

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy Tendering Processes.

1. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was established in 1977 after urgent concerns within the Victorian Aboriginal community regarding the large number of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and adopted or fostered into non-Aboriginal families.
2. VACCA is now the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare statewide community controlled organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children, young people, families and the community.
3. The types of services we provide include:
 - Child and family welfare services -this includes early years programs, family services, foster care, kinship care, residential services, permanent care and Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Consultation Support Services (ACSASS) which provides an Indigenous perspective on risk to Child Protection on all key decisions for all Aboriginal children that come to their attention Clinical Healing Programs across all services, Family violence services including women's and children crisis service as well as outreach services, Youth Services such as leaving care, homelessness services and leadership programs, Child and family mental health services, Alcohol and Drug services(in development), Stolen Generation Services-Link Up, Services supporting people affected by Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse , Financial literacy services, Energy efficiency services, Group Parenting Programs (run also in prisons), Educational support services, Koorie Connect Services-a referral and advice service for all Aboriginal community members over 18 years of age, Men's Programs, Cultural Programs, Ante natal and post natal mother and baby health program (in development). We also run youth programs for at risk young people ie leaving care camps, KYLA program need to spell this out and facilitate and lead community activities to celebrate culture, Aboriginal achievements and significant days such as NAIDOC.
4. VACCA's funding from the Commonwealth since 2012:

Revenue	2014	2013	2012
	\$	\$	\$
Operating Grant Income			
Commonwealth Grants - DSS	851,079	1,008,176	1,302,174
PM&C - Linkup	1,206,144	1,066,494	1,024,528
Commonwealth sub-total	2,057,224	2,074,670	2,326,702
DHS - State Government	16,338,516	14,037,709	12,639,146
Health Dept - State Government	277,121	222,925	163,750
Commonwealth Grants - DEEWR	11,860	0	0
Subtotal Received this year	20,741,945	16,335,304	15,129,598
Plus grants received in advance from last year	735,274	1,276,468	1,211,021
Less grants received in advance this year	(488,837)	(735,274)	(1,291,658)
Total Operating Grant Income	20,988,382	16,876,497	15,048,961

5. The proportion of Commonwealth funding is approximately 15% of our total revenue. It is however crucial to our overall mix of funding enabling us to provide much needed services to Stolen Generations people in the community as well as early year services This funding has also supported our Koorie Connect service which is a referral and advice service for people in need.

Indigenous Advancement Strategy Submission Outcome

6. Our submission included funding for nine programs and VACCA was successful in receiving funding for four programs. This included three existing programs with some modifications to align with current Indigenous Advancement Strategy. These included Link Up, Playgroups and Koorie Connect.
7. We lost approximately \$30,000 for Linking our Mob, Healing our Spirit program.
8. We also received funding for a new program, Koorie Kids Stay @ School which is a trauma informed educational engagement and support program to young people in years 6 – 10 who are disengaging from school.
9. We did not apply for the Parenting support position currently funded by the Commonwealth.
10. Originally we were advised that Boorais and Bubups and Koorie Kids Stay @ School were being funded for 1.5 years however on the 28 April we were advised that these have been extended to 2.5 years until 31 December 2017 to enable us to achieve outcomes.
11. The total funding for 2015-16 is \$2,052,332 which is more than VACCA currently receives from Prime Minister and Cabinet of \$1,827,456 (2014-15).

VACCA Indigenous Advancement Strategy Submissions and Outcomes

12. Herefollows a detailed list of our applications and the outcomes:

Indigenous Advancement Strategy – Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency proposal				
<i>Empowering Aboriginal people through education, employment and a safer community</i>				
Jobs, Land and Economy		Current Funding	Funding requested	Funding Received
<i>Koorie Traineeship</i>	An employment training, mentoring and support program for Aboriginal Victorians	\$23,818	Refer MacKillop	Not successful
Children and Schooling				
<i>Bringing up our Boorais and Bubups (Playgroups)</i>	An early years' program for Aboriginal young children 0-5 years and their parents or carers provided within service hubs and outreach mobile bus service	\$346,478 (annually) Plus funding for resources North and South are funded	\$1,433,184 (2015-16) for 3.5 years North, West, South and East	\$527,432 (2015-16) for 2.5 years North/West and South
<i>Koorie Kids Staying @ School</i>	An educational engagement and support program Aboriginal young people who are at risk of disengaging from school and their families	New program	\$374,043 (2015-16) for 3.5 years North and South Division	\$180,000 (2015-16) for 2.5 years North/West
<i>Strong Culture, Deadly Schools</i>	A cultural education program for primary and secondary schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students	New program	\$369,913 (2015-16) for 3 years	Not successful
Safety and Wellbeing		Current Funding	Funding requested	Funding Received
<i>Koorie Connect</i>	An assessment, advice and active referral service for the Aboriginal community	\$323,592 (annually) North and South are funded	\$851,734 (2015-16) for 3 years North, West South and East	\$324,900 for 1 year Locations to be confirmed
<i>Kick'n'Goals</i>	An intensive, therapeutic case management service for Aboriginal young people aged 12-17 years who are beginning to display at-risk behaviours including substance and alcohol use, violence, sexual activity and/or offending	New program	\$385,585 (2015-16) for 3 years	Not successful
<i>My Voice, My Kulthca</i>	A skill building and wellbeing group program for children and young people including children in out-of-home care	New program	\$192,136 (2015-16) for three years	Not successful
<i>Strong Sistas</i>	A healing group program for at risk Aboriginal women from 16 years of age who are experiencing or engaging in unsafe behaviours including family violence, alcohol and substance use	New program	\$180,248 (2015-16) for 3 years	Not successful
<i>Linking Our Mob, Healing Our Spirit (Link Up)</i>	A healing and reconnection service for Aboriginal adults displaced or disconnected through removal or incarceration	\$1,050,187 (annually)	\$1,140,563 (2015-16) For 3 years	\$1,020,000 for 3 years
Culture and Capability				
<i>Journey Towards Recognition</i>	A community strengthening, engagement and education service	\$83,331 (annually)	\$520,270 (2015-16) for 3 years	Not successful

13. Although we were successful with a number of our applications we missed out on crucial cultural activity programs which we believe have a positive impact on the children.

Note: The following section responds where applicable to the individual references of the Committee of Inquiry.

a. the extent of consultation with service providers concerning the size, scope and nature of services tendered, determination of outcomes and other elements of service and contract design;

- i. VACCA met with PMC staff to discuss our submission and receive feedback. Staff were as helpful as they could be giving us an insight into how we should prepare our submission so that it was as strong as possible.
- ii. Nevertheless, there was confusion about aspects of the process including the number of applications that needed to be submitted if more than one project; NAIDOC inclusion; assessment process.
- iii. Our services are tailored to respond to need in our community amongst those are risk of entry into the child protection system. We work with families who present with multiple issues including physical and psychological. Many of them are stolen generations families. The Commonwealth's approach to Indigenous affairs encapsulated by its three line slogan "back to school, into jobs and safe communities" maybe catchy to the electorate who have Aboriginal policy fatigue but is too facile a framework to address the trauma and damage in the community.
- iv. VACCA was advised by Commonwealth staff that the PMC funding was only open to Indigenous services and on this basis VACCA did not apply more broadly for program funding under the DSS submission process.
- v. VACCA was advised by Commonwealth staff that the PMC submission process would not be onerous and time consuming, this was not the case.

b. the effect of the tendering timeframe and lack of notice on service collaboration, consortia and the opportunity for innovative service design and delivery;

- i. The timeframe for the preparation of applications was inadequate given the Commonwealth's ostensible desire to see innovation and collaboration-based services. Partnerships are not based on tenders but on relationships built over time. While we submitted one application with a partner it was a small project and we were ultimately unsuccessful with it.
- ii. the process of preparing the applications was the most onerous aspect of the IAS process. We can reasonable accurately estimate that we had three staff working solely on the IAS applications over a five week timeframe. They in turn consulted with nine of our programs and their managers over this period. Our Executive Director of Strategy and Services oversaw the process over this five week period and we estimate in total a week of her time was taken up in the process.
- iii. The cost estimate of this work is a minimum of **\$25,769.02** without the inclusion of staff time outside of the key unit assigned the task of preparing the applications. A final cost estimate would be more accurately closer to \$30,000.
- iv. The opportunity cost of the diversion of this level of resources is indeterminable however it set us back in a number of respects including delaying other projects. It would be fair to

say that the process caused considerable disruption to our organisation's plans for the period leading up to the date for submissions.

c. the evidence base and analysis underlying program design;

There did not appear to be any evidence base directing the changes to Commonwealth funding grants. Government policy including objectives were unclear seemed to be driving the complete revamp of Commonwealth funding to Aboriginal services. We seriously question the approach that was taken and wonder what the objectives of the Government were. Certainly, the way the changes happened and the overwhelming feeling in the Aboriginal community is one of being under siege, uncertainty and insecurity.

d. the clarity of information provided to prospective tenderers concerning service scope and outcomes;

There was both inconsistent information provided by Commonwealth staff members and the information changed over the period of the submissions.

Commonwealth state based staff appeared very uncertain of many aspects of the submission and we were often advised that there was limited direction from Canberra.

As of 28th April, post submission outcomes:

- a. Commonwealth staff although helpful were still unable to answer many questions about the information required for the new the service agreement
- b. Commonwealth staff were inconsistent in their messages about one program (Koorie Connect)
- e. VACCA had difficulty aligning the outcomes of the three streams with the projects we wanted funded. As an organisation with almost forty years of experience of working with Aboriginal families and children we felt there was little acknowledgement of our expertise and knowledge of this area.
- f. the opportunities created for innovative service design and delivery, and the extent to which this was reflected in the outcomes of the tender process;**
- All bar one new innovative program was not successful in spite of significant attention by the agency to design innovative programs
- g. the number of non-compliant projects, the nature of the non-compliance, if and how they were assisted, and how many of these were successful;**
- h. analysis of the types, size and structures of organisations which were successful and unsuccessful under this process;**
- i. the implementation and extent of compliance with Commonwealth Grant Guidelines (CGG):**

The CGGs sets out the seven key principles of grants administration established by the Australian Government, as follows: (1) Robust planning and design. (2) Collaboration and partnership. (3) Proportionality. (4) An outcomes orientation. (5) Achieving value with public money. (6) Governance and accountability. (7) Probity and transparency

It is our view that the IAS process did not, in our experience conform to the key principles of the CGG.

j. the potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability;

Given the lack of clarity regarding the Koorie Connect program, there is the potential for a significant number of Aboriginal people currently accessing the service to be excluded.

k. the framework and measures in place, if any, to assess the impacts of these reforms on service user outcomes and service sustainability and effectiveness;

l. the information provided to tenderers about how decisions are made, feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful tender applicants, and the participation of independent experts in tender review processes to ensure fairness and transparency;

Very little information was provided about the assessment process. Given the number of applications submitted across the nation we do not have confidence in the process even though we were successful with most of our applications.

m. the impact on advocacy and policy services across the sector;

We believe that there will be a real impact on advocacy and policy development given that our national peak body, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) were unsuccessful with a number of their applications.

Funding we sought would also have supported the advocacy and policy contribution of our CEO, Professor Muriel Bamblett AM who has been a strong advocate in and for our sector.

n. factors relating to the efficient and effective collection and sharing of data on outcomes within and across program streams to allow actuarial analysis of program, cohort and population outcomes to be measured and evaluated;

o.

p. the extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants;

q. the effect of mandatory incorporation under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 on Indigenous organisations receiving grants of \$500 000 or more per annum;

We feel that the requirement to reincorporate under the Corporations Act is discriminatory and a further impost on our organisation. Whether we seek an exemption or reincorporate we will be spending additional time and money. We are a sound organisation that was a finalist in the Indigenous Governance Awards in 2014. Eighty-five per cent of our funding comes from the State Government and we operate in a highly regulated field.

r. the effect and cost impact of delays in the assessment process and the extension of interim funding on organisations pending the outcome of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy; and

The delays have not cost us financially however the uncertainty about the outcome has caused considerable anxiety across our sector and within the Aboriginal community about the security of job tenure for people in Commonwealth funded positions.

s. any other related matters.

- a. It is disappointing to know that when there are Aboriginal communities in great need that funding ostensibly allocated for Indigenous Advancement is open to competition from the mainstream sector including sporting and statutory bodies.
- b. This meant larger organisations with a bigger voice were now competing for Aboriginal money. Whether they meant to or not it reinforced feelings of disempowerment and oppression felt by Aboriginal people from government undermining the objectives and aims /intentions and outcomes of the IA Strategy.
- c. The process favoured larger organizations with greater capacity and resources;
- d. It also put Aboriginal organizations in competition with one another for funding. This potentially causes splits and animosity between Aboriginal organizations with smaller and unsuccessful organizations resenting those that succeeded. This adds to the level of lateral violence in the community which mainstream organizations are not subjected to.
- e. It is of serious concern that successful organizations included government departments who can realign activities based on their priorities rather than ensure the funds went to the community services sector where there is no capacity to do this.
- f. The Guardian noted of the successful organizations that:
The list of recipients included several state government departments, the Northern Territory, universities, churches and a number of sporting organisations, including

Australian Rugby Union, the Brisbane Broncos and [North Queensland Cowboys](#) NRL clubs, Swimming Australia and Athletics Australia. The success of corporate entities in receiving federal funding for Indigenous-focused programs while some Indigenous-specific frontline services were rejected has sparked a backlash in the sector.

- g. VACCA is comparatively well-resourced as an organization and we had the capacity to divert resources for a period without significant compromise to our service delivery. We were also capable of presenting applications/tenders of a high standard which we believe can compete with the best. We are nevertheless concerned about other smaller Aboriginal organizations who would not have had the same resourcing or would have been put off by the process.
- h. A well-written submission or application is not an indicator of the level of need in a community or of the service or activity sought. The IAS process did not appear to have any evidence base on which decisions were made or in terms of priority setting.
- i. There was significant confusion associated with the IAS including:
 - i. The length of time one could apply for a project or activity
 - ii. Whether one or multiple applications needed to be submitted although this was eventually clarified;
 - iii. The assessment process and who would be doing the assessments;
 - iv. NAIDOC funding was in then not;
 - v. Difficulty aligning the streams with outcomes and specific projects
- j. We believe the IAS process was difficult for all concerned including the staff of the Commonwealth agency in Victoria. While they were unable to clarify many of the issues raised they were as helpful as they could be and we commend them for their patience and willingness to help under trying circumstances.