For Our Children and Families

VACCHO's Balit Durn Durn Centre

Call for Action

The Balit Durn Durn Centre

VACCHO

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge all Traditional Owner's ongoing connection to these lands, waterways, and skies. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present. To the giants whose shoulders we stand on today and every day. And we acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

The ongoing impacts stemming from colonisation on the social and political determinants of Aboriginal peoples have been profound. Its impacts continue to reverberate across several generations. In Victoria, colonialism has been especially brutal. Colonial violence has been enduring and takes many forms. From various government policies intent of genocide, and those that led to the Stolen Generations – a form of cultural genocide in itself - to police brutality and the continuing torment of Black deaths in custody, to the trauma that is a product from unchecked, unchallenged racism and discrimination.

Despite all that colonisation has wrought in the last 235 years, our connection to Country, culture and kin remains enduring. It remains strong. Despite dislocation borne from colonial violence, we are healing. We are finding our voice, a voice that was so ruthlessly taken from and denied to our Ancestors. We are telling our stories, sharing our experiences with the belief that society, systems, and structures can learn from us and those who went before us – whose footsteps we follow. The belief that with our advocacy, systems and structures can evolve to place the social and emotional wellbeing model at the core of service design and delivery. A holistic model that recognises our mob's health and wellbeing as being influenced by cultural, historical, political, and social determinants.

Language

The term 'Aboriginal' in VACCHO documents is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples and 'Aboriginal Victorian' includes all Aboriginal people living in Victoria. The terms 'Community' or 'Communities' in this document refers to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia, representing a wide diversity of cultures, traditions, and experiences.

Story of the artwork – 'Nyarri Yathuka' (*Now we will no longer be without*)

Kenita-Lee McCartney is an Aboriginal woman from Swan Hill/Balarand. Her bloodlines run through Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri, Wotjiboluk, Neri Neri, and Boon Wurrung Countries. This piece, 'Nyarri Yathuka' (Now we will no longer be without), tells the story of bright futures, with Mobs flourishing and thriving. It signifies our path to a brighter future and the healing journey for our mob. With our Communities leading the way to create even brighter and self-determining futures for generations to come. The colours are vibrant and bright, invoking our past and its impacts that helped plant the seeds of resilience that our Mob have sown. The piece tells a story of the journey our Mobs continue on. We are alive. We have survived. We are healing. We are strong. We will thrive.

VACCHO's Balit Durn Durn Centre vision for our children and families

VACCHO's Balit Durn Durn Centre's (The Centre) vision is that our children grow up **physically, emotionally, spiritually and culturally** strong, live in safe and caring environments within their own families and communities, and are afforded the same life opportunities available to all children and young people to achieve their full potential regardless of where they are born.

Our children have the right to a bright, healthy, and powerful future — a future that is shaped by their own aspirations and unquestionable potential, rather than entrenched disadvantage and low expectations. Our children deserve an equitable chance to grow up well, thrive, and achieve their best hopes for their life.

Our families have the right to raise our children in culture, Community, and in Aboriginal kinship structures, free from judgment and parenting expectations based on Western notions of child-rearing.

Our families deserve to be set up for parenting success before birth and have access to culturally strong, safe, and responsive Aboriginal and mainstream health and wellbeing services that build on our strengths and enable healing.

Our families have the right to participate in – and have control over – decisions that affect our children and our lives.

'We must never forget the profound impact of the past on the present, and we must forever acknowledge the enduring strength of our cultural connection. We must always remember that the weight of the past reverberates in the present. As we embark on the journey of healing and revitalisation, let us rise as a proud and thriving people, knowing that one day our children will inherit the legacy we leave behind.

This knowledge calls upon us to take bold action, to weave together the threads of our heritage and reclaim our rightful place in the tapestry of humanity. With a resolute spirit, let us forge a future that celebrates our traditions, embraces our diversity, and ensures the cultural sovereignty of our people. Through unity and collective effort, we will shape a tomorrow that echoes with the wisdom of our ancestors and sustains the flame of cultural resilience for generations to come.'

- *Anonymous Community Member*

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We Call for Action from the Victorian State and Federal Government

Recognition of Rights: Acknowledge and affirm the inherent rights of Aboriginal children, as outlined in international human rights instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Prioritise the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of Aboriginal children and recognise the interconnectedness of individuals, families, and Communities that is shaped by connection to the body, mind and emotions, kinship, Community, culture, land, and spirituality. Disruption of any one these connections results in diminished outcomes for Aboriginal people and their communities.

Health and wellbeing: Prioritise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children by addressing the social determinants of health, including access to nutritious food, safe, affordable, and stable housing, and access to readily available high quality healthcare services that are culturally safe and responsive.

Land and Cultural Heritage: Protect and preserve Aboriginal lands, territories, and cultural heritage as integral components that strengthen social and emotional wellbeing, identity, and the cultural determinants of Aboriginal children. Engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration with Aboriginal communities in decisions that impact their lands and resources. This includes conversations about reparations and returning Crown land to Aboriginal ownership and land governance.

Education and Empowerment: Embed Aboriginal ways of knowing (epistemology), being, and doing (ontology) in all learning curriculums from kindergarten onwards. Invest in quality education that is accessible and relevant to Aboriginal children, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary for personal growth, academic success, and future opportunities. Foster programs that promote cultural resilience, traditional teachings, and bilingual education.

Family and Community Support: Recognise the importance of family, kinship structures and community in the lives of Aboriginal children. Invest in programs that strengthen family bonds, cultural connections, and support systems.

Reconciliation and Healing: Commit to truth-telling, reconciliation, and healing by acknowledging and correcting the historical injustices and ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal children and communities. Foster dialogue, understanding, and respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peoples.

Partnership and Collaboration: Establish meaningful, Aboriginal-led partnerships and collaborations between government agencies at all levels, Aboriginal organisations, community leaders, and other stakeholders to develop and implement child-centred policies and programs. Ensure that Aboriginal children and their families are actively lead in decision-making processes.

Data sovereignty: Enable Aboriginal families and communities to shape the narratives and representations of their families based on their own lived experiences and cultural contexts. Empower Aboriginal families and communities to control how their stories are shared and ensure voices are accurately represented. Build the evidence base to assist in the development of programs with a high likelihood of success.

Resourcing for success: Allocate sustainable resources and funding models to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of self-determined, place-based programs and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal children. Ensure that resources are distributed equitably. Resource for success.

We call for Action from all Australians and Global Citizens

Education and Awareness: Educate oneself about Aboriginal history, culture, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Seek out reliable sources of information, engage with Aboriginal-led initiatives, and participate in cultural events to foster understanding and awareness.

Challenge and call-out Racism: Actively challenge and confront racist attitudes and behaviours, whether they occur in personal interactions, public spaces, or online platforms. Speak up against stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and microaggressions, promoting a culture of respect and inclusion.

Listen and Learn: Listen to the voices and experiences of Aboriginal children and communities without judgment or defensiveness. Take the time to learn from their perspectives, stories, and aspirations, recognising the diversity and richness within Aboriginal cultures.

Support Aboriginal-led Initiatives: Engage with and support Aboriginal-led organisations, initiatives, and businesses. Attend Indigenous cultural events, purchase from Aboriginal business and enterprise, and contribute to programs that empower Aboriginal children and families.

Advocate for Policy Change: Write to political representatives, urging them to prioritise policies and programs that address the specific needs and aspirations of Aboriginal children. Advocate for equitable and fair funding, culturally safe and responsive services, and greater representation of Aboriginal voices in decision-making processes.

Cultivate Relationships: Seek opportunities to build relationships with Aboriginal communities based on trust, respect, and reciprocity. Engage in collaborative projects, volunteering, or mentorship programs that contribute to the well-being and empowerment of Aboriginal children.

Support Aboriginal Education: Advocate for inclusive and culturally responsive education, including the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, languages, and histories into school curricula. Support scholarships, bursaries, and mentoring programs that promote educational opportunities for Aboriginal children.

Promote Cultural Safety: Encourage organisations, institutions, and workplaces to prioritise cultural safety and responsiveness by implementing policies, protocols, and training that ensure respect for Aboriginal cultures and the provision of culturally appropriate services.

Amplify Aboriginal Voices: Use platforms, both online and offline, to amplify Aboriginal voices and stories. Share and promote Aboriginal art(ists), literature, music, and cultural achievements, helping to counter stereotypes and promote understanding. Representation is important for aspiration and empowerment - "you can't be what you can't see". Equip Aboriginal children with the tools and environments they need to thrive and blaze their own trails.

Our work:

The Balit Durn Durn Centre is committed to promoting Aboriginal-led solutions and empowering communities across Victoria. The Centre maintains a focus on the strengths of our mob, shifting away from deficit narratives and positioning Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing as central, legitimate, and vital.

With unwavering dedication, the Balit Durn Durn Centre (The Centre) has advanced critical recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system and pioneered innovative approaches, amplified living experience perspectives, delivered workforce support responsive to needs, fostered meaningful connections, and sparked vital conversations.

Below are some examples of The Centre's work and how we ensure our children and families remain at the forefront of our advocacy, programs and projects.

- The Centre embeds Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing into all its work and advocacy using a decolonial lens.

- The Centre advocates for more funding for prevention and early intervention initiatives that start from a place of wellness and move away from crisis driven care and tertiary end responses.

- The Centre advocates for more funding and better access to culturally strong and safe, Aboriginal and mainstream SEWB services that build on our strengths.

- The Centre continues to support the training, upskilling, education and employment aspirations of our mob via scholarships and training opportunities.

- The Centre involves youth mob throughout all of our work and supports youth mob to grow into leadership roles. We ensure our young people are in meetings, spaces and places to absorb knowledge and grow.

- The Centre is working on key system reform projects that came out of the Royal Commission- the co-design of an intensive SEWB service model for infants, children and families (recommendation 33.4), and the co-design of two on-country healing centres (recommendation 33.1)

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