



VACCA

**VACCA's Evaluation
Framework –
Strengthening the
evidence base of an
Aboriginal Community
Controlled
Organisation**

October 2018

Connected by culture



Summary

Increasing importance of evidence in program design, implementation and evaluation provides opportunities for the documentation of an evidence base for Aboriginal programs.

Mainstream program design and evaluation approaches are frequently not appropriate for the Aboriginal community.

Lack of relevant evidence - and evidence-based programs – for Aboriginal Communities.

VACCA's Evaluation Framework will enable the design, delivery and evaluation of programs which are specific to the context.

The framework is aimed at building a growing culturally appropriate evidence-base of Aboriginal programs.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

State-wide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation with 40 years' experience

Policy development, advocacy, service delivery and research in health, wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal communities

Range of services to children, families and individuals

Committed to the objective of self-determination for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal controlled organisations

VACCA's organisational outcomes

- VACCA's clients understand and are empowered to exercise their rights – and discharge their associated obligations – as First Peoples;
- Culture is embedded in VACCA clients as a resource to draw on for strength, resilience and healing;
- VACCA's clients are safe – and feel safe – and are supported to make safe lifestyle decisions through family and community relationships; and,
- VACCA improves the physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of its clients.

Outcomes measurement and use of evidence

- Commitment to measuring outcomes; collecting, and using, evidence to inform program design and delivery
- Designing and delivering programs for Aboriginal communities for over 40 years
- Considerable experience of what works for Aboriginal communities
- Shift to outcomes measurement and requirements regarding evidence provide opportunities to document VACCA's evidence base

VACCA's approach to evidence

Using evidence throughout the program cycle - in developing, implementing and evaluating its services for Aboriginal families

Approach to evidence is underpinned by principles of the rights of the child and self-determination

Evidence comes from a broad range of sources. Evidence is dynamic, reflecting constant changes in our communities.

Importance of context to the usefulness of evidence - research and evaluations from other contexts may not be relevant to VACCA's context.

VACCA's evidence-informed practice

Building practice informed by evidence of what works for the communities that VACCA serves.

Drawing on common definitions of evidence-informed practice:

- Research evidence: rigorous research, open enquiry methods, research studies with similar practice elements
- Practice wisdom: recognising the skills and knowledge that practitioners bring, including cultural and contextual knowledge
- Client preference: service provision reflecting clients' situations and outcomes relevant to their needs.

Prioritising development and implementation of models that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal families.

Evidence-based programs from other contexts if appropriate, and in a way that allows for continuous learning and cultural adaptation.

What is the Evaluation Framework?

The mechanism through which VACCA will internally evaluate that we are achieving outcomes

Key decision making phases of program design, implementation, program reporting and learning.

Piloted in three programs through the organisation's Outcomes Project called Yinga, which brings together three interrelated initiatives that formalise existing cultural practice:

- **VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways which guides VACCA's approach to healing – the centre-piece of Yinga**
- **The evaluation framework.**
- **CS-Net - a digital case management system**

Purpose of the Evaluation Framework

Design, delivery and evaluation of programs which are specific to the context

Establishing an Aboriginal evidence base to support Aboriginal informed decision-making processes and programs

Developing ethical research and evaluation processes and protocols, ensuring that unintended consequences, both positive and negative are captured

Measuring progress against specific outcomes, building practice informed by evidence of what works, for whom and how

Driving continuous learning, improvement and consistency for the delivery of services to VACCA's children, families, adults and communities

Assumptions underpinning the framework

That decisions regarding program design, delivery and evaluation are Aboriginal led

Building on strengths within the organisation by documenting the skills and experience of the organisation and what is working

Building program evaluation plans that draw largely on program data – utilising existing data

Allowing for iterative development of the framework across the organisation – and learning from its implementation

Starting with realistic expectations – achievable outcomes, and indicators which are relevant and easy to measure

Key evaluation principles informing the framework

- **Human rights** - our evaluations will protect, promote and respect human rights, in particular the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and the rights of the child. VACCA will respect the rights of evaluation participants (program participants and staff and community members) including their rights to privacy, ensuring that we have their proper consent, and that we provide opportunities to enable, capture and reflect the voice of participants.
- **Benefit to the community** - evaluation is needed to improve client outcomes, we will commit to using the findings, we will report evaluation findings back to the community and ensure ethical review, including risks of re-traumatising participants.
- **Rigor** – evaluations will be rigorously conducted, culturally appropriate, and implemented by qualified personnel. VACCA's evaluations will be transparent, and explore positive and negative results of our work. VACCA will take action to address negative consequences identified as part of an evaluation.

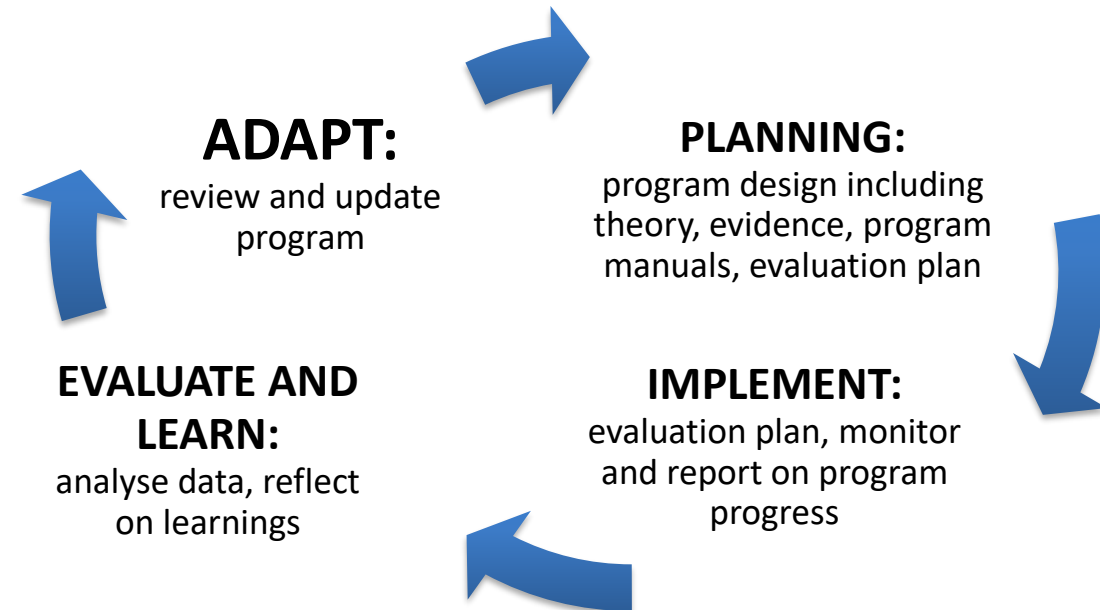
Implementation of the Evaluation Framework

The framework embeds continuous reflection to improve practice across the program cycle so that planning and design are not static, and monitoring and evaluation occur simultaneously with program implementation.

Each program will contribute to the evaluation process: consultation, the development of program logic and evaluation plans, including its implementation.

The design of the evaluation framework is based on a program cycle of four intersecting stages: planning, implementation, evaluation and adaptation.

Program cycle



VACCA has drawn inspiration from the adaptive management cycle, DPIPWE 2014, Jones 2005, 2009, as cited by Better Evaluation, https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/adaptive_management

Stages – what does it look like in practice?

Planning - program theory with identified participants, activities and the outcomes; document evidence used to design the program; program manuals; an evaluation plan

Implement - implement the evaluation plan and undertake regular monitoring and reporting on program progress

Evaluate and Learn - analyse and interpret data provided by program participants; reflect on findings from data analysis; summarise learnings and consider program implications.

Adapt - consider if and how the program needs to be adapted

Building a learning culture and staff skills and knowledge in evaluation

Staff engagement in the process is critical

By embedding evaluation into program design and implementation, the Aboriginal staff will be supported to design targeted programs, measure outcomes and evaluate programs.

Staff will be supported to reflect and learn throughout the evaluation cycle to assist with determining the change process.

Strength based – helping to identify what staff understand and their skills – and help to document how they are using their knowledge and skills in delivering services

Next steps in implementation

Iterative process, being done alongside VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways and new case management system

Learning as we go and have drafted a process evaluation plan to help document our learnings

Two pilot programs underway with program logics developed and work is underway on evaluation plans. Preparations for the third pilot project are underway.

A menu of common outcomes and indicators is being developed aligned to the Cultural Therapeutic Ways

VACCA's experience of implementing EBPs:

- From 2017, VACCA has been implementing three EBPs
 - FFT- CW
 - MST (psych)
 - Tuning In To Kids and Tuning into Teens
- In all EBPs, VACCA partnered with different mainstream service providers who were the lead implementing organization
- The EBPs were implemented in both rural and urban settings

Challenges of evidence-based models

Mainstream evidence-based programs do not provide an evidence-base of effective programs to achieve outcomes for Aboriginal people

EB Programs may be context specific and therefore not appropriate in other contexts

Reliance on evidence-based models, may ignore evidence gathered through other ways/from other sources

There are limited evidence-based programs relevant to VACCA

Adoption of EB Programs can be costly and time consuming and the models are not necessarily designed to monitor cultural adaptations needed

Learnings from VACCA's implementation of the models include:

- Only one of the models had been implemented in a similar context - with Aboriginal clients in Victoria
- Positive experience regarding some best practice elements of the models
- Less prescriptive models were easier to adapt
- EBPs are targeted to specific cohorts
- Some EBPs have strict recruitment criteria for program staff

Aboriginal communities are keen to develop evidence informed programs based on cultural elements that have empirical evidence.

The importance of culture is supported by empirical data and experience indicates that effective approaches to Aboriginal people include a focus on cultural identity and connection to community and country

Self determination means Aboriginal communities being able to design, implement and evaluate programs that work for their community