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Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-Op. Ltd

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

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Issues Paper 10 – Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services

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Introduction

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. This includes re-unification services to Stolen Generations, and advising government and community services organizations in relation to child abuse and neglect issues affecting the community. 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 significant experience in the delivery of services across the universal, specialist and statutory platforms.

VACCA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Issue Paper 10: Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services. VACCA's submission is based on our unique position as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) which provides the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Support Service, as well as services in both the family violence and child protection areas and more broadly to vulnerable community members experiencing disadvantage. Our submission focuses on areas where VACCA believes our knowledge and experience enable us to make a valuable contribution. Our submission offers the following observations, issues, recommendations and priority actions particularly as they pertain to the Victorian Aboriginal community in which we work.

Topic A: Victim and survivor needs and unmet needs

1. What advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment services work for victims and survivors?

From a holistic, social and emotional wellbeing perspective the distinction between advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment (which we refer to as healing) is unhelpful. Providing advocacy can be healing. Providing healing without concurrent support can be counter-productive. For many Aboriginal Victorians social justice and personal experiences of healing are intertwined as a result of the structural violence that was perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples during colonization. This included colonization processes that resulted in profound loss of life, dispossession of land, the breaking up of families and communities, and the suppression of language, knowledge and cultural

beliefs. Therefore, social justice advocacy is often an important part of the healing process that co-occurs alongside personal therapeutic processes.

In VACCA's experience, including through consultation with community, the importance of holistic healing and for the process to be empowering, not just for the individual but also for family and community, is vital. Such holistic approaches to healing have been shown to be increasingly successful in engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community(s) and meeting growing needs. Some examples highlighted by community included, but were not limited to, programs facilitated by services such as Link-Up Victoria and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. Programs with specific focus on Men's and Women's and On Country healing were underlined as integral. There was a strong view that cultural healing programs contribute to individual healing and wellbeing and in turn contributes to the overall wellbeing of family and community. It is important not only to focus on counselling that targets distress and trauma (i.e., symptoms management and reduction), but equally important to have strength-based programs that focused on improving self-worth and cultural wellbeing and identity. This is particularly important because Aboriginal survivors from institutions may experience two layers of trauma - interpersonal trauma such as sexual abuse combined with loss of connection to culture and heritage. Cultural activities and cultural camps can greatly assist in enhancing self-esteem and strengthening identity. From our perspective, it is very important to understand that distress and symptom reduction, and strengthening identity and building life skills, are related but distinct processes that require different programs and therapeutic focus.

2. What does not work or can make things worse or be harmful for victims and survivors? What do victims and survivors need but not receive?

Several VACCA clients and their families have expressed a strong discontent with mainstream counselling services, stating that such conventional treatment methods fail to meet survivor needs that are specific to Aboriginal people's experience. Clients have stated that such failure is due to practitioners lacking appropriate cultural understanding, in particular relation to the systemic displacement of Aboriginal people. While it is important that choice and access must be available, our experience shows that few Aboriginal survivors find mainstream counselling services to be beneficial.

The vast majority of our clients consider access to healing, particularly cultural healing to be what they need. There is a requirement to provide a balance between mainstream services and more holistic cultural healing practices. The human cost of an Inquiry into child sexual abuse cannot be measured in dollars. There are many who contributed to the Stolen Generations Inquiry who are still trying to recover from their experiences with that Inquiry. VACCA wants to ensure that in trying to redress past abuse we do not re-abuse the victims and keep any re-traumatization to a minimum. It is critical that Aboriginal people affected by the terms of reference of this Royal Commission are provided with culturally safe supports and healing. These services are not currently supported through the Department of Social Services (DSS) or any other funding source and our experience, several months into the Royal Commission is the initial healing provided by "telling their story" to the

Royal Commission is short lived and without access to cultural healing supports some question why they came forward.

CLIENT CASE STUDIES

In working with the Victorian Aboriginal community there have been a number issues and barriers that continue to impede our client's healing journey. The following has been produced in consultation with VACCA's Royal Commission Support team and is based on working experience with clients. In addition, the following is also comprised of feedback provided by clients highlighting the prominent issues they continue to face, as well as the healing practices utilized to both cope and empower.

Employment/Centrelink

As children forced to live with trauma alone under Australia's past education policy, which completely excluded the rights and experience of Aboriginal people, some clients were denied access to the same standard of education that most Australians today take for granted. Consequently, those same survivors today lack the required qualifications and experience to be deemed 'job ready.' This then leads to issues proving that existing trauma can in fact be a disability that prevents clients from accessing employment opportunities, and therefore should warrant grounds to be granted pension payments equivalent to that of a physical disability. Accepting the psychological and emotional impacts that both intergenerational trauma and the added trauma of removal and sexual abuse leaves many of our clients struggling to be capable of trying to find work, let alone holding down employment. It is our experience that since the tightening of grounds for a Disability Pension many of our clients are struggling financially more than ever.

Art is healing

Some clients choose to express themselves and their story creatively through poetry, painting and cultural practices. Clients have stated this to be an empowering process that helps facilitate healing from within.

In addition to being a coping mechanism and a tool that assists clients to navigate in times of crisis, creative expression is also enjoyed and can be practiced with a means to share with others. Therefore VACCA argues that such methods and their ability to heal must be appropriately acknowledged, and that additional funding for arts programs be provided with aims to support survivors in their creative endeavors. More specifically, these programs would nurture creative expression and build on client aspirations to become professional artists, writers etc. Through mentoring initiatives catering to both creative and business interests the program would generate potential opportunities for self-employment and in turn facilitate individual and community empowerment.

Cycle of Child Protection and removal

Successive Australian government policies informing the forcible removal and ongoing displacement of Aboriginal people continue to weigh heavily on the relationship between the Victorian Aboriginal community(s) and Child Protection. The lack of culturally appropriate practices around referrals for placement of Aboriginal youth remains responsible for such division and is in need of immediate reform. Survivors in the Aboriginal community(s) who are now caring for their own children and or grandchildren continue to be put at risk of being re-traumatized – having to witness the cycle of removal being repeated.

VACCA believes that the referral process must be improved to ensure a smoother transition for child placement, both with families and in out of home care and that such improved practices work in close partnership with VACCA and be informed by the history of removal and the ongoing impact it has on the Aboriginal community(s) today.

Support Services needed for both clients who are currently on the waiting list and those who have since shared

Due to the continuing numbers registering with the Royal Commission, clients now wishing to share their story with the Royal Commission could be waiting as long as twelve months for a private session. The extended wait and anticipation can heighten anxiety and be a traumatic experience in itself. This can trigger depression and fears of not being heard whilst increasing the potential of self-harm in times of crisis.

Clients who have since shared with the Royal Commission and are now just beginning their healing journey have also expressed a strong need for ongoing support. As the Royal Commission is aware, for those having shared for the first time, the private session can be the mere beginning of a long and arduous process, often reopening wounds that have been suppressed and are in need of ongoing healing. Additional funding for at least two programs (one for those waiting to be heard and one for those who have since shared) is needed in order to meet the growing needs of the Victorian Aboriginal community(s) and ensure that all those affected are supported.

Brokerage for VACCA Royal Commission Support Team

Clients often present at times of crisis relating to housing, health, family and various other matters that require access to emergency funds. This places VACCA under extreme pressure to find appropriate funds in a small window of time. Additionally, the tasks required of VACCA workers when supporting clients in these times are often outside of their assigned duties. However with additional funding put aside for such times, stresses would be reduced and additional workload for VACCA workers minimized.

Superannuation and financial management support

Financial disadvantage continues to be a daily struggle for most clients. An instability in finances can compound existing stresses and detrimental to a client's coping abilities. As previously mentioned, due to the experience of being forcibly removed and institutionalized, clients have been denied equal

opportunities in education and employment and as a result require extensive support and financial advice. Such support can include, but is not limited to, managing superannuation, Centrelink, and receiving monies from settlement claims. With a number of clients wishing to pursue legal matters and civil litigation, VACCA support workers are often requested to make referrals to relevant professionals that can assist in achieving positive outcomes for clients. This has been achieved in finding appropriate legal representation, however a gap remains with financial support services relating to the management of settlement amounts.

The continued request for VACCA support workers to assist clients with these types of financial matters, which are outside of assigned duties, highlights a vital need for services that are equipped to deliver sound and trustworthy financial advice for the Victorian Aboriginal community. In addition, the service must have the professional and cultural capacity to deliver a practice that ensures confidentiality is upheld and is in the best interests of the clients and their family(s).

3. What helps or facilitates access so victims and survivors receive what they need? What are the barriers to receiving advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment and how might those barriers be addressed?

In VACCA's experience, survivors in the Aboriginal community have requested ongoing support be provided by an Aboriginal service. This is due to the ability of an Aboriginal service to establish a trusting relationship with survivors through demonstrated cultural understanding, not only of the impact of abuse but the circumstances in which Aboriginal people have been institutionalized. With a number of clients being of the Stolen Generations, reconnection to family and community is of the highest priority. The re-building of family and community relationships is seen as vital in addressing one of the major impacts of sexual abuse, namely isolation, fear of intimacy and experiencing disconnection from others (while concurrently these processes help to heal the historical trauma of community dis-connection). Again, these are supports that only Aboriginal specific services are equipped to deliver. In cases where outside referrals are requested and or required, VACCA continues to advocate on the client's behalf.

An identified barrier is the insufficient funding provided by government which does not match the growing needs of the Victorian Aboriginal community. These needs relate to the above mentioned and have informed the proposed, and as yet unfunded, healing camps model VACCA has outlined in Appendix A. As the Royal Commission is aware, a survivor sharing their story is merely the beginning of a long and arduous healing journey, one of which appropriate support is required throughout. It is VACCA's fear that with growing needs of the community, coupled with the increasing numbers of clients in community wishing to share their story, that capacity will be exhausted.

Topic B: Diverse victims and survivors

- 1. What existing advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment services are available that cater to the specific needs of diverse victim and survivor groups? What types of models and approaches are used to address the particular needs of these populations?**

Unfortunately, a healing service that specifically caters to the needs of Aboriginal survivors of child sexual abuse is non-existent. In acknowledgment of this critical service gap VACCA has recently developed a proposal for a specialist program for healing from experiences of family violence and childhood sexual abuse, see Attachment B. Through community consultation, survivors have expressed an urgent need for such a service to be delivered by Aboriginal facilitators with both professional and cultural capacity. An Aboriginal designed healing program that has a specific focus on healing sexual abuse would fill a critical gap in community services. A service of this kind would be trauma-informed and embody demonstrated knowledge of the continued displacement of Aboriginal people. In conjunction with being culturally aware, the service must also empower survivors. It is the belief of VACCA that such empowerment begins with reconnecting survivors to what was forcibly taken from them as a child - a strong sense of self, culture and belonging. It is this foundation that provides survivors with the tools to confidently navigate and lead in their healing journey.

2. How could the needs of victims and survivors from diverse backgrounds be better met? What should be in place to ensure they receive the advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment they require?

The Healing Foundation's recent "Growing up Our Children Strong and Deadly" report details healing practices that are trauma informed and respect of Aboriginal culture. As stated in our response to Topic A, it is important to acknowledge that mainstream services such as counselling are important and as previously stated access to these must be a choice available to those impacted by childhood sexual abuse. However it is VACCA's experience working with survivors that healing approaches with a strong cultural focus are most frequently the preferred option. Further, it is important to understand that the needs of Aboriginal community(s) vary and that not all members of community share the same experience. Therefore, whilst clients who were forcibly removed do share commonalities, it is important to be mindful that each experience is unique.

Stolen Generations not only suffered the same loss, grief and trauma as most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to the removal of land, forced re-dispersal onto missions and reserves, loss of economic surety and denial of culture, they also suffered from the removal from family and community and many were abused by those who were supposed to take care of them. This has, all too often, created devastating life-long impacts both for direct survivors and their descendants, and the wider Aboriginal community.

VACCA believes that in order to meet the diversity of growing needs amongst the Aboriginal community(s), strong partnerships must be formed with local Aboriginal representatives who have successfully advocated on behalf of survivors since the Royal Commission's inception. Moreover it is important that existing partnerships are acknowledged and that additional government funding is provided if we are to meet the growing needs of survivors, their families and community(s). Such partnerships would ensure the continuation of successful cultural healing practices and provide the platform needed to expand the scope and spread of current healing initiatives.

3. What would better help victims and survivors in correctional institutions and upon release?

VACCA's recent experience with the inmate engagement work of the Royal Commission is causing considerable concerns for client's cultural safety and well-being. If the Royal Commission is to successfully engage survivors in correctional facilities, ensuring cultural support is provided from the outset is critical. VACCA agrees with the Royal Commission that client confidentiality is an important priority and that the measures taken to ensure this and client safety must be improved. VACCA is concerned about the levels of support that those in prisons will require and how an already very stretched support service will manage this potential demand. Working in conjunction with the Aboriginal wellbeing officers in prisons will be imperative if we are to collectively keep those wanting to come forward to have their safety and wellbeing needs met during this process.

In light of the recent reports made by clients, VACCA believes that greater support is needed for those survivors currently in correctional institutions. Upon request, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates must receive access to Aboriginal services; this includes, but is not limited to, scheduled private sessions and any and all scheduled consultation with the Royal Commission.

TOPIC C: Geographic considerations

1. What challenges do service providers face when trying to respond to the needs of victims and survivors outside metropolitan areas (e.g. those living in regional, rural or remote areas)?

Working closely with the local Bringing Them Home Worker (BTH Worker), VACCA supports regional and remote communities and facilitates direct liaison with the Royal Commission, ensuring all those affected are heard. It is important to note that VACCA supports both those wishing to share their story and those who have since shared and are seeking ongoing support.

Whilst VACCA's experience working with the regional and rural community(s) continues to be positive, there have been significant challenges worth noting.

At times local supports and survivors share a family and or social connection, which can understandably limit the level of support workers are able to provide. This has also complicated matters for survivors wishing to share their story and ensure confidentiality. Moreover, for survivors sharing for the first time, being linked to their support worker outside of a professional relationship can potentially re-traumatize and impose a negative impact on family and community. In addition, workers having to support their family in a professional capacity as well as personal can understandably feel overwhelmed and pressured without the appropriate supports in place.

In these cases it is often requested that VACCA'S involvement assume primary support, for both the survivor and local workers who are also affected. Again, while VACCA welcomes this responsibility, the Royal Commission support team consists of only three staff (program manager inclusive), therefore the increased focus on regional and remote areas can exhaust the team's capacity and place workers social

and emotional well-being at risk. VACCA has raised the issue of the uniqueness of the vicarious trauma Aboriginal community workers are exposed to and how this has an additional element due to workers being part of the Aboriginal community and hence work is not just work it is part of their life so to speak. None of the funding made available for training was provided to Aboriginal services and hence the specific training needs of Aboriginal workers, in VACCA's view remains unmet.

2. What would help victims and survivors outside metropolitan areas? Are there innovative ways to address the geographical barriers to providing and receiving support?

VACCA argues that greater support is needed for BTH workers in remote and regional areas. Additionally, in light of the current number of Aboriginal people in Victoria coming forward, it is imperative VACCA receive additional funding and government support in order to continue meeting the growing needs of the Aboriginal community.

TOPIC D: Service system issues

1. There is a range of terminology used to describe advocacy and support as well as therapeutic treatment services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. We provided our current working definitions in the introduction to this paper. Are these terms adequate and have they been defined appropriately? If not, what terminology and definitions should we consider using?

Some VACCA clients have reported poor experiences with mainstream "treatment" – feeling they were presented with temporary solutions that only suppressed symptoms and subsequently neglected the deep-seated roots of their trauma. Therefore VACCA strongly encourages the use of the term "healing", which in practice employs a holistic approach and identifies a continued connection between physical, mental, spiritual and cultural well-being. The term "treatment" can imply a disconnected and surface level engagement, whilst "healing" demonstrates an ongoing commitment to a healthy lifestyle that benefits the individual, family and community.

2. Given the range of services victims and survivors might need and use, what practical or structural ways can the service system be improved so it is easier for victims and survivors to receive the advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment services they need? What type of service models help victims and survivors to receive the support they need?

Where possible, co-locate related services, making it easier for clients to access supports. This will also further encourage the level of trust that survivors can instill in their support workers. More importantly, this will reduce the need for survivors having to retell their story over and over, which can re-traumatize and in turn be detrimental for the survivor and all those affected/related.

3. How can we ensure practitioners and workers are sufficiently skilled to provide advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment for adult and child victims and survivors, including those from diverse backgrounds?

All practitioners and workers supporting Aboriginal clients must have trauma informed training and experience, as well as being culturally informed. Culturally informed includes, but is not limited to, demonstrated knowledge of Australian history in relation to the ongoing displacement of Aboriginal people and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children, and in addition being aware of the relevant cultural protocols (Men, Women, Elders) when engaging with the Aboriginal community(s) in Victoria. Trauma informed training includes the need to understand the wide-ranging effects of sexual abuse on individuals, (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder, complex trauma, drug and alcohol abuse, depressions), concepts of intergenerational trauma and recent findings related to both collective/community trauma and epigenetic transmission of a biological vulnerability to stress and trauma, and strategies and pathways associated with resilience, healing and recovery from trauma.

TOPIC E: Evidence and promising practices

1. What promising and innovative practices (including therapies, interventions, modalities and technologies) for victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse are emerging from practice-based evidence? Where are these available and who can access them?

VACCA continues to work closely with the following healing practices:

- Red Dust Healing (Men’s healing group/workshop)
- Marumali (for survivors and workers who are supporting survivors)
- On Country Men’s camps (Link-Up Victoria)
- Women’s group
- Men’s group

Clients that have engaged with one or more of the above services, and subsequently found them to be of great benefit, state that this is due to the strong cultural leadership and focus that the practices embody. This reiterates the need for Aboriginal healing practices to be afforded equal respect and support as that of the funded mainstream services.

The forcible removal and institutionalization of Aboriginal people has produced an understandable distrust for mainstream services today, for it was government officials, lawyers, doctors, health practitioners and the like that once betrayed the trust of Aboriginal people under the guise of ‘care’ and ‘protection.’ In light of this history and its continued impact there remains a critical need for Aboriginal healing and support services to be led and facilitated by Aboriginal people with trusted knowledge and experience. The above are examples that operate within an Aboriginal framework and empower workers as well as clients.

It is important to note that Aboriginal workers have either endured similar experiences to those of their clients and/or are connected to a family member’s experience. Therefore the well-being of workers

must be placed at equal importance if practices are to facilitate true healing for the Aboriginal community(s).

2. What evaluations have been conducted on promising and innovative practices? What have the evaluations found?

The Bringing Them Home report and its discussion of 'Adequate resources' highlights culturally appropriate service delivery for survivors of the Stolen Generations. The report states that acknowledging the 'expertise' in the Aboriginal community(s) empowers survivors to lead in their own healing. VACCA argues that in addition to such an acknowledgment it is important that the healing come from within community, as opposed to being prescribed from an external source that offers a temporary solution at best due to a lack of knowledge and experience with Aboriginal people. This means acknowledging community healing practices that have long proven high success rates, such as the above mentioned programs in answer to question 1, and ensuring that these programs receive ongoing government support. In the spirit of self-determination it is important to reiterate that all the above-mentioned programs are led by Aboriginal facilitators with relevant experience and knowledge, in both a professional and cultural capacity.

3. What other learnings are emerging from practice-based evidence or from grey literature (i.e. published reports and papers that have not been formally peer-reviewed, such as government reports) about supporting adult and child victims and survivors?

It is acknowledged that there is a dearth of community driven evaluation practices and related literature with regards to healing trauma. There is a great need to resource ACCOs to develop robust evaluation programs with regards to future healing practices. With regards to the current research available, Gee (2015) (personal communication, December 2015)) recently conducted a review of 20 studies and evaluation reports involving Aboriginal peoples worldwide. Many of the studies describe particular phases of healing that tend to include developing an understanding of the impact of trauma, experiencing an acceptance or readiness to heal, the establishment of personal and cultural safety, the need to disclose experiences of trauma in safe and trusting environments, the importance of constructing meaning of the trauma experience, and the need to enhance individual and relational skills and capacities, such as increasing self-worth, developing trusting relationships with significant others, and strengthening cultural identity. Most of the studies also identify the importance of incorporating cultural healing practices that involve ceremony and/or spirituality into the trauma recovery process. Studies that investigated healing from interpersonal trauma such as childhood sexual abuse, and family violence, all emphasise the importance of addressing personal guilt and shame, and the need to address issues of personal accountability (e.g., at gender, family and community levels). One other important theme to emerge from the review was that many of the studies recognised that the historical impact of colonisation on whole of communities and cultural groups mean that individual healing alone may be insufficient, and community level efforts are required to address issues such as the loss of self-determination, a lack of resources and diminished community capacity, inadequate training, and resistance and denial in some communities.



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APPENDIX A

Proposal to provide group healing to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse

About the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

VACCA is a state-wide, Aboriginal community controlled organisation and receives funding from both the Victorian State Government's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C) and the Department of Health to provide assistance and support to Aboriginal children, young people, women, families and members of the Stolen Generations.

VACCA is the lead Victorian Aboriginal agency in the area of child and family welfare and advocates for the importance of culturally sensitive and safe service delivery models that are responsive to Aboriginal children, families and community. VACCA works in partnership with key stakeholders in protecting children and providing families with a range of options, promoting self-determination and best practice to capacity build families and communities. VACCA auspices the Link- Up Victoria program – a state-wide program.

Link- Up Victoria has been operating since 1990. Link-Up Victoria is funded to support the Stolen Generations – that is, any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who was removed, adopted, fostered or placed in an institution or family who are searching for loved ones that were removed, adopted, fostered or placed in an institution. Link-Up Victoria provides family tracing, reunion and counselling services to the Stolen Generations to reunite them with their families, communities, traditional country and culture.

Royal Commission Support Service

The VACCA Link-Up Royal Commission Support Service has been established to provide information and education to the Victorian Aboriginal community about the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We provide a range of support services to Aboriginal people including:

- Information about the Royal Commission and how people can tell their story
- Support people to register to tell their story
- Support people to tell their story the way they wish to tell it
- Assist people to access their records if they choose
- Assist people to report the abuse to police if they choose
- Link and make warm referrals to other services, particularly legal, counselling and other support services as required.
- Provide support to family members of survivors and others impacted by institutional child sexual abuse.

How Australia's history continues to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today

Colonisation has had a devastating impact on the physical, spiritual, social, emotional, economic and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal people. In all parts of Australia, there have been decades of racially-based Aboriginal child removal which occurred within the framework of genocide and assimilation. Government policies sought to determine the future of Aboriginal and Islander communities rather than allow Aboriginal and Islander communities to determine their own futures.

The experience of Aboriginal people has been traumatic involving a series of disconnections – from the land, from spiritual ancestors, from culture and from family. These often occurred under the banner of 'protection'.

Many children were physically, emotionally and sexually abused in the care of state institutions, foster homes and other forms of care. The impacts of these abuses have been documented previously in a range of publications, not least the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families, Bringing Them Home Report (1997).

Stolen Generations members not only suffered the same loss, grief and trauma as most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to the removal of land, forced re-dispersal onto missions and reserves, loss of economic surety and denial of culture, they also suffered from the removal from family and community and many were abused by those who were supposed to take care of them. This has, in a number of cases, created devastating life-long impacts and impact on subsequent generations.

There are many in Aboriginal communities across Australia who have direct experiences of the Royal Commission and Inquiry processes. While these processes offer hope, the opportunity to be heard, to be believed and contribute to an improved system for today's children in out of home care, they are also stressful and can re-traumatize the victims who are the "subjects" of the topic of the Inquiry. There is a human cost of an Inquiry into child sexual abuse which cannot be measured in dollars. There are many

who contributed to the Stolen Generations Inquiry who are still trying to recover from their experiences with that Inquiry.

VACCA wants to ensure that in trying to redress past abuse we do not re-abuse the victims and keep any re-traumatisation to a minimum. It is critical that Aboriginal people affected by the terms of reference of this Royal Commission are provided with culturally safe supports and healing.

Funding currently provided by the Department of Social Services, enables the employment of 1.4 (FTE) Support workers. With support received from Drummond Street Services and Relationships Australia we have an additional 1 FTE enabling a team of three workers, all working 0.8.

Our client base has been continually increasing since we began operating in 2013. The support and healing needs of our clients are significant and we are unable to provide our clients with the level of service they actually need. One of the areas we are most concerned about to enable a healing approach is the ability to provide group healing.

At a consultation with survivors regarding what they wish to see in regard to “counselling and psychological care” the following was said to us:

“Participants expressed the importance of holistic healing and for the process to be empowering, not just for the individual but also for family and community. Such holistic approaches to healing have proven to be increasingly successful in engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community(s) and meeting growing needs. Some examples highlighted by participants included, but were not limited to, programs facilitated by services such as Link-Up Victoria and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. Programs with specific focus on Men’s and Women’s and On Country healing were underlined as integral. There was a strong view that cultural healing programs contribute to individual healing and wellbeing and in turn contributes to the overall wellbeing of family and community. Participants felt that it was important not only to focus on counselling that targeted distress and trauma (i.e., symptoms management and reduction), but equally important to have strength based programs that focussed on improving self-worth and cultural wellbeing and identity. This is particularly important because Aboriginal survivors from institutions may experience two layers of trauma - interpersonal trauma such as sexual abuse combined with loss of connection to culture and heritage. Cultural activities and cultural camps can greatly assist in enhancing self-esteem and strengthening identity.

Participants also expressed the need for healing groups that were not necessarily gender specific, as facilitating respectful and open discussion between family members has also proven to be of significant benefit.”

The Royal Commission in their Consultation Paper on Redress recognised that for Aboriginal survivors:

“Aboriginal people are a collective society, aunties have the role of mothers, uncles of fathers and children are raised knowing the relationship they have to each and every member of their family and ‘mob’ or tribal clan. In schools even today, many Aboriginal kids have their cousins and relations as their

best friends and grow up with an understanding of this unspoken connection they have to their extended family and community. When Aboriginal people were removed from their families and placed in out of home care, not only their connection to their family was disrupted, but their connection to their community was and they grew up with a sense of disconnection from family, community, land, culture, language etc. This is cultural abuse and all those disconnected in this way suffer from trauma, now entrenched through generations of removals – intergenerational trauma. Those that suffered sexual abuse in addition to this cultural abuse have yet another layer of trauma to work through.

Collective redress and traditional healing is crucial to Aboriginal people’s healing as it provides for reconnection to that which was taken when they were removed. Cultural and other abuses have damaged the spirit of an Aboriginal person ... no amount of mainstream counselling will heal the spirit, only reconnection and collective healing opportunities on country will achieve this.”

VACCA LINK-UP VICTORIA Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Proposed Group Healing Programs

Men’s Business

A 12 week program for Aboriginal men which would begin by holding a three days, two nights camp on country with the aim of engaging, connecting and establishing the foundations for the 12 week program. We expect 10-12 men to attend. This program will take a narrative approach to identity.

The program will offer culturally sensitive delivery of:

- Tree of Life
- Landscape of Identity
- Yarning Circles – Ceremony
- Healing Circles – Smoking
- Affirmations’
- Group discussions re: identity
- On country Camps
- Capacity building through identity
- Keeping safe ‘Safety of other
- Goal setting – short; medium and long term.

On country, doesn’t necessarily have to be the survivors’ country but somewhere close to Melbourne, where the group can connect with local Elders/cultural custodians and learn about the area and the local mob. Opportunity to reconnect/strengthen Aboriginal heritage and culture. Visit men’s places/sites

- Art; painting, burning
- Visit Koori Heritage Trust
- Learn how to trace family history

- Yarning circles – can be anywhere, if on a camp may be around the fire or as simple as checking in with the men at the start and end of the day (like Marumali)
- Graham Gee, Aboriginal psychologist at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, session about self-care
- Father and son day
- Local dance group – songs, dances, cultural activities.

Draft 12 week schedule (Subject to change dependent on client needs)

Pre Camp Meeting of men to outline expectations, goals etc

Week 1. 3 day Camp at Morning Glory or Camp Jungai:

Week 2. Catch up & informal lunch.

Week 3. Visit Koori Heritage Trust

Week 4. Men's group 1. Lunch and afternoon yarn.

Week 5. Art/Craft workshop

Week 6. Tree of Life

Week 7. Men's health & Self Care

Week 8. Visit sacred sites

Week 9. Most of the sessions will be guided by the participants.

Week 10. Men's Group 3.

Week 11. Get all the Participants Women and Men together and have a discussion around whether they would like to continue supporting one another as separate groups Women and Men or come together as a whole group to support each other.

Week 12. Lunch/Dinner

This program aims to provide Aboriginal men the opportunity to share their experiences with fellow survivors, strengthen connection with culture and further develop leadership qualities of potential benefit to their family and community.

It has been expressed that an ongoing battle for the Aboriginal men we work with is a sense of isolation and feeling alone in their experience as a survivor of child sexual abuse. This program seeks to bring Aboriginal men together in a culturally safe environment and support the exchange of Aboriginal knowledge and experience, to assist in the healing journey and self-empowerment.

Outcomes:

- Shared self-care techniques and coping strategies.
- Establish/Strengthened connection with fellow community members and survivors
- Cultural empowerment (strengthening of Aboriginal identity through practice of culture and on country learning)
- Establish/strengthen connection with Aboriginal service providers and support workers
- Family Tree
- Training to trace family history

Women's Business

A 12 week program for Aboriginal women which would begin by holding a three day, two nights camp on Wautherung country in the Geelong area, with the aim of engaging, connecting and establishing the foundations for the 12 week program.

- On country, doesn't necessarily have to be the survivors' country but somewhere close to Melbourne, where the group can connect with local elders/cultural custodians and learn about the area and the local mob. Opportunity to reconnect/strengthen Aboriginal heritage and culture. Visit women's places/sites
- Art; painting, basket weaving, possum skin cloak making these sessions will be held in the afternoon as it will give the women either some quiet time to think and reflect on the day's activities or a space to have group or one on one talks amongst one another.
- A group art session: a large piece of canvas divided into individual sections so that each participant gets to create a piece of art. This activity helps create a space for the women to get to know and trust one another.
- Visit Koori Heritage Trust
- Learn how to trace family history
- Yarning circles – can be anywhere, if on a camp maybe around the fire or could be as simple as checking in with the women at the start and end of the day (like Marumali)
- Session about self-care
- Mother and daughter day
- Local dance group – songs, dances, cultural activities.

Draft 12 week schedule (Subject to change and client needs)

Week 1. 3 day Camp Torquay:

Week 2. Catch up & informal lunch.

Week 3. Visit Koori Heritage Trust

Week 4. Women's group 1. Lunch and afternoon yarn.

Week 5. Art workshop

Week 6. Women's Group 2.

Week 7. Women's health & Self Care

Week 8. Visit sacred sites

Week 9. Most of the sessions will be guided by the participants.

Week 10. Women's Group 3.

Week 11.

Get all the Participants Women and Men together and have a discussion around whether they would like to continue supporting one another as separate groups Women and Men or come together as a whole group to support each other.

Week 12. Lunch/Dinner

This program aims to provide Aboriginal women the opportunity to share their experiences with fellow survivors, strengthen connection with culture and further develop leadership qualities of potential benefit to their family and community.

It has been expressed that an ongoing battle for the Aboriginal women we work with is a sense of isolation and feeling alone in their experience as a survivor of child sexual abuse. This program seeks to bring Aboriginal women together in a culturally safe environment and support the exchange of Aboriginal knowledge and experience, to assist in the healing journey and self-empowerment.

Outcomes:

- Shared self-care techniques and coping strategies.
- Establish/Strengthened connection with fellow community members and survivors
- Cultural empowerment (strengthening of Aboriginal identity through practice of culture and on country learning)
- Establish/strengthen connection with Aboriginal service providers and support workers
- Family Tree
- Training to trace family history

This program aims to provide Aboriginal women the opportunity to share their experiences with fellow survivors, connect with culture and community which in turn will help strengthen their families and communities.

Family and Community Business

Providing an opportunity for individual Healing Days for the family and community of clients who have come forward (or registered to tell their story) to the Royal Commission. These Healing Days would begin with the local Elders welcoming the group and where possible a dance or other cultural activity. Yarning circles to provide information and hear from family members about their concerns or views on

what as a family would assist in halting the intergenerational trauma that experiences of institutional child sexual abuse have on the current and future generations of that family and that community.

Art and other cultural expressions of healing will be utilized on the day once consultation with the specific families and communities has taken place. We would hope to run four of these healing days initially and dependent on their success, run additional days in each community across Victoria.

Evaluation and establishing an Evidence Base

VACCA believes it is crucial to evaluate these programs for two reasons, firstly to learn how these initiatives impact clients and contribute to their healing – in other words is what we are doing working? The second reason is to begin to develop an evidence base for cultural healing and the immediate, short and longer term impacts and outcomes on the participants and also their families and communities. We propose an additional \$20,000 to undertake a rigorous evaluation of all the above components of the program.

Evaluation methodology and design

The evaluation will be undertaken by VACCA's research team in partnership with La Trobe University, Department of Social Work and Social Policy under the leadership of Associate Professor Margarita Frederico. The evaluation will be inclusive of both the group healing programs and the family and community family days.

The evaluation design will be culturally sensitive, highlight the importance of relationships and engagement to program success and be based on a participatory action research evaluation, so that clients' voice is central and that learnings from the evaluation can inform the development of the programs in an ongoing way. The design is based on being able to identify changes for participants over time.

Ethics approval for the evaluation will be sought through La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

The evaluation methodology will be a mixed-methods approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The design will be guided by the values identified in the NHMRC Values and Ethics; Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. The values are Reciprocity, Respect, Equality, Responsibility, Survival and Protection, Spirit and Integrity.

Pre and post healing program surveys will be developed in consultation with the program designers which will incorporate both fixed-choice and open ended questions to provide data on outcomes achieved. Program facilitators will also be asked to keep a journal on the process and their perception of how the content and style of delivery engages the participants and influences outcomes.

The methodology will also include the identification of an appropriate tool to be used as an outcome measure to identify client change over time. A scoping exercise will be completed including a literature review of possible measures. Possible tools to be considered are the Most Significant Change (MSC)

technique a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation whereby program stakeholders are involved in deciding on the changes to be recorded and occurs throughout the program cycle and provides data on impact and outcomes. Another possible measure for consideration is the Aboriginal – specific Growth and Empowerment Measure (GEM).

Pre-program, Post program and Follow-up interviews (three months post program end) will be conducted with participants and service providers. Interviews at these three time periods allows for identification of specific expected changes/outcomes (such as engagement, cultural strengthening, improved family relationships, improved mental health), and to assess the extent to which changes were achieved at program end and maintained following the program.

Due to the shorter nature of the day programs the evaluation methodology will be limited to a pre and post survey for these program participants.

The evaluation timelines will be an 18 month period to allow for post-program interview and focus groups and for the evaluation report to be completed.

APPENDIX B



VACCA
Connected by culture



Healing from Experiences of Family Violence and Childhood Sexual Abuse

A Specialist Program for

Child and Adolescent Survivors of Sexual Abuse & Family Violence

Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Children and Young People with Problem Sexual Behaviours

Young People with Sexually Abusive Behaviours

November 2015

BACKGROUND

In 2013 with the announcement of the Federal Government of a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, VACCA established an information and referral service, expanded in 2014 with funding from DSS, to a support service to assist adult survivors of childhood institutional sexual abuse. The work of this service has found there to be a concerning lack of culturally safe services for Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

VACCA has also identified a need for a specialist Aboriginal Sexual Abuse and Family Violence Healing Service. This is based on three main factors: 1) the high number of VACCA clients (children and young people) with a history of sexual abuse and exposure to family violence; 2) a reported number of Aboriginal children and young people engaging in problem sexual behavior/sexually abusive behavior (who also have a history of exposure to family violence) having no timely access to clinical services, nor any access at all to a culturally specific specialist service; and 3) the growing number of adult Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse coming forward to tell their stories as part of the ongoing Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse who choose not to access traditional adult sexual assault counseling services because of cultural safety concerns.

The link between family violence and sexual abuse is conclusive, and recent research is demonstrating a probable causal link between family violence and harmful sexual behaviours in children and adolescents. Therefore, one issue should not be addressed without addressing the other. Consequently, trauma-informed sexual abuse services must recognize the role of family violence in their clients' histories and address this trauma experience with the same attention usually paid where a history of sexual victimisation presents.

*The **three key priorities for the proposed service** will be to:*

- a) meet the unmet need for a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive child sexual abuse assessment and healing service;*
- b) make specialist consultation readily available as and when needed; and*
- c) provide capacity building in the sector through specialist, culturally informed training and workshops for professionals and carers.*

DEFINITIONS

Healing

Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse have expressed their need for holistic healing – and for the process to be empowering and to include their family and community. Such holistic approaches to healing have proven to be increasingly successful in engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community(s). Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse advise that programs with specific focus on Men’s and Women’s business and held “On Country” would provide an experience they see as integral to their healing. Cultural healing programs contribute to individual healing and wellbeing and in turn contribute to the overall wellbeing of the family and community. Aboriginal survivors of childhood sexual abuse have advised that it is important not only to focus on counselling that targets distress and trauma (i.e., symptoms management and reduction), but equally important to have strength-based programs that focus on improving self-worth, cultural wellbeing and identity. This is particularly important because Aboriginal survivors from institutions may experience two layers of trauma - interpersonal trauma (such as sexual abuse) combined with a loss of connection to culture and heritage. Cultural activities and cultural camps can greatly assist in enhancing their self-esteem and strengthening their identity.

For many Aboriginal survivors the meaning(s) of sexual abuse may differ from other survivors because the abuse is not only understood as a personal violation, but also often seen within the context of colonisation and a larger systematic effort to deny basic human right to one’s culture and all that this brings with it. (Castellano, 2006, Kishk Anaquot Health Research 2006, Archibald, 2006).

Healing involves consideration for the individual, family and community with regard to:

- (1) Cultural Safety (e.g., to ameliorate experiences of racial discrimination and validating Aboriginal identity and culture)
- (2) Cultural Mourning (e.g., mourning cultural and historical losses to help heal grief and loss)
- (3) Cultural Reconnection (e.g., learning about history, privileging Aboriginal worldviews, renewing cultural beliefs, tracing heritage, and reunifications with family and community – to strengthen identity and sense of belonging)
- (4) Cultural Practices (e.g., increasing relational networks to strengthen social support and healthy attachment relationships, ceremony and spirituality to providing context for which meanings of trauma and recovery can be constructed, strengthening cultural identity and enhancing self-esteem)
- (5) Cultural Norms (e.g., renewing and restoring cultural values and norms that guide behaviours that effect the wellbeing of children, partners, family and community)

It is also important to consider that post-trauma stressful life events and other known risk factors contribute to post-traumatic stress symptoms. Post-traumatic stress disorder research has documented that stressful life events can be one of the biggest predictors of post-traumatic stress disorder. On average, Aboriginal people experience more stressful life events than non-Aboriginal Australians, and experience disparities across most major social health indicators - including income, education, housing, incarceration, rates of child removal – all of which are certain to add stress and exacerbate an underlying vulnerability to posttraumatic stress symptoms resulting from the effects of Institutional child sexual abuse.

Family violence can be defined as conduct that is violent, threatening, intimidating, controlling or intended to cause fear. It can include physical, verbal, emotional, sexual or psychological abuse, as well as controlling of finances, freedom, relationships and beliefs. It is widely accepted that children are impacted just as significantly by witnessing violent acts in the family, as if they were a direct target of the abusive act itself. This is especially relevant for children who engage in concerning sexual behaviours as they have been shown to have been exposed to family violence in very high numbers.

The terms **problem sexual behaviour** and **sexually abusive behaviour** are used to describe sexual behaviour exhibited by children and adolescents that gives cause for concern.

Problem sexual behaviour is a term used to describe ALL sexual behaviours exhibited by children under the age of 10 years that give cause for concern. Some problem sexual behaviours might be described as 'abusive' in nature if not for the child's young age and, therefore, the absence of criminal responsibility. It is essentially an accepted standard among researchers, authors, clinicians, policy makers, and government authorities to avoid the use of the word 'abusive' to describe sexual behaviour in children under 10 years, even in very serious cases, and they cannot be charged for such behaviour. **Sexually abusive behaviour** is a term used to describe concerning sexual behaviour in children ten years of age and older.

ANTICIPATED SERVICE DEMAND

VACCA is aware that there are almost 1,500 Aboriginal children in out of home care throughout Victoria. The great majority of these clients first came to the attention of child protection because of family violence matters.

There is a strong correlation between early exposure to family violence and the development of problem sexual behaviours and/or sexually abusive behaviours.

The initial data from the Aboriginal Taskforce 1000 project (which is being undertaken by Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Child and Young People) appears to indicate that family violence was a significant issue in 87% of cases presented to the project. There also appears to be a correlation between historic child sexual abuse of parents and the continuing trauma that is often expressed in family violence and other maladaptive coping mechanisms including self medication with alcohol and drug misuse. The significant correlation between exposure to family violence in childhood and sexually

abusive behavior in adolescence has been repeatedly highlighted in the research, with some studies finding family violence to be more prevalent in the histories of these young people than experiences of sexual victimization. (Hatch and Northam 2005)

At least 20 children with whom VACCA is involved are known victims or likely victims of child sexual abuse. The lack of a formal disclosure recorded on file is concerning and within our Aboriginal Children's Healing Team there are an increasing number of consultations occurring about behaviours which may be indicative of an abuse history.

VACCA is aware that six of our adolescent clients have been or are currently engaging in sexually abusive behaviours. While three have been referred for treatment to other agencies, but they have not been able to be supported because of service under-capacity . The unmet demand is even greater children engaging in Problem Sexual Behaviours – particularly for cases where children are engaged in inappropriate behaviours with other children.

Notwithstanding the over-representation of Aboriginal children in institutions, Aboriginal children continue to be more vulnerable to sexual abuse than non-Aboriginal children. This was highlighted in the recent “...as a good parent would...” Inquiry report undertaken by the Victorian Commissioners for Children and Young People into child sexual abuse in residential care. The Report expressed concern about the treatment of Aboriginal children, and recommended the establishment of specialist services for them.² The report found there was 25 Aboriginal children subject to 43 reports of sexual abuse in residential care during their Inquiry period. This means that more than one-quarter (27 per cent) of the Aboriginal children in residential care have been subject to a sexual abuse Critical Incident reports.

VACCA's Royal Commission Support Service continues to support 40 Aboriginal adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. While many of them may benefit from some individual counseling in respect of these experiences, none of them with to access use CASA services either because they have tried in the past and found the service did not meet their needs on a cultural level, or because they have heard about cultural insensitivities of counselors and were not prepared to give it a go.

All Royal Commission clients have requested a healing program that can meet their needs through the lens of culture. It is VACCA's intent to be able to offer this much needed service, not only to Royal Commission clients, but other Aboriginal adults and parents who need this healing and with this healing may be able to better meet the needs of their children.

In summary, there is considerable demand and an urgent need for culturally sensitive and informed services aimed at healing Aboriginal children, families and communities from the impacts of intergenerational trauma, family violence and childhood sexual abuse. VACCA is well placed to provide

¹Hatch, J. & Northam, L (2005) Doctoral thesis. University of Melbourne.

²Commission for Children and Young People, Melbourne, August 2015, p.13

this specialist service given the learnings from Taskforce 1000, the Royal Commission Into Family Violence and the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

PROPOSAL FOR PROGRAM SERVICE DELIVERY

The proposed Program would provide trauma-specific, culturally safe healing to Aboriginal children, young people and adults who fall into any of the following categories:

- Aboriginal Children and Young People who have been sexually abused or exposed to sexual violence (who are not currently engaging in PSBs/SABs)
- Aboriginal Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse
- Aboriginal Children who are engaging in problem sexual behaviours
- Aboriginal Young People who are engaging in sexually abusive behaviours

Trauma-specific, culturally safe healing will be provided encompassing a range of services delivered directly to clients and indirectly to the community of professionals who support them. Service provision may include the following:

1. Clinical Services

- i. Outreach/initial consultation with clients, families and carers
- ii. Assessment
- iii. Healing
 - a. Individual Healing
 - b. Dyadic/Family Healing
 - c. Group Healing programs
- iv. Family Reunification work
- v. Secondary Consultation

2. Community Education & Training

- i. Community education seminars for Parents/Carers/Community
- ii. Education and training for professionals (Aboriginal agencies)
- iii. Education and training for professionals (non-Aboriginal agencies)
- iv. Education and training for clinicians from Sexual Assault agencies

3. Service Development & Review

- i. Community Consultation
- ii. Data Collection & Evaluation
- iii. Opportunities for Intra/Inter-agency collaboration

Referrals will come from a variety of sources, including:

- Self-referrals
- Family referrals
- Professional referrals

Case Management forms an essential component of effective service delivery, and

each client referred to the service will need to have a current case worker (this role won't be undertaken by the clinician). Where the referred person already has a VACCA or DHHS case worker, they can assume this role in this instance.

PROPOSED STAFFING

Staffing:

Manager (1.0 eft)

4 x Clinicians (4.0 eft)

Services delivered:

It is anticipated that, *in the first year of service*, the following services will be provided:

- Assessment of all young people referred for SABs
- Group Healing program for all young people with SABs (based on suitability)
- Individual Healing for all young people referred for SABs
- Family reunification work, where appropriate
- Assessment of all children referred for PSBs
- Individual Healing work with all children referred for PSBs
- Assessment of all children referred for history of sexual abuse and family violence
- Individual Healing work with all children referred for sexual abuse and family violence
- Group Healing for all adults referred for childhood sexual abuse (individual healing work may be provided if the client's preference indicates it)
- Consultation on all cases meeting criteria for referral
- Community consultation, education and training in all areas of service