
Care Programs

Training,
Research, Policy
& Advocacy

Homelessness
Support Programs

Therapeutic Family
Violence Programs

Justice Support
Programs

Integrated
Family Services

Specialist Support Programs,
Link-Up Victoria & Ngarrra Jarra
Noun Kedress Support
Service

Healing Team and
Mental Health

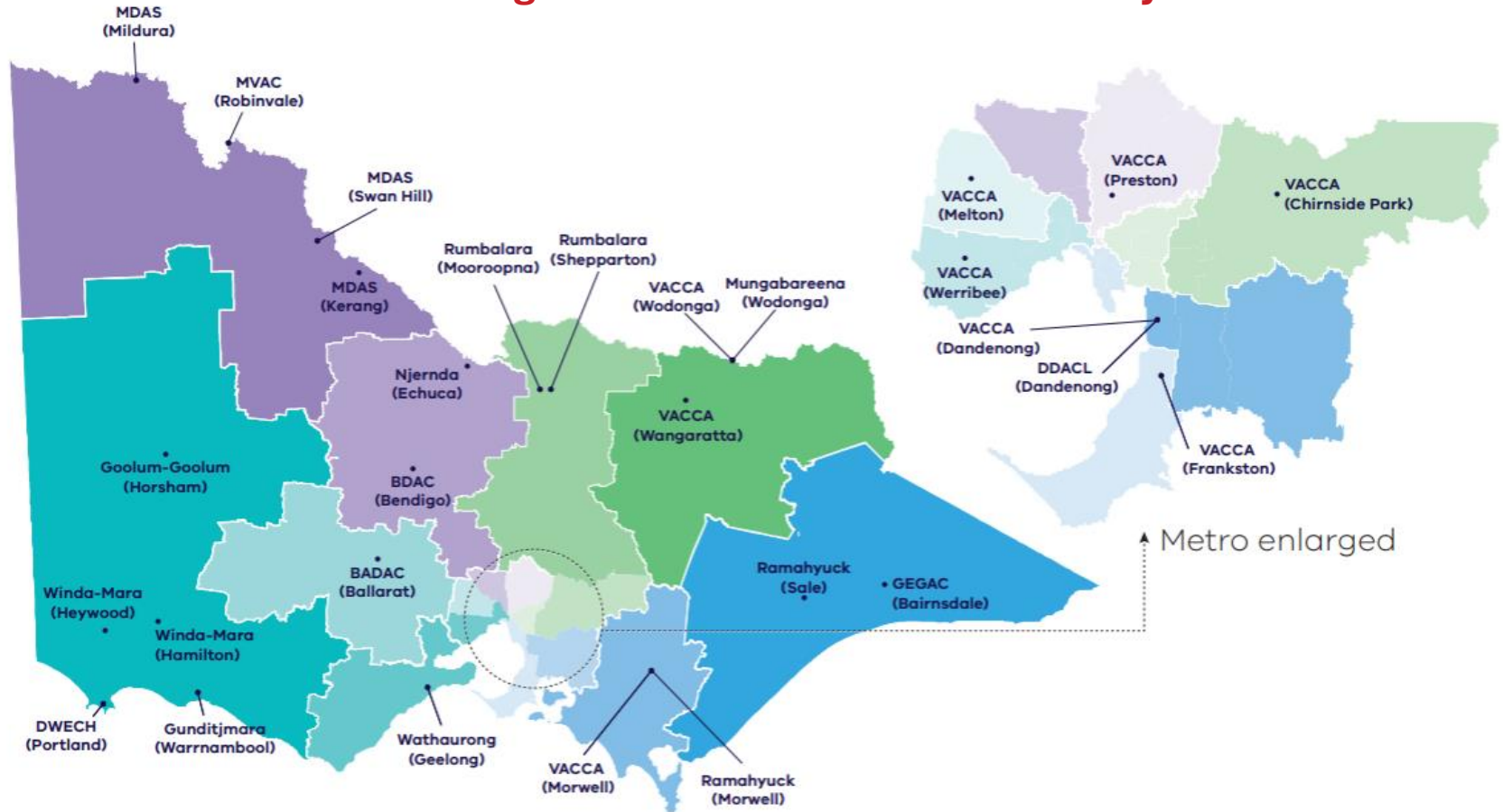
Community Support
& Emergency
Relief

Cultural
Strengthening
Programs

Child Protection Data

- 21% of Aboriginal children subject to unborn reports (received in the two years to 30 June 2023) entered Care Services within 12 months of birth, compared to 12% for non-Aboriginal clients
- Over FY21-22 across Victoria, the majority (82%) of Aboriginal children subject to an unborn report progressed to a regular CP report at birth
- Only 40% of unborn reports for Aboriginal children (received in the two years to 30 Jun 23) progressed to a substantiated investigation within six months of birth

ACCOs delivering Vic Gov funded child and family services



When to support vs report

- Thoroughly assess the situation
- Does the family need support and who is best to provide this?
- Consult with ALO, VACCA/ACCO, and other relevant professionals
- Do the safety concerns require a child protection response?

Important Considerations

Reporting to child protection can have serious consequences for Aboriginal families, including:

- Trauma and distress
- Breakdown of trust with healthcare providers
- Potential separation of families
- Reinforcement of historical trauma

Remember:

Our goal is to support families to stay together safely whenever possible.

VACCA's Pre-birth Response model

In response to Aboriginal infant removals that had been happening, VACCA developed an agency approach to supporting Aboriginal families expecting a baby. Our 'Pre-birth Response' model comprises two key components:

1. The referral of unborn reports to the Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing (ALCC) program
2. The reintroduction of Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH)

Both programs were piloted by VACCA and found to be successful in diverting Aboriginal families from Child Protection.

Broad objectives – what do we want our Pre-birth Response model to achieve?

- To give Aboriginal families the opportunity to access culturally safe support in preparation for baby being born
- To avoid CP attending the hospital at birth, and babies being removed from their mothers at hospital
- To enable Aboriginal babies being brought up at home



Aboriginal-led Case Conferencing – ALCC

Purpose of the model: To divert Aboriginal families from Child Protection

Target cohort:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families subject to a Child Protection report, where the currently reported concerns suggest that a planned investigation may be required
2. Mothers of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander unborn baby subject to an unborn report, where it's been assessed that the mother requires advice, assistance and support

Via Child Protection Intake, suitable families are referred to a VACCA ALCC Convenor who works with families to address concerns and refer into appropriate and culturally safe services

Areas where ALCC is available:

- North East Melbourne and Hume Merri-bek (from our Preston office)
- South Melbourne and Bayside Peninsula (from our Dandenong office)
- Inner and Outer East Melbourne (from our Chirnside Park office)
- West Melbourne and Brimbank Melton (from our Werribee office)

Key ALCC evaluation findings

Prof. Sarah Wise and Graham Brewster, University of Melbourne, Seeking Safety: Aboriginal Child Protection Diversion Trials Evaluation Final Report (2022) found that the ALCC model **prevented investigations** and **strengthened the safety and wellbeing of children and families** involved in the trial.

The evaluation recommended that the ALCC trial be fully implemented and found the following:



The trial has a 78.3% investigation diversion success rate



Families were highly satisfied with the service and felt culturally safe, as reported in client feedback forms



The trial can yield high return on investment – a \$5 return per \$1 invested



BUABAH – Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home

- BUABAH is a Statewide service, offered in:
 - Southern Melbourne (from our office in Dandenong)
 - Bayside Peninsula (from our office in Frankston)
 - Hume-Merribek and North Eastern Melbourne (from our office in Preston)
 - Inner East and Outer East (from our office in Chimside Park)
 - Western Melbourne (from our office in Werribee)
 - Brimbank Melton (from our office in Melton)
 - Ovens Murray (from our offices in Wangaratta and Wodonga)
 - Inner Gippsland (from our office in Morwell)

Model Overview:

Purpose: An Aboriginal-led, systems-based solution to prevent child protection involvement

- Eligibility criteria:
 - Expectant mums who are pregnant with an Aboriginal child
 - Between 16-25 weeks gestation, and;
 - Who are at risk of child protection involvement
- Intensive support approach – working with mums 2-3 times per week, up to 6 months post-birth
- Referral pathway: Can receive referrals from any source, via VACCA Family Services Intake

BUABAH Pilot evaluation:

Prof. Sarah Wise and Dr. Ellen Pittman, University of Melbourne,
Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home: Program Evaluation (2024)

7 mothers supported and 7 babies birthed safely

6 discharged from hospital with mum, and 1 with maternal aunt

CBCP team member talking about the BUABAH program:



“...some of the cases that they’ve worked, there’s,

hand on heart, absolutely no way

I thought that we would avoid a legal intervention,
and those children not being placed...”



Early insights – what have we found since VACCA's Pre-birth Response started?



Before the first 12 months is complete, one VACCA region has already offered support to nearly **triple the number** of expectant Aboriginal families in a previous 12-month period



BUABAH referrals have been received **earlier in gestation**, allowing more time for practitioners to work with families before birth



Of the 11 BUABAH babies born to date, **all have been discharged from hospital in the care of their mothers** - 72 per cent remain with their mothers, and the other 28 per cent in kinship care.

VACCA's Pre-birth Response will be evaluated in partnership with the University of Melbourne

Final report expected July 2027

VACCA Family Services

- VACCA Family Services is a large program area that spans across all VACCA regions, focusing on strength-based work to **promote parenting/caring capacity and grow up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a positive way underpinned by culture.**
- We provide a continuum of service from brief or early support all the way through to intensively working with families in the home, as well as some specialist programs.
- Our Family Services programs work with families involved with Child Protection but also with families and Community more broadly, using both individual and group-based approaches.



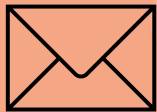
Closing reflections

What you can do

- Reach out and build relationships with your local ACCO. Understand the range of services they can provide and how to refer
- Explore with Aboriginal families appropriate pre and post birth support referrals
- Work collaboratively with and be respectful of the expertise that ACCO practitioners hold

Thank you

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