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| Aboriginal Children’s Forum May 2024 |
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The 28th Aboriginal Children’s Forum (ACF) was held in Dandenong on 8 and 9 May 2024. The May ACF was co-hosted by both Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative (DDACL) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child & Community Agency (VACCA), with the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (DFFH). Jenny Ockwell, CEO of DDACL, and Muriel Bamblett, CEO of VACCA, co-hosted day one with Peta McCammon, Secretary of DFFH. The Minister for Children, the Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MP, co-hosted with Ms. Ockwell and Ms. Bamblett on day two.

ACF members highlighted the state of emergency in Australia regarding deaths from family violence and the heightened impact this has on Aboriginal women and children in Victoria. Aboriginal women and children are at heightened risk of experiencing family violence and are less likely to access formal support. Rates of domestic violence deaths have risen in Victoria, with 25 women lost to family violence this year by April 2024 – 11 more than this time last year. The ACF recognised the importance of ongoing Aboriginal-led, culturally safe support services and networks that protect and support vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

The May ACF focused on the refresh of the *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement’*s Strategic Action Plan. The current iteration of the Action Plan began in June 2021 and expires in June 2024. The refreshed Wungurilwil Gapgapduir action plan was workshopped by the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) caucus prior to the May ACF to ensure that it aligns with other key strategies - including the Yoorrook for Justice report, Treaty, the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021-2031*. Jason Kanoa, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People’s Alliance (VACYPA) made it clear that transformative change is required.

*“Aboriginal families, children and young people need change, and they need it now. Yoorrook made it very clear, as did the ACCOs, that we need transformative change in Victoria. We need to walk together on the transfer of power, authority, control, and resources to ACCOs to deliver an Aboriginal-designed, led and delivered system.”*

ACF members have collectively undertaken a reform process for both the ACF and Wungurilwil Gapgapduir to re-envision and re-invigorate our commitments and priorities. The torch is shining bright - this ACF signified the strengthened relationship between VACCA and VACYPA, as well as ongoing collaboration between all parties. This includes an ongoing partnership with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children & Young People, Meena Singh to ensure that the independent voice of Aboriginal children and young people is heard at the ACF.

With this commitment in mind, the ACF identified and agreed to four priorities for the next Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Strategic Action Plan (2024 – 2027):

1. Equitable local access to Aboriginal models of prevention and early intervention services,
2. Self-determining and ACCO-led response to child safety,
3. Building knowledge and the evaluation of Aboriginal child and family ways,
4. Aboriginal decisions over investment into Aboriginal children and families.

ACF members will undertake further work collectively to finalise outcomes for the Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Strategic Action Plan (2024 – 2027) before the next ACF, which is scheduled for August 7 and 8 2024.

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