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17 January 2023

To: Yoorrook Justice Commissioners:
Professor Eleanor Bourke AM,
Sue-Anne Hunter
Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter
Professor the Honourable Kevin Bell AM KC

In addition to VACCHO's written submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission and my witness statement on 6 December 2022, I would like to share a business case VACCHO has developed to establish a Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Family Wellbeing as a system response to addressing the alarming rate of Aboriginal children entering care in Victoria.

The attached business case and report into the child and family services system, particularly focused on the existing provision and investment of culturally-safe and Aboriginal-led family strengthening programs and supports, was the result of a request from VACCHO's Board. On behalf of our Members, the Board requested VACCHO investigate ways VACCHO could be a stronger voice for children and families to advocate for the greater investment into the wellbeing of Aboriginal families before they come into contact with the child protection system.

As I mentioned in the Inquiry's hearings, the child protection system is failing Aboriginal children, families, and communities. This is because the current child protection system takes a siloed approach: failing to take a holistic view of Aboriginal families' wellbeing and to address the significant disadvantage and discrimination Aboriginal families endure due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

It is my strong belief that Victoria needs an Aboriginal-led and independent voice advocating for Aboriginal families, building the evidence base as to what works and advocating for greater investment in provision of culturally led prevention/early help services. This Aboriginal voice, based on Aboriginal expertise in holistic service design, whether led by VACCHO or another body, needs to be leading reforms in child and family prevention and early intervention (Roadmaps for Reform) not to be an afterthought.

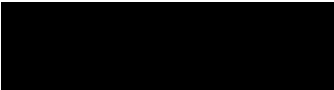
This vision is outlined in attached reports, as well as an evidence base as to why the current system is failing Aboriginal families and recommendations for improvement. The prospectus for the Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Family Wellbeing also offers a system solution consistent with the call made for greater investment in Aboriginal-led holistic services for early help, made by Aboriginal partners at the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

It is my hope that this report will act as additional evidence to support VACCHO's submissions to the Inquiry and help inform your final recommendations.

Please feel free to reach out to my office if you wish to further discuss the inquiries findings or the Centre's vision.

Thank you, as always, for your crucial work in this space,

Yours sincerely



Jill Gallagher AO
Chief Executive Officer

