



Victorian Aboriginal
Children & Young
People's Alliance

Productivity Commission Close the Gap Report – Memo

To	Commissioners Mokak and Siegel-Brown	Date	16 th November 2023
From	Dana Pyne, Executive Manager VACYPA	Deadline for action	N/A
Objective	Provision of advice following an online consultation for the Productivity Commission's final report into Closing the Gap		

To Natalie and Romlie

Thank you for reaching out to the VACYPA and hearing directly from Karen and Dallas. As discussed, please find attached and below links to supporting documents, evidence, and case studies for the Commission's consideration in the final productivity report.

The [VACYPA Case for Systemic Reform](#) for Aboriginal families, children and young people in Victoria also includes our reform agenda which was developed by our 15 member ACCOs after several conversations with the former Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews. I'd also encourage you to read our past submissions and advocacy across health and wellbeing for Aboriginal families and children on our website <https://www.vacypalliance.org/>. It's no news to you that self-determination, including transfer of power, resources and authority is something Aboriginal communities have been asking for, for years and this is reflected in our advocacy which rarely transpires into action from Government.

I've also summarized our thoughts and positions under each of the Priority Reform areas. It was such great conversation today that we weren't able to touch on all of it.

Priority Reform 1 – Formal partnerships and shared decision making.

- In Victoria, Yoorrook has recommended transfer of authority, control, and resources to establish an Aboriginal designed, led and delivered child protection system, supported by standalone legislation to be developed by the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.
- VACYPA is positioning itself to help inform Treaty negotiations, representing our members who are experts in service delivery. There is an existing Closing the Gap Partnership Forum that could provide an opportunity to put forward members' views. However, as Dallas and Karen stated, "what do all these governance and partnership meetings actually do/achieve?"
- VACYPA recently pointed out in our recent paper on local decision making, that in Victoria there is a plethora of partnership forums that operate more as consultation mechanisms than true decision-making bodies.
- The VACYPA's recommendations for reform of the ACF is a step towards shifting partnership towards decision making rather than discussion and building accountability into planning. However, as Karen said progressing this is being stalled by the Victorian Government and other partner agencies (met with radio silence).
- In Victoria, ACCOs want a direct line to the decision makers for funding and resources i.e., Department of Treasury and Finance.

Priority Reform 2 – Building the community-controlled sector.

- The VACYPA's Reform Agenda, which aligns strongly with Yoorrook's recommendations, advocates for an Aboriginal designed, led and delivered system.
- In Victoria, ACAC is the clearest example of transfer of authority to ACCOs and is a model that other jurisdictions may benefit from, provided they have strong ACCOs that are able to provide the services.



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- The limitation of ACAC is that it operates within existing legislation, implementing orders made by courts through colonial decision-making processes, restricted by timelines and processes that many Aboriginal people reject. However, at a practice level, ACAC puts case planning in the hands of ACCOs, so that decisions about child and family welfare are made by ACCOs rather than the department.
- Our reform agenda highlights other priority areas, such as investment in early help and family support, workforce and infrastructure to build ACCOs and truly enable Aboriginal self-determination.

Priority Reform 3 – Transforming government organisations.

- VACYPA reform agenda outlines [“a shift in thinking”](#) from Government (p.2)
- This priority reform commits governments to addressing systemic racism and to reform government processes, such as funding mechanisms. As Yoorrook made clear, systemic racism exists across Victoria. Yoorrook called out the hospital and health system as particularly problematic.
- ACCOs have many experiences of culturally unsafe practices and have implemented several approaches to help mainstream systems to be more culturally sensitive. However, this is clearly not enough. Perhaps it's time Government consider anti-racism training and campaigns (as opposed to cultural safety training) to challenge systemic bias and be publicly accountable to combatting racism and increasing cultural understanding.
- VACYPA's call to shift funding accountability towards outcomes rather than outputs requires a major shift in thinking and policy and process for Victorian Government. It is a positive step that State Budget funding DFFH has been amenable to VACYPA's request that funding for Aboriginal Diversion and Early Intervention be allocated based on agreed outcomes, rather than narrow program definitions.
- The Productivity Commission notes that some jurisdictions have changed their Cabinet and Budget processes to reflect the National Agreement. Unfortunately, ACCOs have not had input to budget planning or bid preparation in Victoria, though that is something we might expect to be negotiated through Treaty.

Priority Reform 4 – Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

- The potential overlap between information access/utility and data sovereignty appears to have been used, either deliberately or inadvertently, to delay progress.
- In Victoria, DFFH shares significant data with ACCOs through the ACF, though the utility of that data is questionable.
- As we move towards an Aboriginal designed, led and delivered system, the value of data will grow. Currently, the approach to data, stemming from its use as a performance management and accountability tool, plus the fact that data provided by ACCOs may appear to disappear into a black hole within government department, never to be seen again, is that data is treated as an annoying nuisance rather than an asset. This is partly because many ACCOs would probably argue that the data they provide is a poor match for either performance, socio-emotional wellbeing improvement or cultural identification.
- When we design a new Aboriginal-led system, there could be strong value to use data to inform accountability in meaningful terms to community, to measure outcomes that inform planning, and to record culture for future generations.
- In Victoria, we know that when provided the opportunity to design and deliver services, the Aboriginal way of knowing, being and doing works for families and children. However, what we have not been afforded, which mainstream has, is the resources and support to establish, document and build the Aboriginal evidence base through an Aboriginal Knowledge and Practice Centre. VACCA and VACYPA are currently working with ACCOs to develop the strategic business case and advocacy strategy for the Centre.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Further information,