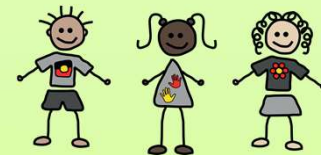


# Reform agenda for Aboriginal families, children and young people

Presentation to the OPEN Symposium from the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance

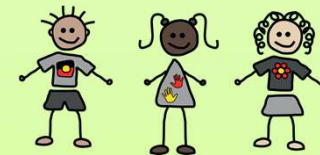
26 October 2023

Dana Pyne & John Cheshire



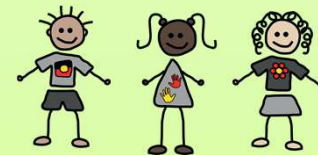
Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# Difference between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal per 1000 population



# The Parliament acknowledges that

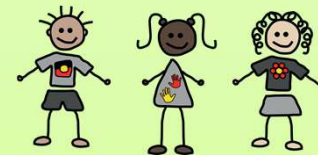
- 2 (a) the child protection system played a key role in the enactment of policies leading to the dispossession, colonisation and assimilation of Aboriginal people; and  
(b) the laws, practices and policies of former child protection systems resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, culture and Country, by compulsion, in an effort to assimilate and extinguish their culture and identity.
- 3 the systematic forcible removal of Aboriginal children through the laws, practices and policies of the child protection system has substantially contributed to—
  - (a) a legacy of disconnection; and
  - (b) intergenerational trauma; and
  - (c) entrenched social disadvantage and dysfunction; and
  - (d) marginalisation; and
  - (e) a distrust of the child protection system.



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

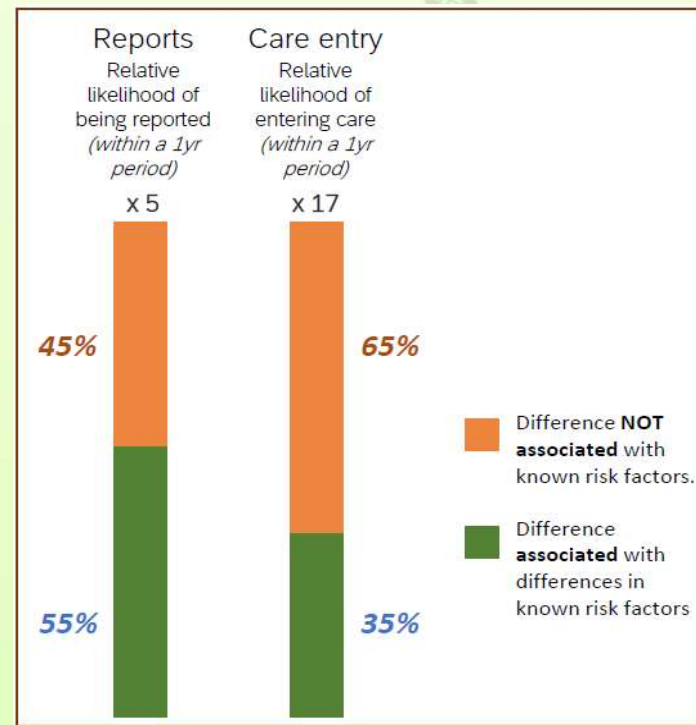
The Parliament recognises that ongoing **structural inequality** and **systemic racism** impact Aboriginal people and culture in relation to—

- (a) decision-making in the child protection system; and
- (b) over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

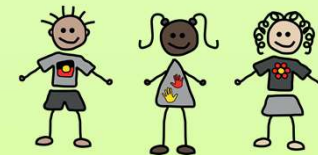


Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

“known risk factors are the most significant driver for higher rates of involvement with child protection for Aboriginal children ... however, this does not fully explain the level of over-representation.”



“even if Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children presented with equivalent known risk factors, Aboriginal children would likely still be over-represented.”

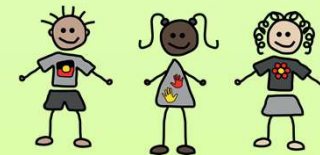


Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# The rate of Aboriginal children in care is worse in Victoria than the rest of Australia

Rate of children in out-of-home care per 1000 population (June 2021)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Indigenous	59.5	103.0	43.4	64.7	90.0	34.4	66.8	34.5	57.6
Non-Indigenous	5.4	4.7	4.7	3.4	7.7	6.5	5.2	2.5	5.0

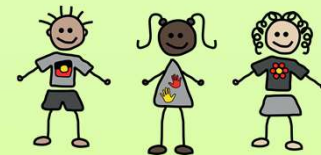


Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# Socio-economic conditions are not worse in Victoria than the rest of Australia

Aboriginal Victorians have

- Highest kindergarten enrolment
- Second highest year 12 completion
- Third highest employment rate
- Below average level of family violence
- Lowest youth detention
- Mid-range homelessness

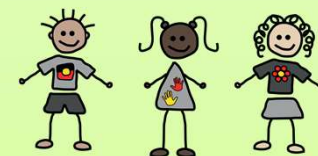


Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# The rate of admission to and exit from care is nearly 3 times national average

Rate of admissions to and discharges from out-of-home care in 2020-21

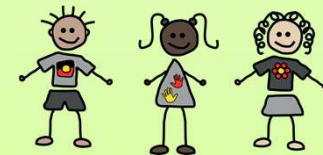
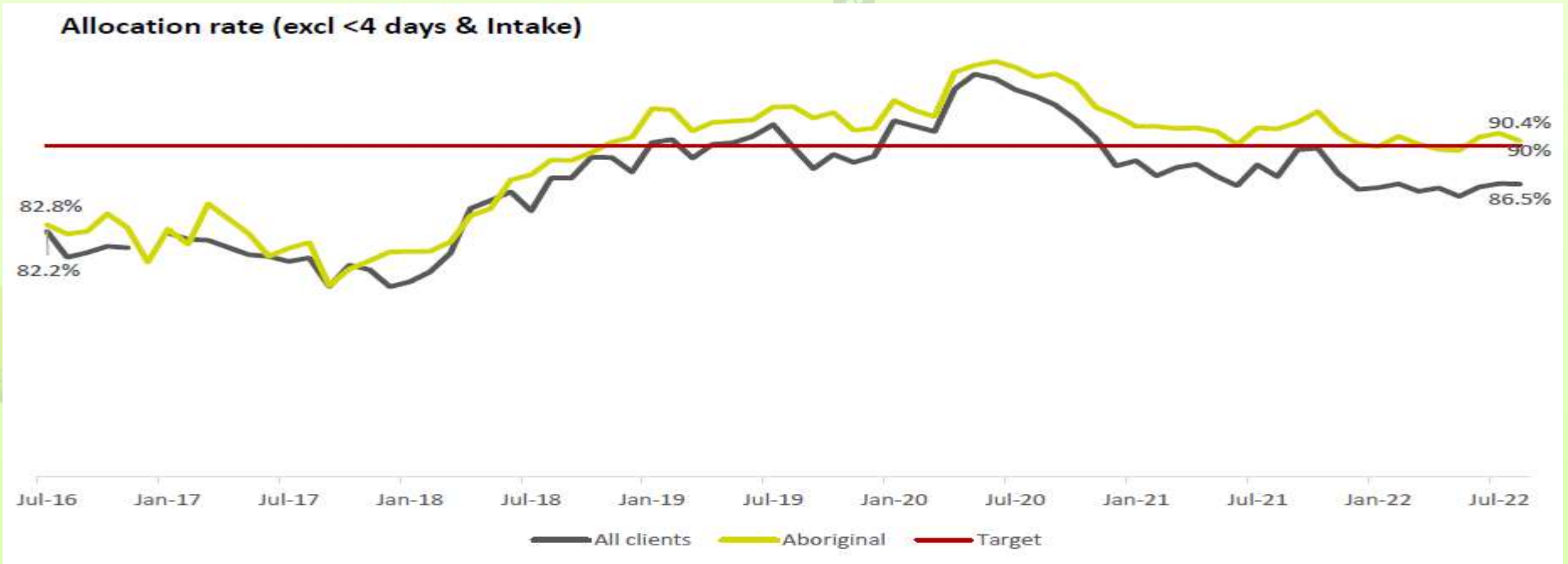
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Proportion Indigenous children admitted to OOHC	1.0%	3.6%	1.4%	1.2%	1.8%	0.5%	1.2%	0.7%	1.3%
Proportion Indigenous children discharged from OOHC	1.0%	3.4%	1.1%	1.4%	1.3%	0.6%	1.9%	0.9%	1.2%
Proportion non-Indigenous children admitted to OOHC	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Proportion non-Indigenous children discharged from OOHC	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance



# Victoria's over-burdened child protection system creates system drivers that drag Aboriginal children deeper into the system

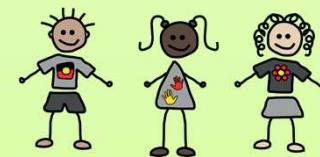


Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# High caseloads force workers to substantiate too quickly and pass the case onto case management teams

Time taken to complete investigations in 2020-21

Proportion of investigations completed in 2020-21	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
28 days or fewer	13.6	41.7	11.4	19.1	28.4	13.9	12.9	20.3	20.3
29 to 62 days	49.7	36.4	29.3	28.9	30.8	17.8	60.2	30.2	40.8
63 to 90 days	18.7	11.9	20.5	17.1	14.2	13.8	16.6	16.3	17.1
More than 90 days	18.0	10.0	38.7	34.9	26.6	54.5	10.3	33.2	21.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# The Alliance calls for

## **Local decision making by ACCOs**

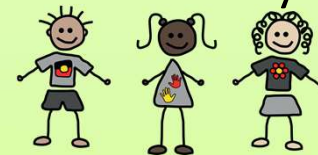
- Support an ACCO-led Child Protection reform that results in the transfer of decision making, funding, and ways of working, to local ACCOs.

## **Aboriginal care system based on community outcomes**

- Resource and provide the time for ACCOs to build, design and deliver an Aboriginal family, child and young person care system backed by stand-alone legislation based on community outcomes

## **Needs-based funding**

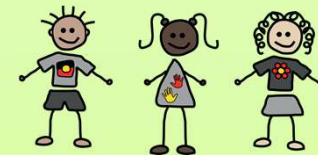
- Commit to ongoing rights-based funding that reflects demand, that is, the number and complexity of families and children supported by ACCOs, from early help through to statutory service delivery.



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

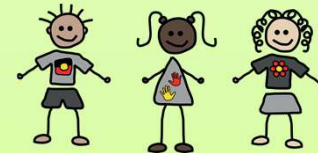
# This requires changed thinking:

- The Aboriginal way is clear, heard, supported, and authorised
- The Government must fund the time and resources to develop and implement a new Aboriginal family, child and young person's care system
- Government must value and accept ACCO governance and their local expertise, capability, systems and infrastructure to support local families, children and young people
- Acknowledgement that local ACCOs are best placed to determine the risk with their families, children and young people



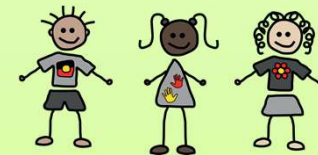
# This requires changed thinking:

- Aboriginal organisations and communities must have oversight of, and be making decisions with, their families, children and young people
- Local ACCOs determine and have control over who they will partner with
- Government understands and accepts self-determination will produce improved outcomes but is not risk-free
- Funding is increased and proportionate to family, child and young people's needs, not historically-based



# We need to change the system

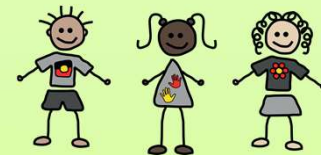
- Our system is grounded in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*
- To change the system, the Alliance calls for new stand-alone legislation for Aboriginal families, children and young people
- There are changes that can be made now while the Alliance works with ACCOs and Government to design and implement a new system
- Marram-Ngala Ganbu should be expanded across the state



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# VACYPA recognised and funded as a peak body for ACCOs in the family, child and youth sector

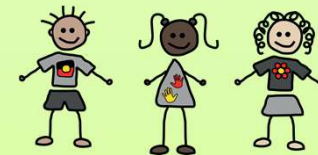
- VACYPA represents the 15 ACCOs who deliver family, child and youth services across Victoria, other than VACCA.
- Half of Victorian Aboriginal people and 61% of Aboriginal children on Protection Orders live outside metropolitan Melbourne. Our members support those Aboriginal families in their local communities.
- As we embark on system reform, the need for the VACYPA to support our members is critical



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# To keep families together and out of the statutory system, we call for

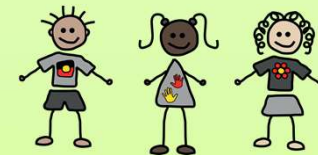
- Every Aboriginal family seeking support can access what they need directly from their local ACCO
  - Families should be able to self refer, without needing child protection or Orange Door involvement
- Rights based funding, based on key drivers of demand, increased in line with population and need, not just CPI increases





# To keep families together and out of the statutory system, we call for

- Every Aboriginal child and young person has access to local Aboriginal early years and youth programs
- ACCOs deliver or partner with other providers to support culturally rich services for Aboriginal children and families



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

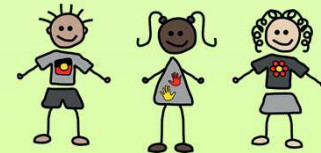
# To keep families together and out of the statutory system, we call for

- Increase early help / prevention funds allocated to care for Aboriginal families, children and young people and reallocate investment for child protection from Government and CSOs to local ACCOs
- ACCOs determine which services will be delivered for their communities
- Early help services are evaluated based on common outcomes, with simplified reporting
- Local governance models are established



# To keep families together and out of the statutory system, we call for

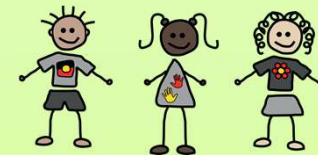
- Self-determined policies and expanded funding criteria enables ACCOs to support families, children and young people to fully engage in community life
- Local ACCOs are supported to be the meeting place in their local communities to foster relationships
- Brokerage is sufficient and flexible to enable ACCOs to use their discretion to support families, children and young people
- Increased investment for local programs developed by and for Aboriginal communities



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

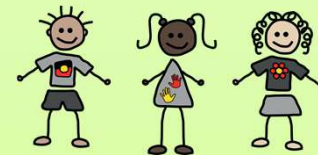
# To provide self-determination through the statutory system, we call for

- Local ACCOs make the decisions about who will deliver statutory services in their community
- Transition of statutory services, including funding and support at a pace set by each local ACCO
- Funding is sufficient to enable ACAC to be undertaken across all areas
- If an ACCO chooses not to deliver ACAC, approval of the local ACCO is necessary for another provider to deliver ACAC



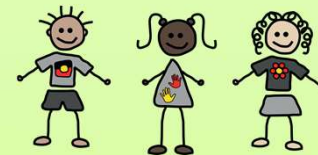
# To provide self-determination through the statutory system, we call for

- Aboriginal children stay in their communities through alternative arrangement when carers are not available, so connection to family and friends are maintained and disruption to daily lives are minimised
- Alternative care models are funded, researched and established by ACCOs rather than residential care



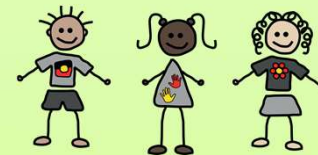
# To provide carer equity, we call for

- Carers of Aboriginal children and young people, whether voluntary, kinship, kith or foster care, receive equitable support based on the child or young person's complexity and the needs of the carer
- Equitable carer assessment that do not traumatise prospective carers; and same assessment process for levels of carer payments regardless of care type
- All Aboriginal children are case managed by an ACCO
- Funding allows for children's needs to be met and for them to engage in school, sport, culture and community life



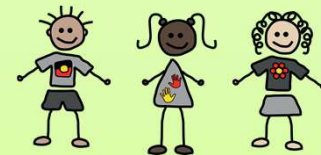
# Continued

- Care services address health, trauma and the social and emotional needs of children and their carers
- Initial brokerage for placement establishment is sufficient to establish a stable and functional placement
- ACCOs are funded to provide carer networks
- ACCOs are able to support the many Voluntary Community Carers that care for Aboriginal children and young people who aren't engaged with the care system – valuing their role and providing financial support where required
- Shift to professional carers



# To support the workforce and operational costs, we call for

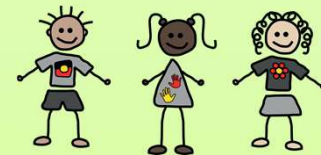
- Equitable sustained workforce investment, including sector wage parity, to meet the escalating operational costs, and the additional cultural and other responsibilities, particularly for smaller rural and regional ACCOs
- Wage parity with government
- Dedicated funding for professional development
- An ACCO child and family workforce strategy is created, funded and implemented





# To support infrastructure, we call for

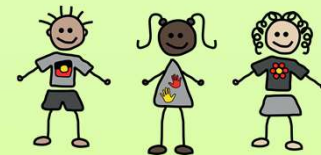
- Infrastructure is funded to match local ACCO's service delivery commitments, demand and growth
- ACCO business and infrastructure is funded separately from program delivery



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

“The unmistakable fact remains that too many of our children suffer the consequences of failures of successive governments to address the ongoing harm caused by child protection systems. Our children and families can no longer be expected to pay the price for government inaction. Twenty-five years after Bringing Them Home there can be no more excuses.”

*Catherine Liddle & Paul Gray*  
*Family Matters Co-Chairs 2022*



Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance