



VACCA

Connected by culture

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

A large, vibrant orange graphic dominates the center of the page. It features a central, stylized figure of a person with arms raised, surrounded by intricate Aboriginal patterns including concentric circles, dots, and wavy lines. The graphic is set against a white background with a thin orange border.

Emergency Relief Program and Procedure Manual



WARNING: This work is protected by copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the owner of the copyright:

© 2016 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) 340 Bell Street Preston 3072.

Artist: Emma Bamblett

Welcome



Welcome

Welcome to the Emergency Relief Program (program). This program is one of many programs the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) provides to the Aboriginal Community that reflects our cultural values and principles in achieving the safety, wellbeing and empowerment of Aboriginal people.

Fundamental to our work is the commitment to provide programs and deliver services in an Aboriginal way, reflecting the priorities and needs of the Community. Our vision is for Aboriginal children, young people, families and Community to thrive – by being culturally strong, empowered and safe. We strive to achieve this vision by providing programs that:

- keep children safe
- empower and strengthen families and Community
- draw on culture to promote healing and build resilience
- utilise and embed kinship systems of care and Aboriginal childrearing practices
- provide an Aboriginal trauma-informed approach.

As a member of the Emergency Relief team, you play a vital role in achieving this vision and in helping children remain with their families and Community. This manual, together with mentoring, supervision, training and professional development, will guide and support you in this important work.

Contents

1.	Preface	1
1.1	How to use this manual	1
1.2	Language used in this manual	1
1.3	Introduction	2
2.	Overview of the Emergency Relief Program	3
2.1	Program summary	3
2.2	Program aims	4
2.3	Program principles	4
2.4	Program eligibility	4
2.5	Program targets	5
2.6	Data collection and reporting	6
2.7	Program location and contact information	6
2.8	Program hours	7
2.9	Program structure	7
2.10	Program positions	7
2.11	Key networks and partnerships	10
3.	Working with children and families	13
3.1	Referral and intake	13
3.2	Assessment and engagement of families	16
3.3	Making referrals	26
3.4	Court work	27
3.5	Client records and file management	27
3.6	Casework tasks	28
3.7	Case closure	32
3.8	Re-entry into the program	32



4.	Child safety and wellbeing	33
4.1	Child safety and wellbeing	33
4.2	Responding to concerns for a child	33
5.	Staff safety and wellbeing	35
5.1	Staff safety and wellbeing	35
5.2	Supervision	36
6.	Quality	37
6.1	Quality services	37
6.2	Responding to critical incidents	37
6.3	Feedback	38
6.2	Privacy and confidentiality	39
7.	Resources	41
7.1	Key legislation	41
7.2	Key sector policies and frameworks	41
7.3	Key VACCA policies and frameworks	42
7.4	Practice tools	42
7.5	Forms	43

1. Preface



1.1 How to use this manual

The Emergency Relief Program and procedure manual (manual) will inform and guide you in culturally appropriate case practice and the delivery of effective services to Aboriginal children, parents and families.

It provides information about the tools and casework frameworks you will use in your day-to-day work.

This manual is not a stand-alone resource. You will also need to read the [client services manual](#) and the [introduction to family violence manual](#) for information about the policies and practices relevant to all client service staff and the broader child and family sector.

This manual is designed to be read online. Hyperlinks have been created within the text to access information, forms and resources while reading. You can also click on the table of contents page numbers to take you directly to sections in the manual.

1.2 Language used in this manual

It is important staff are aware of how language is used within VACCA and this document. We understand that language is powerful and have sought to be respectful in the way we use language. Key terms we use within this manual are:

Child – this refers to children and young people up to 18 years, unless otherwise specified.

Aboriginal people – this refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Community – this refers to and acknowledges all Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

We use the 'phrases Aboriginal and Communities' (plural) to 'acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal people and communities their different histories, political dynamics, social situations and cultural characteristics. Some Aboriginal people will prefer to use other terms to convey their tribe or clan group: for example, some Aboriginal people from Victoria may prefer 'Koorie'¹.

When we refer to Elders and Traditional Owners we have written these words with a capital letter to show the deep respect we have for these positions and their significance in the Community. We have also written Country in capital to show the importance and sacredness of land and Country.

More information about language can be found in the [client services manual](#).

¹Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services, VACCA, 2010, pg10

1.3 Introduction

The history of Aboriginal people since colonisation has been overshadowed by disempowerment and marginalisation. This has led to significant trauma and entrenched layers of disadvantage within the Aboriginal Community. The Community continues to experience higher levels of life stressors and poorer health, poverty, social and emotional outcomes than the general population.²

In the Aboriginal Community financial hardship and crisis impacts on the levels of physical, social and emotional safety and wellbeing.

The Emergency Relief Program (program) plays an important role in addressing individuals' and families' immediate financial needs and supports them to access support services to address issues that have led to current financial crisis.

VACCA has been providing emergency relief to the Aboriginal Community in the North for more than 6 years. In 2015 VACCA was able to expand this program to provide support across the North, West, South and East providing vital support to the Aboriginal Community and facilitating access to local financial counselling and other support services.

²Council of Australian Governments. Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Closing the Gap report (2012)

2. Overview of the Emergency Relief Program

2.1 Program summary

The program provides a culturally respectful service to help Aboriginal people address immediate basic needs in times of financial crisis. Access to emergency relief is considered universal and is a safety net for people experiencing financial distress or hardship and who have limited means or resources to help alleviate their financial crisis. Emergency relief is seen as an entry point into a continuum of financial and other support services.

In this role the program will:

- address immediate basic needs in times of financial crisis – provision of emergency relief
- undertake assessments of need
- refer people to financial counselling services and other support services for assistance.

2.2 Program aims

The program aims to:

- assist people to respond to and address their immediate financial crisis
- deliver services in a way that maintains the dignity of the individual and families
- refer people to other sources of support and assistance, and
- encourage self-reliance.

2.3 Program principles

The program is underpinned by the following principles and values:

- a recognition of the impact of colonisation and the associated trauma experienced and inherited by Aboriginal people
- a commitment to culturally appropriate and holistic practice
- respect for Aboriginal self-determination and person-centred services
- empowerment of individuals to make important decisions
- a recognition of the important role of the Community in supporting individuals
- to ensure individuals remain closely connected to their family and Community.

Case practice is informed by:

- the best interest of the child - protecting and promoting the safety and wellbeing of our children
- Aboriginal cultural observance - the importance of cultural practice and compliance with Aboriginal protocols and ceremony in effecting positive change and healing
- a commitment to ensure the cultural rights of the Community and families are valued and upheld
- empowering our Community with a strengths-based approach
- excellence - our Community is entitled to high quality and professional services.³

2.4 Program eligibility

To be eligible for the program, individuals need to live in the [service areas](#) covered by the program and be Aboriginal or caring for an Aboriginal child. The primary target group for this service include people who are:

- participating in [income management](#) (service priority, currently only operating in Greater Shepparton)
- a person with disability
- in receipt of a Commonwealth Pension or allowance or have a low income
- students
- sick
- unemployed
- experiencing financial stress, bankrupt or insolvent or at risk of either
- impacted by a significant event effecting them financially
- unable to access loans or savings products
- making the transition to employment
- individuals or families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Future support

To ensure that the whole Community has access to emergency relief there are timeframes of eligibility for people who have accessed the service in the past. The aim of the service is to address immediate financial crisis and then assist people to access support to become self-reliant and address the issues that have led to the financial crisis through accessing relevant services.

To be eligible for future emergency relief people need to show that they have followed through with recommended referrals when they previously attended.

Upon receiving emergency relief people will be advised of when they are able to access emergency relief support again. These timelines are

- food (or other type) gift cards, three months
- support for bills, 12 months
- material aid, 12 months.

In certain circumstances, the team leader or manager can use their discretion to provide additional support to Community members who present with a financial crisis.

³VACCA Strategic Plan 2015-18, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

2.5 Program targets

The program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. VACCA has a funding and service agreement, which sets out the services to be provided, the target group, program standards and performance measures.

The Department of Social Services has established [Financial Wellbeing and Capability Guidelines](#) which apply to the program. Staff will need to comply with these requirements in delivering this program.

There is also the [Emergency Relief Handbook](#) that provides advice to all emergency relief providers about how to deliver services consistently across Australia.

Who is the client?

Department of Social Services definition

The Department of Social Services defines a client as an individual who receives a service as part of the funded activity that is expected to lead to a measureable individual outcome.

If a service is delivered to a related group of individuals such as a couple, family or household, more than one client record can be created and grouped together using a case record. For example, where we provide gift cards for food based on the number of individuals within the family, each member of the family is a client.

VACCA client information database

The client information database records the primary client of the program and includes fields for staff to enter information about the children.



The program provides emergency relief from VACCA head office and the Werribee, Dandenong and Ringwood offices. VACCA has developed the following targets however there is some flexibility in terms of the type of aid and support that can be provided through the program:

Office	Gift cards (based on \$20)	Material aid (up to \$200)	Support for bills (up to \$200)
Head office			
Melbourne Inner	161	12	12
Melbourne North East	291	24	24
Melbourne North West	136	24	24
Werribee office			
Melbourne West	328	48	48
Dandenong office			
South East	328	48	48
Ringwood office			
Outer East	136	24	24

2.6 Data collection and reporting

The program records and reports data on the DSS data exchange as per the [DSS data exchange protocols](#). Staff can access further information on the use of the data exchange from the fact sheets and video support.

Performance reports are extracted from data entered into the DSS data exchange.

2.7 Program location and contact information

Northern VACCA

340 Bell Street
Preston VIC 3072

PO Box 494, Northcote Plaza
Northcote VIC 3070

Ph: (03) 9287 8800
Fax: (03) 9287 8881

Southern VACCA

Level 2, Plaza Business Centre
26 McCrae Street
Dandenong VIC 3175

PO Box 7052
Dandenong VIC 3175

Ph: (03) 9701 4200
Fax: (03) 9706 6808

Eastern VACCA

10 Maroondah Hwy
Ringwood VIC 3134

PO Box 635
Ringwood VIC 3134

Ph: (03) 9871 9000
Fax: (03) 9879 4224

Western VACCA

Level 3, 8 Watton Street
Werribee VIC 3030

Ph: (03) 9742 8300
Fax: (03) 9742 8339

The western VACCA program also provides the service from the Braybrook and Melton hub.

2.8 Program hours

The program operates an appointment system. Times and days the service is available vary across office locations.

2.9 Program structure

Program structures are updated regularly. Caseworkers can access their [program structure](#) to get a better understanding of how the program fits within the broader office and staff in positions.

2.10 Program positions

All staff

All staff in this program are required to:

- prioritise the wellbeing and safety of the child
- see the child's best interests through a cultural lens
- empower and strengthen families
- use a trauma-informed approach to practice
- respect and promote kinship systems of care and decision making
- see families within the context of their past and present experiences
- create a culturally safe environment where children and families feel safe and supported.

Support worker

The support worker is responsible for ensuring that Aboriginal culture is embedded throughout all aspects of the program's functioning and that all program activities are culturally safe.

It is their role to:

- conduct needs assessment of individuals and families and identify support needs to address the issues that have led to financial crisis
- identify with the client their goals to address their current financial crisis and become self reliant
- provide information and advice about local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services
- provide practical one-to-one advice to individuals and families on budgeting and making good financial decisions
- provide assistance to navigate the service system and communicate effectively with other services
- make appropriate referrals to other services to best meet the needs of individuals and families
- assess the client current situation against the client current circumstances domains, or complete this with the client if appropriate
- complete the [assessment form](#) documenting all information about the client, assessment of their current situation, their goals, support provided and measurement of outcomes and achievement of goals
- develop and maintain effective relationships with other VACCA programs, appropriate Aboriginal Community-controlled organisations, government agencies and community service organisations
- develop and maintain effective referral pathways to local non-Aboriginal financial counselling services to ensure access, engagement and provision of culturally responsive services to the Aboriginal Community
- maintain a referral pathway list of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services
- maintain high-quality and up to date written records and statistics on all activities
- maintain up to date data in the DSS data exchange
- manage emergency relief funds within allocated budget and maintain up to date records to

acquit emergency relief funds

- train other staff in the office to respond to the Community in financial crisis when required
- participate in training, team meetings and other meetings as directed
- participate in regular supervision.

The support worker may also undertake the roles of the intake and assessment worker for the Koorie Connect Program (see [Koorie Connect program manual](#)).

Administration worker

The administration worker is responsible for providing a culturally safe and accessible service to the Aboriginal Community.

It is their role to:

- provide initial contact to individual and families in financial crisis
- make appointments with the support worker for assessment for emergency relief
- provide information and advice about local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services
- assist the support worker to maintain a referral pathway list of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services
- enter service provision information into the DSS data exchange database
- complete registration and closure of clients on the VACCA client information data base
- create and archive client files as per [VACCA client records and file management policy](#)
- participate in training, team meetings and other meetings as directed
- participate in regular supervision.

The support worker may also undertake the roles of the administration worker.

Team leader

The team leader is responsible for the day-to-day management of the program.

It is their role to:

- ensure Aboriginal culture is embedded throughout all aspects of the program's functioning and that all program activities are culturally safe
- review client files to ensure they are up to date and of a high standard
- provide overall supervision to all staff who undertake assessments of need of individuals and families in financial crisis
- be familiar with all relevant legislation, sector and VACCA policies, including governance and foundational documents relevant to managing the program. It is also the role of the team leader to guide staff within the program to embed these frameworks in their practice
- ensure data collection and review systems are in place and data input is being completed
- complete reporting to DSS data every six month
- co-ordinate, facilitate and participate in team meetings and planning meetings
- ensure that performance targets and compliance requirements are met
- ensure management of the emergency relief budget and acquittal of funding
- meet agency requirements
- liaise with financial counselling providers and other key partner agencies on a regular basis to support access and engagement of Aboriginal people to local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services.

Program/operations manager

The program/operations manager is responsible overseeing the management of the program.

It is their role to:

- ensure Aboriginal culture is embedded throughout all aspects of the program's functioning and that all program activities are culturally safe
- be familiar with all relevant legislation, sector and VACCA policies, including governance and foundational documents relevant to managing the program. It is the role of the operations or program manager to guide staff to embed these frameworks in their practice
- ensure the program is focused on the best interests of the child
- provide support and supervision to the team leader
- ensure adequate staffing levels by leading the recruitment, induction and retention of staff
- ensure that data collection and monitoring systems are adequate and operating effectively
- ensure the program operations are compliant with Department standards, child safe standards and continuous quality improvement processes
- ensure that performance targets are met
- manage program finances and ensure program remain within budget
- ensure VACCA policies and procedures are implemented, monitored and reported as required.

Executive manager

The executive manager is responsible for the overall management of the program.

It is their role to:

- ensure Aboriginal culture is embedded throughout all aspects of the program's functioning and that all program activities are culturally safe
- provide support and supervision to the operations manager
- participate in VACCA strategic, business and operational planning activities
- engage in department and sector service development and strategic planning
- ensure the program operations are compliant with legislation, standards, program requirements and continuous quality improvement processes manage program finances and ensure programs remain within budget
- ensure VACCA policies, procedures and systems are in place and working effectively.



2.11 Key networks and partnerships

Internal networks and partnerships

All support workers are expected to work with other VACCA programs as required to achieve the best outcomes for children, young people and families using our services.

Information about other VACCA programs and the services they deliver can be found in the client services programs section of the [client services manual](#). Support workers will need to be familiar and work closely with the following internal programs.

Lakidjeka ACSASS

The Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) is a state-wide service that provides expert advice to Child Protection on culturally appropriate interventions and case consultation regarding significant decisions made about Aboriginal children. Lakidjeka are to be advised if there are issues identified that may impact on consultation with Child Protection. Regardless of Child Protection involvement, all community members can access Lakidjeka.

Koorie Connect

The Koorie Connect program provides information, advice, referral and long term case management service. Where individuals or families attend Emergency Relief they may present with a range of issues and a referral to the Koorie Connect program may be required to further assess their needs and provide long term case management to address multiple and complex issues. The support worker may make a referral to the Koorie Connect program where clients live in the North or West.

Integrated Family Services

The Integrated Family Services program provides support to individuals and families caring for children to address issues and improve their quality of life. The program focuses on the strengths of the individual and family, supporting them to identify goals and work towards achieving these. Individuals and families in contact with the service will generally have between 1 to 6 hours of contact with their caseworker per week.

The support worker may make a referral to Integrated Family Services where families live in North Eastern Melbourne, Hume Moreland, Western Melbourne, Brimbank Melton, Bayside Peninsula, Inner and Outer Eastern Melbourne areas.

Wilka Kwe

The Wilka Kwe program provides short-term intensive support to families for up to 15 hours a week for 12 weeks. The support worker may make a [referral](#) to the Wilka Kwe Program where families live in the Southern Melbourne Area.

Aboriginal Stronger Families

The Aboriginal Stronger Families program provides intensive in-home support for up to 12 months for families where children are at risk of entering out-home care or have been placed in out-of-home care for the first time. If Child Protection are involved, the support worker may make a [referral](#) to the Stronger Families program for intensive support where families live in the Southern Melbourne Area, North Eastern Melbourne Area, Inner and Outer East (if there are vacancies referrals may be accepted from the Hume Moreland Area).

Cradle to Kinder

The Cradle to Kinder program provides support to vulnerable pregnant women and women who have just given birth (within 6 weeks) up until the time the child is four years of age. The support worker may make a referral through Child FIRST to this program.

Aboriginal Kinship Care Program

The Aboriginal Kinship Care Program is able to provide an information and advice service to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kinship carers who are caring for Aboriginal children. They can also provide group support and activities and short-term family support and cultural connections work. The support worker may make a referral to the kinship care program for children and carers.

Mental Health Worker

The mental health worker supports Aboriginal children aged 5-13 years who have mental health issues or who are at risk of a mental health illness, where the parents have consented to this support. There is some flexibility for the worker to support young people over 13 years on a case-by-case basis. The mental health worker also delivers community education and facilitates group work for mental health. The support worker can refer the young person to this worker if relevant and appropriate and they reside in Hume and Brimbank.

Playgroups

Playgroups provide opportunities for Aboriginal parents and carers of Aboriginal children to meet other Aboriginal families and establish support networks while strengthening their parenting skills and knowledge. The support worker may recommend families to attend and participate in playgroups which are available in Southern Melbourne, Bayside Peninsula, North Eastern and West Melbourne and Hume Moreland Areas.

Cultural Programs

All client services programs are involved in delivering and facilitating cultural programs for children in care and the broader Community in their service areas. In addition VACCA has a cultural program team based at Head Office, they facilitate and deliver Community activities. All staff should keep themselves informed of cultural activities and programs to ensure children are involved and keep connected to Community and culture.

See also client services programs section of the [client services manual](#).

External networks and partnerships

The program works in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and community service organisations who provide support to individuals and families in need.

In particular the program works in partnership with Department of Social Services funded financial counselling and capability programs to assist people address their financial issues to become self-reliant. Each region will have information on local partnerships and networks.

There are a number of mainstream [emergency relief providers](#) that the Aboriginal Community can also access and the Community should be supported to access these services if we are unable to meet the demands of the Community in financial crisis.



3. Working with individuals and families

3.1 Referral and intake

Referral sources

Referrals to the Emergency Relief Program (program) can be made by an:

- individual, couple or parent/carer (self referral)
- family member or Community person
- government department
- community service organisation
- VACCA staff member.

Intake processes

The intake processes will vary across offices.

Northern and Western offices

A support worker will manage all enquiries, make appointments for people to attend the office and provide support. This position will be supported by the Koorie Connect intake and assessment worker and where required other staff in the program or office.

Southern and Eastern offices

The office administration worker will make appointments for people to attend the office for support. A duty system of staff in the office will provide a dedicated person to provide support for arranged appointments.

Regardless of individual office arrangements the intake process is as follows:

Individuals need to attend in person to receive support. The person will be provided an appointment to meet with the support worker to complete an assessment of need, provide support and referral to other support services.

If a referral is made by a family member, Community member, government department, community service organisation or VACCA staff the referrer will be provided with an appointment time for the individual to attend. Alternatively the program can contact the individual with their consent to discuss the program and support VACCA can offer and arrange an appointment.

The availability of appointments will vary across offices. If an individual, couple or family are unable to wait for an appointment, the support worker or another staff member will meet with the person to assist in addressing their immediate financial crisis.

In preparing to provide services to Community members, staff should familiarise themselves with the VACCA policies and procedures on [staff safety](#).

Assessment of eligibility for service

Individuals, couples and families will be assessed as to whether they meet the eligibility criteria to access emergency relief. Young people who are 16 years can be assessed as an independent client if parents are not present.

On initial contact with the program the worker will ask the following questions to ensure eligibility for service:

- are they Aboriginal or caring for an Aboriginal child?
- why are they contacting the service / what is their current financial situation?
- individuals may only require phone support and referral to an appropriate service
- check that person meets eligibility criteria for service (refer to eligibility section of the manual)
- check if this program is the most appropriate service
- have they accessed the service before? If so when was the last time they accessed the service to determine eligibility
- where do they reside (if homeless where do they most commonly stay).

If people attend the office who do not reside in the VACCA service area an assessment will need to be undertaken to determine if they can be supported to access services available where they live or if support is to be provided. If people reside in another service area covered by another VACCA office the worker is to check they meet eligibility criteria and have not accessed emergency relief recently from that office by checking the database and then provide support.

If it is assessed that the individual is in financial crisis and cannot be supported to access local services given current situation or that there are no Aboriginal emergency relief providers in their area the worker will provide support.

VACCA provides services to the Aboriginal Community and although funding specifies service areas not all areas across Victoria have Aboriginal emergency relief providers. It is important that all Aboriginal people are able to access Aboriginal services if they choose given some Aboriginal people may not feel culturally safe to access non-Aboriginal services in their area.

Not eligible

If people do not meet eligibility for emergency relief as they are not in financial crisis, people should still be supported to access appropriate local Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal services, for example requesting financial support for items that are not basic needs.

If the individual, couple or family are not Aboriginal or caring for an Aboriginal child, they should be supported to access the local non-Aboriginal [emergency relief provider](#) in their area.

Waiting lists

The program does not have a waiting list. The program has a monthly budget for emergency relief and when this funding has been provided to the Community, the program will continue to provide information and referral services. The program will support people to access other locally based mainstream emergency relief providers, financial and crisis support services.

Case allocation

Given the brief nature of the service, the support worker who meets with the individual or family to undertake the assessment will complete the assessment, make referrals and provide emergency relief.

Cases will not actually be allocated, the responding worker will complete all paperwork required and provide this to the administration worker to complete data collection, file registration and closure.

Registration and client file set up

In order to register the family as a client of the program and create a client file the team leader will complete or request the caseworker or administration worker to:

- conduct a search of the client information database to check if there is existing or previous VACCA involvement (check parents and accompanied children's details)
- retrieve all closed files relating to the family, in line with the [VACCA client records and file management policy](#)
- register program involvement with the young person on the client information database using the existing client information database number or generate a new client number (refer to the [VACCA client information database userguide](#) for more information)
- set up the paper client file in accordance with the VACCA client file folder requirements using the [client file structure](#)
- complete the [client information summary](#) and attach to the paper file.



3.2 Assessment and engagement of individuals and families

Cultural tips for building relationships

- be aware of using language and behaviour that may cause shame
- be genuine in your interest in the child and their family and make this evident
- create time for a yarn
- acknowledge that sharing information is a two way process and share something about yourself
- show warmth and where appropriate use humour to lighten conversations
- use straight talk – be honest, open and transparent
- respect cultural norms and values and model this through your conduct, particularly in relation to the roles and responsibilities of family and Elders and men and women's business.

Preparation for office appointments

When making appointments at the office staff need to consider the nature of other programs provided by VACCA including programs for clients with statutory involvement with Child Protection. The local Community attending the office will likely know each other and it is imperative that the privacy of all clients is maintained in the reception area. For example a family attending the office for an Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making meeting.

Each office has had a meeting room identified for emergency relief. All appointments are to occur in this dedicated room as security measures have been put in place to ensure staff safety. These include:

- a secondary exit from the room only available to staff with their security swipe
- CCTV camera to enable staff to ensure staff safety on the meeting room.

Individuals attending the office in financial crisis could be unknown clients to VACCA. There may also be issues of people attending the office affected by drugs or alcohol or who present as aggressive to staff. If there are any issues with clients presentation in the reception area, clients are to be advised of the program's expectations of clients' behaviour. A decision will need to be made with a team leader or manager as to whether the client's appointment should continue and whether they can proceed to a meeting room.

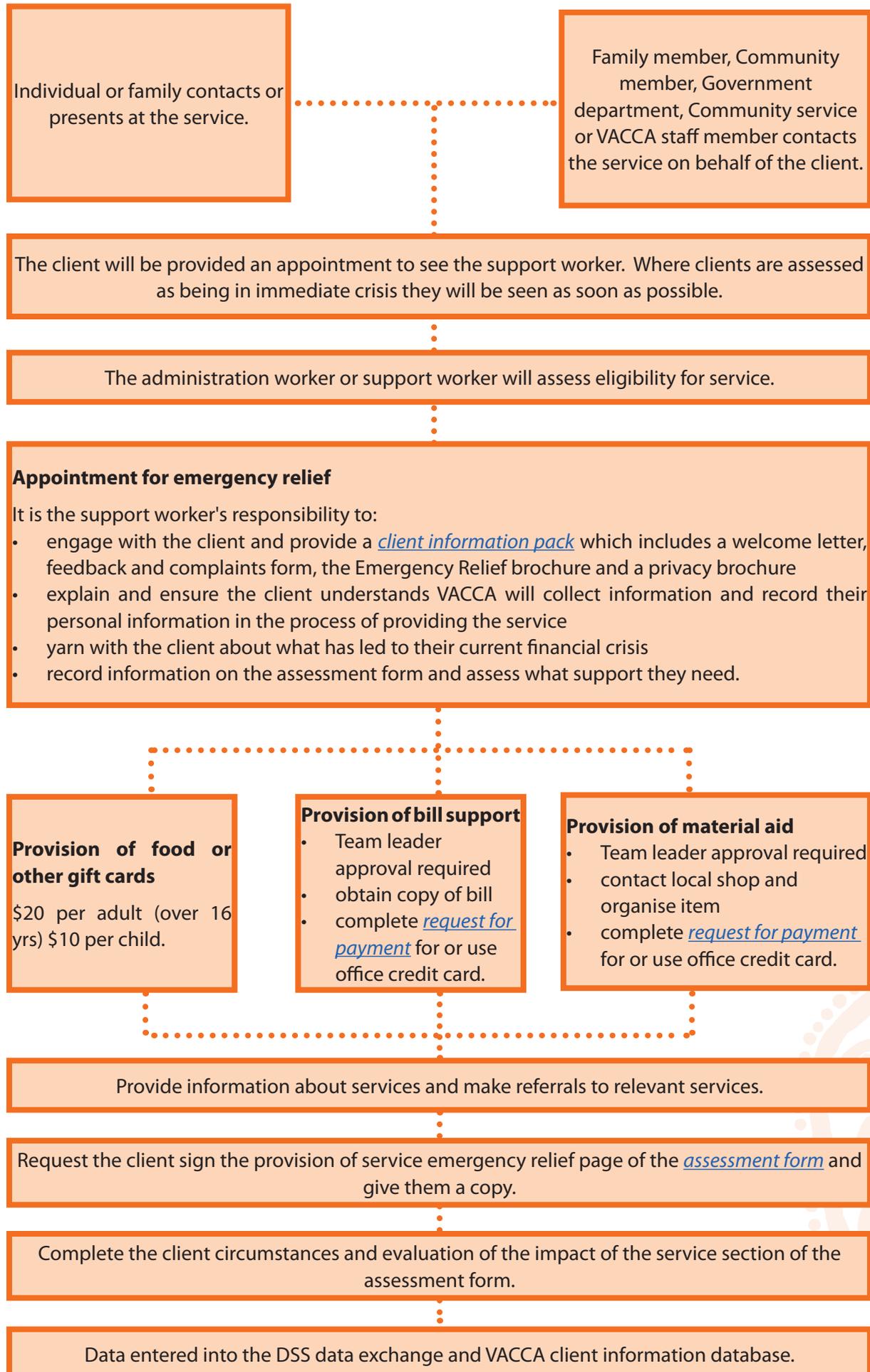
Violent and aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated. Staff are to refer to the VACCA [violence and aggression policy](#) for further information.

Staff need to ensure that they are prepared and that safety processes are followed including:

- having their security swipe with them and easily accessible to exit meeting room, if required
- wearing a duress pendant
- staff in the office are aware of appointment and name of client and when the appointment is likely to be completed.

In preparing for appointments, workers will need to read VACCA policies and procedures on [staff safety](#) in regards to office appointments.

Provision of service flowchart



Engagement

The support worker will make the individual or family feel welcome in the office by providing access to a drink and light snack.

The worker will have a yarn with the individual about what has brought them to VACCA and led to their current financial crisis.

During the conversation the support worker will:

- welcome the individual or family to the program and explain the role of the program
- confirm eligibility for the program
- discuss the program's expectations of behaviour of both staff and clients
- begin to engage and build a relationship
- provide a copy of the VACCA [client information pack](#), which includes a welcome letter, feedback complaints form, the [Emergency Relief brochure](#), VACCA client services charter, Dardee Boorai – Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal & Young People and a privacy brochure
- go through the key documents as per the [client information pack checklist](#) relevant to the program to ensure the individual or family understands all of the documents.
- the emergency relief [assessment form](#) has the exchange and release of information form embedded and client will be requested to sign assessment form part of being provided the service
- where age appropriate children and young people should be provided with key documents from the client information pack and the caseworker needs to ensure that they understand the forms and documents provided, their right to provide feedback and processes.

It is important that the caseworker provides written and verbal information in a way that is understood by people accessing our services including children.

Emergency relief assessment

The program guidelines identify that there is a process to acquire an accurate and comprehensive picture of the person's personal support needs, obtained in a confidential and objective manner.

The support worker needs to be clear with the person about the purpose of the assessment and the time that it will take.

The assessment template

The [assessment form](#) is used to guide and document the assessment. The template covers:

- mandatory information about the person – name, date of birth, gender, post code, Indigenous status and disability indicator
- voluntary information about the person's current circumstances to show outcomes for the client.

The support worker should not rely on the assessment template as a checklist to be gone through with the person or spend the entire time writing. This may give the impression they are there for their own purposes rather than to listen. Before taking notes, the support worker will need to explain to the person that note taking is necessary to record their information accurately.

In providing the program VACCA wants to provide holistic support to individuals and families and provide information and referrals that will support them to address the issues that have led to their current financial crisis. It is important that individuals tell their own story and that we record the information they provide to us.

The support worker does not need to ask every question on the assessment form, for example 'do you have a disability or what is your weekly income?' There are options to record responses as 'not stated.' However it may come up in conversation that the individual has a disability support worker or that they are on the single mother's pension.

After the appointment, the support worker will complete the assessment template, enter the information into the [DSS data exchange](#) or given to the administrative worker to enter data and then place in the client's file.

For clients who have previously accessed the service, the support worker may not need to complete all client information and children's details as this will already be in the client file. The support worker should ask the client if any of their personal information has changed and refer to the file for client information.

Practice tip for conducting assessments

Use a conversational style to obtain information from individuals, couple and families. Be curious and listen carefully. Demonstrate a sincere interest in what the person have to say. Pick up on their non-verbal cues and respond appropriately to these.

Client circumstance outcomes

The aim of the assessment is to understand what has led the person to be in financial crisis in the context of their life and not just limited to their financial circumstances. It provides an assessment of the clients' circumstances in the following domains:

- physical health
- mental health, wellbeing and self-care
- personal and family safety
- age-appropriate development (for children)
- community participation and networks
- family functioning
- managing money
- employment, education and training
- material well-being
- housing.

The client circumstances are to be completed for the primary client only. When recording data on the DSS data exchange all clients within a family will be recorded if they have received a service (example food gift cards) and linked together as a case.

This enables an accurate assessment of their needs beyond addressing the immediate financial crisis and ability for the program to identify how we can provide information, advice and support people to access local support services.

The support worker will need to assess the persons current circumstances against a five point scale on the [assessment form](#) and measure the outcomes people achieve from the service they receive from the program.

The support worker does need to ask if the individual or family have these current circumstances, however will complete this based on information provided during the appointment. Given people are attending for emergency relief it would be expected that for most people there would be impacts on their current circumstances in regards to:

- managing money
- employment, education and training
- material wellbeing
- housing.

Assessment examples

The following are some examples to assist worker in completing the assessment:

- If the individual does not discuss any physical health issues impacting on their ability to be independent, how they feel about themselves or their ability to do things then the score would be a 5 at the beginning of the service and a 5 at the end of the service
- for most people attending the program they will identify that they are experiencing money issues and that this is impacting on their independence, ability to do things and how they feel about life. The support worker may assess that managing money is having a moderate impact and record a 2 and then at the end of the service assess that managing money is still impacting a fair bit and more support is required to address the issue and record a 3 or that managing money is hardly having any impact and they are now managing fine after we have provided support and record a 4 on the assessment
- for individuals that come to the service in need of material aid the worker may assess at the beginning of the service that the individual has a moderate impact of needing material goods and record a 2 and then after being provided with material aid assess that they have secured short-term material goods and record a 4
- for individuals or families who attend with housing issues the worker may assess and record at the beginning of the service that the person has short-term housing issues. The worker may be able to support the person to access housing services and then assess at the end of the service that they are progressing towards housing stability and record a 3 or if housing is located record a 4 identifying that the person has short-term housing.

Given the short nature of support provided by the program, it is unlikely that workers will have a significant impact on people achieving outcomes across many of these domains. However, in most instances the program provides the first point of contact for people and referral pathway to the support they need to achieve longterm outcomes.

Identifying goals and measuring

The support worker will need to identify with the person goals they want to achieve from accessing the service. The types of goals that people can identify are:

- knowledge and access to information
- skills
- behaviours
- confidence to make own decisions
- engagement with relevant support services
- impact of the immediate crisis.

Examples of the types of questions the worker can ask to identify goals:

- what can we do to support you today?
- would you like information on budgeting and managing your money?
- are you aware of local financial counselling services and how they can support you?
- can we support you to access local services?

At the end of the service the support worker will need to assess achievement of identified goals.

Measuring outcomes of goals

Measuring the outcomes achieved by people accessing the service can be completed in three ways:

- the support workers own assessment
- a joint assessment with the client
- a client self-assessment.

Given the short nature of the service the majority will be the workers own assessment, however this will be informed by questions that are asked of the client.

Example of questions that will assist the worker to identify if the goals have been met:

- have I met your needs today?
- do you feel that the information we provided will help you manage your money better?
- are you aware of the services that are available in your local area that you can access in the future?
- will you make an appointment with the financial counselling service I have provided?
- if I make the referral will you attend and engage with the service?
- would you like to use the phone and self-refer to the service?
- are you more confident to make your own decisions?
- do you feel that the financial support provided has reduced your current financial issues?

The worker may make a decision that it is appropriate to do a joint assessment with the client. The worker will need to document on the assessment template that this assessment has been completed jointly with the client.

Client satisfaction

At the end of the assessment and service provided, the client needs to be asked to rate their satisfaction of the service against the following statements:

- I am satisfied with the services I have received
- the service listened to me and understood my issues
- I am better able to deal with issues that I sought help with.

This information is part of the assessment and data collection for the program. This is separate to the client feedback form that is provided as part of the information pack and completed as part of all VACCA programs.

These questions are on the assessment form the client will complete and sign to demonstrate that they have received emergency relief.

Provision of emergency relief

The support worker will have assessed the needs of the individual or family and offer the type of emergency relief that will best meet their needs. The worker will also have:

- assessed eligibility as per eligibility section of manual
- checked the database to see if the person has previously accessed emergency relief and if so when they accessed it last and for what type of support
- request to see and copy the person's health care card or other identification, for example their Medicare card, license to prove who the person is and when claiming support for children that children are in their care.

Type of emergency relief

There are three types of emergency relief provided in this program, these include:

- food gift cards - \$20 per adult (includes young people over the age of 16 years) and \$10 per child is available (this is capped at \$50 a family where required to manage monthly budget)
- support with bills – Up to \$200 is available to support people to pay utility bills, example electricity, phone
- material aid – Up to \$200 is available to purchase clothing, beds, household items, whitegoods, and furniture.

The needs of each individual or family will vary and the worker will need to offer the support that will best meet their immediate financial crisis. If more than one type of emergency relief is requested, workers are to consult with the team leader as to the level of support provided and a decision will be made regarding what is appropriate based on the circumstances of the client.

Workers can also consult with the team leader if unsure about whether support requested is a basic necessity, as opposed to an inessential item or service.

There is flexibility within the delivery of the service to also provide other options that include:

- gift cards for petrol, myki cards for public transport, cab vouchers and payments to chemists
- basic goods like toiletry packs, nappies, blankets etc
- food items including single items or parcels
- discretionary and creative use of financial support to best meet the needs of individuals and families.

There is flexibility within the program as to the type of support provided and decisions around what is appropriate should be based on the needs and circumstances of the client.

Procedures for provision of emergency relief

For all people accessing emergency relief the worker will:

- provide information to the person about supports available to them to address issues that have led to financial crisis
- make referrals for the person to support services (refer to the 'making referrals' section of the manual)
- provide information about emergency relief being assistance to address immediate financial crisis and support people to access services to achieve outcomes to improve independence, participation and wellbeing
- advise the person when they are eligible for future support and that assessment of future eligibility for emergency relief will include individuals following through with referrals to improve their current financial situation.

Gift cards

The worker will assess that the individual or family is in financial crisis and a food gift card (or other gift card) is the best way to support them to address their current financial crisis. The worker will need to:

- obtain evidence of who the person is by making a copy of some form of identification, health care card, medicare card or driver's license
- obtain evidence of the number of people and children in the household by getting a copy of their health care card or medicare card – gift cards can only be provided for people listed on this card and residing with the individual (there will be some exceptions to this rule like sorry business where the assessment form allows for unidentified people to be recorded)
- obtain a signature from the client on the assessment form that they have received the gift cards
- complete the gift cards sign off sheet (this is a record of all gift card numbers removed from the safe and provided to clients)
- at the end of each month, finance is advised of the value of gift cards on hand in the safe.

Bill support

The worker will identify with the individual that the best way to address their current financial crisis is to support them to pay a bill. That may include gas, electricity, water, phone, childcare or other bill that they require financial assistance that will alleviate the current financial crisis.

It is important that staff understand that emergency relief is to support people to address immediate basic needs and not for extracurricular activities that they choose to participate in, for example swimming lessons.

Prior to providing assistance the worker needs to sight the bill and assess whether immediate support is required, for example if electricity will be cut off.

Individuals need to be supported to be self-reliant and manage the payment of their bills in the future given this support is only available every 12 months. The worker may provide bill support and then refer to their service provider to better manage their bills, request hardship support and payment plans to better manage bills in the future.

The worker should support the individual to contact their biller to check if they eligible for any concessions. Where only part bills can be paid, then the individual should be supported to set up a payment plan for the remainder of the outstanding bill and/or payment plan to manage future bills.

Emergency relief is provided to support people in financial, to address immediate basic needs like gas, electricity, water and phone bills. The support worker will need to consult with a team leader for approval for bill support.

Material aid

The worker will identify with the individual that the best way to address their current financial crisis is to purchase material aid items. The worker needs to ensure that the item required cannot be accessed through other processes, for example school uniforms which can be accessed through the school.

The program will have already established relationships with local stores to purchase material aid items on the VACCA account.

The team leader needs to endorse the provision of material aid. The worker will:

- obtain evidence of who the person is by making a copy of some form of identification, health care card, medicare card or driver's license
- contact our local store and arrange purchase of the agreed item using the VACCA account or office credit card
- arrange for the client to pick up the item or have it delivered
- obtain a signature from the client on the assessment form that they have received material aid
- complete the request for payment or use the office debit card to complete finance paperwork.

Support to existing VACCA clients

Caseworkers for existing VACCA clients may advise the Emergency Relief Program that a client is in need of financial support. Clients should be supported to access the Emergency Relief Program in the office. Where the client is unable to come into the office, given the involvement of VACCA and role of the caseworker it may be agreed with the team leader that the caseworker can undertake the emergency relief assessment with their client and provide emergency relief funds.

Emergency Relief processes and forms need to be completed by the caseworker for emergency relief to be provided to their client. Otherwise the client needs to be supported by their caseworker to attend the office.

As part of providing emergency relief the support worker will ask if the client is working with any other program or agency. If the client has an existing caseworker, making referral to other services is a role for that caseworker. In these instances the program will refer the client back to their caseworker for any further support services.

Where there is a VACCA caseworker involved the support worker, with the consent of the client, will email the worker and the appropriate team leader and advise of any relevant information and actions or referrals discussed with the client.

Supporting VACCA staff

VACCA staff may need to access emergency relief in time of financial crisis. To provide confidentiality to staff they can choose to use a pseudonym rather than have their name entered into the VACCA client information database.

It might also be more appropriate for the team leader to undertake the assessment with the staff member and provide sign off for the financial relief. Staff may also wish to access the Emergency Relief Program from another office.

VACCA staff should also be made aware of hardship loans that are available through VACCA and can be accessed by contacting the human resources manager.

Availability of funds

Each office has a monthly emergency relief budget to ensure that funds are available all year. The team leader and program manager manage this monthly budget.

In times of high demand, there may not be emergency relief funding available for the entire month.

People attending in financial crisis are still to be provided with a service and referred to other local [emergency relief providers](#) and/or local services to address the issues that have led to current financial crisis.

The worker is to complete the [assessment form](#) and indicate that the person met the eligibility and type of emergency relief that would have been provided if it was available. It is important that we record the level of demand for emergency relief to accurately budget the funds throughout the year (this will enable the program to identify busy months that may need a higher budget, example December) and provide evidence of need for future submissions for emergency relief or changes in allocation of budget across VACCA offices.

Strategies to manage the Emergency Relief budget should be put in place if demand exceeds available funds. Team leaders will coordinate with their counterparts across all offices providing emergency relief to ensure consistency across VACCA.

Expenditure and reconciliation

The finance department have developed [financial procedures](#) for ordering gift cards and expenditure codes.

The support worker is responsible for completing the gift card sign off sheet for every gift card provided to a client and taken out of the safe.

The team leader is responsible for maintaining the program expenditure and managing the monthly budget.

At the beginning of each month, the safe is to be counted and gift card amount provided to finance.

Program data

All data required for the program is recorded within the [assessment form](#). The support worker or administration worker will enter data into the VACCA client information database and the DSS data exchange.

It is important that all information is recorded into the DSS data exchange as all reporting back to the Department of Social Services will occur through this database.



3.3 Making referrals

Cultural tips for making referrals

- refer children, families and carers to Aboriginal services first, as these are the best placed to meet their needs
- when referring children, families and carers to non-Aboriginal services, assess their cultural safety before making the referral
- introduce families and carers to new services to help them feel comfortable attending
- recognise the vulnerability of children, families and carers in attending new services. If they miss an appointment or meeting, make another time for them to attend and, where appropriate, offer to attend with them until they feel comfortable attending on their own
- always check whether families and carers have reliable transport to services or meetings and, where necessary, help arrange this
- always follow up with families and carers after contact with new services to ask how it went, talk through any issues and provide support.

A key role of the support worker is making referrals and supporting individuals, couples and families to access relevant services to help them achieve the goals outlined in the assessment.

Workers are to provide information about local services and refer people to services that will best meet their current needs. Given people are attending in financial crisis, referral to financial counselling services will be the most common referral.

It is important that people attending in financial crisis are as a priority referred to Commonwealth financial counselling services to assist in addressing the issues that have led to the current financial crisis. There are also State funded financial services available in the local area.

For many people attending in financial crisis they may have a range of complex issues and the worker will need to assess which service response will best meet the needs of the individual or family. For some people a case management service will be required. The worker can make referral to internal VACCA programs and other case management services.

Throughout the assessment process, the support worker may directly make or assist people to make referrals to a number of services including:

- playgroups, kindergarten, child care
- health services
- housing
- financial counselling
- case management services, such as family services and cradle to kinder
- internal VACCA programs, such as the Aboriginal Kinship Care Program and Link Up.

3.4 Court work

Occasionally families referred to the program, may be subject to a Children's Court protection orders that may include a supervision orders.

On occasion, workers may receive a subpoena to give evidence, provide a copy of the client file or a report to the court. The worker must advise their team leader or program manager as soon as possible if they receive a subpoena who will support the worker in attending court or providing documents as legally requested in the subpoena.

The [client services manual](#) has more information about the Children's Court of Victoria, court related tasks and casework and VACCA provides regular training. The worker will also need to refer to the [client records and file management policy](#) for information about procedures to undertake if the client file is subpoenaed.

3.5 Client records and file management

An important part of working with individuals and families is keeping accurate records and up to date case notes and client files. The caseworker is required to keep paper and electronic client files.

All caseworkers are required to follow [VACCA's client records and file management policy](#) that sets out the responsibilities and expectations of staff in recording client records and managing client files to:

- ensure there is standardised and consistent record keeping practices across programs and offices
- create clear, accurate, up-to-date, respectful and professional client records including case notes, using VACCA templates
- record assessments, plans, actions, consultations, key decisions and outcomes to meet accountability requirements
- create and register client files so that they can be quickly and easily accessed when required
- maintain client files in a manner that protects documents from misuse, loss, damage and unauthorised access
- only allow access to client files in accordance with privacy laws and access procedures.

It is the responsibility of all VACCA staff to ensure that client files are created and managed in accordance with relevant legislation and in line with this policy.



3.6 Casework tasks

Office items

In providing emergency relief each office should have a range of items available for individuals and families who attend the office. These include food, drinks, nappies, toiletries and ladies feminine products.

Given people will be attending in crisis it is important that we are able to offer people something to eat and drink and other essential items that they may not be able to wait to purchase.

Ordering gift cards

The program needs to order Coles charity gift cards by the 15th of the month for the following month to ensure that gift cards are available for the beginning of the month.

The administration worker will need to:

- go to <https://corporate.giftcards.com.au/Account/LogOn> (the office will have an account set up)
- enter log in details
- order charity gift cards in dominations of \$20 and \$10
- at the end of the order, select direct debit and you will receive a confirmation email confirming order and an invoice
- print invoice and fill in VACCA [payment request form](#). A team leader can sign payment requests up to \$500 and program manager up to \$2,000. Program cost codes and finance processes are outlined in the [emergency relief finance procedures](#)
- another email will follow with gift card numbers and activation codes
- gift cards will be sent by courier to the office. When received they will need to be activated (it takes 24 hours for cards to become active)
- gift cards are to be kept in a locked drawer or filing cabinet/safe at all times.

Budget and financial advice

Accessing emergency relief is often the first contact that people have had with support services to assist them in managing their money. It is important that in this brief contact the people are provided with some advice to address issues that have led to their current financial crisis.

VACCA has developed a [Tips for managing your money fact sheet](#) that staff can give people to take away as part of their Information pack.

Basic budgeting advice that staff can give to people is:

- track your spending – see where you spend your money for two weeks
- get organised and know what bills you have – this will enable you to plan for future bills
- make a budget.

There are many free online budget programs including [Money Smart](#) and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

A financial counsellor will be able to work with people to assist people to better manage their money.

Where relevant, referrals can also be made to services that provide support for [problem gambling](#).

Financial counselling

The support worker should explain what support individuals can receive from a referral to a financial counsellor. Depending on the person needs, a financial counsellor may be able to help you with:

- applying for a Utility Relief Grant to assist reducing gas/electricity and water bills
- information on 'No Interest Loans' for purchase of furniture, small electrical appliances, beds to improve your life with repayments over 1-2 years
- arranging Centrepay deductions for necessity bills
- budgeting – making your money stretch and using it more wisely
- support to think differently about your money and changing the perception that money rules everyday life
- assistance arranging payment of fines
- provide details of services
- make referrals
- bill support.

A directory of Commonwealth financial counselling services is available on the [Money Smart](#) website. There may also be appropriate state-funded or local services.

Financial support

Centrelink benefits

There are a range of payments, concessions and rebates that individuals and families can access through Centrelink. The support worker should provide brochures or support people to access the Centrelink website to gain information about what they can access.

Individuals

There are payments and services available to individuals through [Centrelink](#) that includes Newstart. The [Disability Support Pension](#) is also available to support people who have a disability.

Families

There are a range of payments and services available to families through [Centrelink](#) that include parenting payments, single income family supplement, baby bonus, child care benefit and rebate.

Young people

Young people aged between 15 and 24 years of age, may be eligible for payments and services from [Centrelink](#), which can support them to study or become independent from their parents or carer.

Depending on the young person's circumstances, they can apply for [Youth Allowance](#) or [ABSTUDY](#), which provides financial support while you are looking for work, studying, training or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship.

Concessions

The Department of Health and Human Services provides [concessions](#) to low income Victorians experiencing difficulty in paying their council rates, water, gas and electricity bills. Discounts are available on essential services to ease the financial burden for low income Victorians. For each concession and/or benefit, there is an eligibility criterion. Concessions programs are designed to ensure eligible cardholders have access to essential services.

Concessions include:

- Annual Electricity Concession
- Controlled Load Electricity Concession
- Electricity Transfer Fee Waiver
- Excess Electricity Concession
- Excess Gas Concession
- Non-mains Energy Concession
- Service to Property Charge Concession
- Winter Gas Concession
- Utility Relief Grant and Non-Mains Utility Relief Grant schemes
- Non-mains Water Concession
- Water and Sewerage Concession.

The worker should support individuals and families to see if they are eligible to any concessions that may ease current and future financial stress.

Housing support

Public housing

The worker may need to support people to access homelessness services to obtain crisis accommodation and who can also support them to complete an application for public housing.

To apply for public housing people will need to complete an [application for public housing](#) and an application for housing with [Aboriginal Housing Victoria](#). To obtain housing through Aboriginal Housing individuals must provide proof of Aboriginality in their application. Providing a Confirmation of Aboriginality letter or a statutory declaration is required. The support worker can check if the person has confirmation of Aboriginality and if not support them to access the Link Up program to commence the process through VACCA or refer them back to their local ACCO.

Financial support for private rental

Individuals and young people may be eligible to access the following financial support to obtain housing:

The Office of Housing provides some financial support for private rentals.

- [Commonwealth rent assistance](#) – subsidises the costs of private rentals.
- [Bond loan scheme](#) - provides financial supports for bond for rental properties.
- [Consumer Affairs Victoria](#) - can assist with property enquiries and provides useful guides and information to renters.
- [National rental affordability scheme](#) –provides financial support for up to 8,500 rental dwellings for low and moderate-income earners.

Education support

Many families may attend in need of school uniforms or school books. The support worker should support the family and in some instances contact schools on their behalf to request support from school wellbeing officers for the purchase or provision of these items.

Managing substance affected or aggressive clients

If a client presents in reception as substance affected or aggressive, an assessment of the person is to be completed in the reception area as to whether the person should proceed to an interview room to receive support.

Staff should be familiar with the [staff safety policy](#) to reduce the possibility of staff being subjected to violence and aggression and follow processes in preparing for an office appointment outlined in the manual. VACCA has an [aggression and violence policy](#) for procedures to follow if a client is violent in the office, if this occurs the [critical incident policy](#) outlines what staff and management are to do in response to the incident.

These policies provide explicit procedures which staff should follow, whenever a client or staff member has been violent or aggressive.

VACCA reminds staff that if they are physically assaulted in any way, this is a criminal offence and they may choose to press charges against the perpetrator. Any kind of physical violence will be treated seriously and referred to the police where necessary.

Concerns for an accompanying child

There are times when the needs of the parent appear to be in conflict with the needs of the child or children in their care and the objective judgment of the parent is impaired. The parent may be unable to put the needs of the child above their own needs. As a result the child's needs are denied, overlooked, and not met because there is a conflict between the needs of the parent and that of the child. This might occur when:

- parents are unable to see that family violence is affecting the child, even if the child is in another room or sleeping
- parents are unable to adequately provide protection and supervision to the child due to activities that conflict with needs for safety of the child. For example charging up and not caring about the kids
- the financial care and responsibilities are not adequately provided for the child.

If the parents are struggling to meet the needs of their child, options such as the Aboriginal Family Restorations program need to be looked at. Where there are protective issues and the parents are cooperating a referral needs to be made to get extra support. The parent is to be made aware of the concerns raised about the safety and wellbeing of the child in their care and informed that a report will be made to Child Protection or referral made to Child FIRST (unless it is assessed it is not safe for the worker to inform the family in consultation with their team leader).

Practice tip for child safety

The safety and wellbeing of the child is always the priority in any assessment. Make sure you are always aware of what is happening for the child or children. Refer to child safety and wellbeing section of this manual for more information about responding to concerns for a child.

Promote Community engagement and connection

VACCA's [community calendar](#) is a tool for keeping workers and carers up to date with events and activities in the Community. The caseworker is expected to review the calendar and to let Community members know about upcoming events and activities on a regular basis.

Given the program is a state-wide service the caseworker will need to contact local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to be informed of local Community activities and events and provide contact details to carers to remain informed.

3.7 Case closure

Case closure processes

Case closure occurs when the individual, couple or family assessment has been completed and either emergency relief is provided or referral to appropriate services is made.

Closing the case is a responsibility shared by the support worker, administration worker and the team leader. When a case is closed, the support worker is responsible for:

- completing all sections of the assessment form.

The Administration worker is responsible for:

- registering the client on the VACCA client information database and completing all data requirements
- creating or retrieving the client file and setting up the client file
- enter data on the DSS data exchange from the assessment form.

The support worker will also need to inform the client that VACCA has a Continuous Quality Improvement team that will send out a feedback form to seek independent feedback to improve services we provide at VACCA.

The team leader is responsible for:

- reviewing the file to ensure that all documents are completed to the required standard and that the file has been appropriately maintained
- ensuring that the administration worker updates the VACCA client information database
- ensuring the data is entered into the DSS data exchange
- given people can access the service every three months or once a year for bill support and material aid, client files will be securely stored on site for 18 months
- after 18 month of no contact with the program, client files will be archive as per [archive policy](#).

The team leader is responsible for advising the Continuous Quality Improvement team of all closed cases for processes to be completed to seek independent feedback and input from community to improve the services we provide at VACCA.

3.8 Re-entry into the program

To obtain future emergency relief through the program, all referrals must go through the same referral and intake process as a new referral.

There are eligibility timeframes to access future support to encourage self-reliance and access to financial services to address issues that have led to financial crisis and to ensure that those in most need can access the service. These timeframes are:

- food gift cards – three months
- material aid – 12 months
- support for bills –12 months.

The support worker will need to advise individuals when they are eligible to access future financial support and other services they can access in the area to address issues that have led to financial crisis. All individual should be advised that they can access the service within these timeframes for information, advice and referral to other services.

4. Child safety and wellbeing



4.1 Child safety and wellbeing

VACCA is committed to the safety and wellbeing of at risk and vulnerable children and young people and place the safety of children and young people above all else. This commitment is clearly stated in VACCA's [child safe policy](#) and is reflected throughout a range of other VACCA policy, procedures guidelines and practice. VACCA's programs and services are consistent with the [Victorian Child Safe standards](#) ensuring that a proactive approach is taken to protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect.

Staff need to be familiar with the [child safe policy](#) understand their responsibilities to keep children safe and protected from abuse and comply with procedures outlined in this policy.

More information about child safety can be found in the [client services manual](#).

4.2 Responding to concerns for a child

All children have a right to feel and be safe and to live in an environment that is free from abuse, neglect and violence. VACCA expects that staff who know or believe a child is being hurt by someone in their family or is living in a home that is unsafe will act on behalf of that child to protect them, regardless of whether this happens in course of their work or in Community.

Staff are expected to be familiar with VACCA's [child safe policy](#) that sets out roles, responsibilities and procedures to respond to and report suspected child abuse or neglect.

5. Staff safety and wellbeing

5.1 Staff safety and wellbeing

It is important for staff to keep themselves safe and well while working in the Emergency Relief program. Working with children and families with complex needs can be challenging emotionally and physically and at times place staff in unsafe situations. Safety issues can arise in and out of the office, outside of work hours, and for Aboriginal staff in the Community.

VACCA requires you to be familiar with the [staff safety](#) and [staff wellbeing](#) policies. These policies aim to protect and maintain your safety and wellbeing.

In preparing for contact with children, young people and families, it is important staff assess and plan for potential risks (example during bushfire fire season), including how to respond to identified risks. The [staff safety](#) policy sets out the safety procedures to be followed in planning and working with children and families:

- in the office
- while attending home visits, at court or in other places
- when transporting children and families in VACCA vehicles or other forms of transport.

For Aboriginal staff living and working in Community, this policy also sets out the safety procedures to follow when attending Community and cultural events.

Practice tips for staff safety

- look after yourself and be aware of your wellbeing and safety, and that of your colleagues
- actively manage your work and personal boundaries
- if you are part of the Aboriginal Community, be aware of your safety in Community and of triggers that may contribute to your own trauma
- if you are concerned that your wellbeing or safety is at risk, discuss the issue with your team leader or program manager and refer to VACCA's staff wellbeing and staff safety policies.

VACCA understands the impact our work can have on your health, in particular the impact of vicarious and intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal staff. The [staff wellbeing](#) policy outlines the things that we will do to maintain your wellbeing and the programs and services in place to support you.

We are committed to providing you with:

- access to appropriate counselling
- regular support and guidance (including debriefing) from team leaders and managers
- workplace action to reduce stress when the need arises
- training and other professional development opportunities to increase your capabilities and knowledge
- information and options for managing stress and support where required
- culturally appropriate and respectful supervision.

However critical incidents in the workplace involving or affecting staff may occur and these are defined as staff incidents.

A staff incident may include for example:

- a staff member is physically injured at work through a workplace accident
- a staff member becomes emotionally unwell through workplace bullying or vicarious trauma
- a staff member is physically or verbally threatened or assaulted by a client.

A [staff incident report](#) form must be completed where a critical staff incident has occurred.

There are a number of other related policies and procedures that staff are required to understand and enact to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and their colleague. These procedures are generally covered under occupational health and safety and human resources policies.

5.2 Supervision

All VACCA caseworkers are supervised and managed according to [Our work our ways VACCA's supervision program](#). There are a range of [supervision forms](#) that are used to document supervision arrangements and record supervision.

The program conducts regular supervision that is documented in a supervision agreement for all caseworkers, team leaders and managers. Supervision is to be documented on the supervision record or unscheduled supervision record, Where the team leader or manager provides direction on a particular case, the action plan for casework section is to be completed for each client and placed on the client file.

Supervision creates opportunities for caseworkers to talk about their work, identify and address issues, develop high quality assessment and plans and reviews these plans regularly.

Please refer to the [Our work our ways VACCA's supervision program](#) for more information about supervision.

6. Quality



6.1 Quality services

VACCA is committed to providing quality services and continuously improving our services. Staff are expected to deliver efficient, effective, consistent quality services that meet legislative obligations and standards. VACCA has policies, client services program and procedure manuals, forms and templates in place to direct and manage work across programs to ensure we meet our organisational obligations and provide quality services to the Community.

The Continuous Quality Improvement team undertake internal auditing, facilitate external audits, analyse data including incident reports, feedback and complaints to support VACCA in developing, reviewing and updating policies, procedures, forms and templates.

Staff are expected to be familiar with VACCA policies, client services program and procedure manuals and use correct forms and templates. If unsure of procedures or forms to use caseworkers need to speak with their line manager, or contact the Continuous Quality Improvement team for information about where the correct information or form is located.

6.2 Responding to critical incidents

Caseworkers are expected to be familiar with VACCA's [critical client incident policy](#) and respond to critical incidents according to these procedures. This policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff in reporting and responding to critical incidents that involve or impacts on clients during VACCA's work with them. It has been developed in line with the [department's critical incident management instructions](#).

6.3 Feedback

The program is to gather and receive feedback according to VACCA's [feedback guidelines](#). When individuals and families have contact with the program they will be given information about how to provide positive feedback and make a complaint. This involves talking to them about:

- how they can give feedback
- who they can give feedback to
- giving feedback anonymously
- the importance of their feedback – that it is valued and treated with respect and in the strictest confidence.

A complaint and feedback form is to be provided to all clients in the client information pack.

VACCA's Continuous Quality Improvement team will be advised of all closed cases and send independent feedback forms to people who access VACCA's services to seek input from community that is used to improve the services we provide at VACCA.

Information about handling complaints is contained in the client complaints section of the [client services manual](#).

Cultural tips for obtaining feedback

Aboriginal people may feel uneasy about providing feedback for a number of reasons. When asking for feedback it is important to:

- explain why feedback is important to VACCA and how it will be used
- provide them with a variety of options for feedback so they can choose the one they feel most comfortable with
- assure them that good and bad feedback is appreciated and if they prefer they can provide feedback anonymously.

6.4 Privacy and confidentiality

All staff in the program must handle personal information related to staff, service users, volunteers and third parties according to relevant legislation and the VACCA [privacy](#) and [confidentiality policies](#). It is important that all staff understand their responsibilities in protecting and managing client information, including sharing their information.

If a caseworker is concerned about the privacy and confidentiality obligations expected of them, or has trouble understanding the policy, they are asked to speak to the program manager.



Cultural tips for talking to families about privacy and confidentiality

Aboriginal people may have fears about the security of their information in an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. It is important to:

- always advise children and families of their privacy rights and their right to change caseworkers if there is a conflict of interest because of family and community connections
- describe to them how you will keep their information safe and the systems in place to restrict access to their information
- encourage them to talk to you if they are worried that their information is unsafe
- address privacy concerns immediately.

Please take the time to read the privacy and information sharing section in the [client services manual](#).



7. Resources

7.1 Key legislation

The Emergency Relief Program works within the requirements of the following legislation:

- [Children, Youth and Families Act 2005](#) (Vic.)
- [Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005](#) (Vic.)
- [Working with Children Act 2005](#) (Vic.)
- [Information Privacy Act 2000](#) (Vic.)
- [Health Records Act 2001](#) (Vic.)
- [Family Law Act 1975](#) (Commonwealth)
- [Family Violence Protection Act 2008](#) (Vic.)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004](#) (Vic.)
- [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#) (Vic.).

A summary of each of these Acts is provided in the legislation section of the [client services manual](#).

7.2 Key sector policies and frameworks

The program is underpinned by a range of sector policies and practice frameworks. It is important that you learn about these and understand how they relate to your day-to-day practice. The most relevant sector policies and frameworks are provided below.

- [Financial Wellbeing and Capability Guidelines](#)
- [Emergency Relief Handbook](#)
- [DSS Data Exchange protocols](#)
- [Best interests case practice model](#)
- [Dardee Boorai: Victorian charter of safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people \(2008\)](#)
- [Aboriginal cultural competence framework \(2008\)](#)
- [Marrung Education Plan 2016-2026](#)
- [Victorian Indigenous family violence strategy: Regional Action Group operating guidelines reference manual 2012.](#)

More information about these key policies and frameworks can be found in the [client services manual](#).

7.3 Key VACCA policies and frameworks

All staff need to be familiar with and know how to locate [VACCA policies](#) as they relate to their area of work. These VACCA policies and frameworks have been developed to guide the way in which staff undertake their roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

It is your responsibility to be aware of these policies and frameworks and ensure you work within these guidelines.

All VACCA policies fall under the following key headings within the VACCA organisational - folder. Please click on the hyperlinks to familiarise yourself with the policies within each of these headings:

- [Foundation documents](#)
- [Governance](#)
- [Corporate services](#)
- [Finance](#)
- [Occupational health and safety](#)
- [Human resources](#)
- [Information management](#)
- [Client services](#)
- [Quality](#)

Critical to working within the organisation is having an awareness and understanding of the [VACCA strategic plan](#). All staff are expected to read this plan and refer to it regularly. More information about the VACCA strategic plan can be found in the [client services manual](#).

VACCA has developed a number of frameworks to support the organisation and more specifically support staff in delivering services to children and families. These include:

- [Our work, our ways: VACCA's supervision program](#)
- [Building respectful partnerships: the commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services.](#)

In addition to VACCA's policies and frameworks and strategic plan, each program area will also have an operational business and risk plan. This plan contains important information about the programs objectives, reporting requirements, targets and strategic directions. The program's operational plan can be obtained from your program manager.

7.4 Practice tools

- [Client services manual](#)
- [Introduction to out-of-home care manual](#)
- [Emergency Relief Program brochure](#)
- [Emergency relief service areas](#)
- [Emergency Relief providers](#)
- [DSS Data Exchange fact sheets](#)
- [Tips for managing your money fact sheet](#)
- [Income management](#)
- [Money Smart](#)
- [Gambler's help providers](#)
- [Coles Group and Myer Gift Cards](#)
- [VACCA Emergency Relief financial procedures](#)
- [Community calendar](#)
- [Program Structure.](#)

7.5 Forms

- [Client file structure](#)
- [Client information summary](#)
- [Assessment form](#)
- [Emergency relief service areas](#)
- [Payment request form](#)
- [Supervision forms.](#)



