

New report highlights the need for urgent action

A new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare highlights the urgent need to overhaul policies and services for Australia's Stolen Generations and tackle the impact of Intergenerational Trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, according to The Healing Foundation Board Chair Steve Larkin.

Professor Larkin says the report, which was commissioned by The Healing Foundation, has uncovered an alarming level of social and economic disadvantage for our Stolen Generations and their descendants.

"We now know that around 17,000 members of the Stolen Generations are living across Australia today and that they experience higher levels of adversity in relation to most of the 38 key health and welfare outcomes analysed in the report," said Professor Larkin.

"Even compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the same age group, who are already at a disadvantage, Stolen Generations members are suffering more.

"It's important to remember that behind all the data, are real people who are living with adversity every day and who have shared their stories many times over the past decade."

According to today's report the Stolen Generations are more than three times as likely to have been incarcerated in the last five years, almost twice as likely to rely on government payments and 1.5 times as likely to experience poor mental health. They are also more likely to suffer chronic health conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

"For the first time, we have comprehensive data to illustrate a direct link between poor health and welfare outcomes and the forced removal of tens of thousands of children from their families," said Professor Larkin

"And we can also see the ongoing impact on subsequent generations."

The AIHW report shows that the descendants of the Stolen Generations consistently experience poorer health and social outcomes, compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, they are almost twice as likely to have experienced violence, 1.5 times as likely to have been arrested by police (in the last 5 years) and 1.2 times as likely to have used substances (in the preceding 12 months).

Professor Larkin said the level of disadvantage outlined in the report was appalling but should not come as a surprise.

"The Stolen Generations were denied a proper education or a decent wage, which put them at a financial loss right from the start. But more fundamentally, they endured significant childhood trauma when they were taken from their families, isolated, institutionalised and often abused.

"If people don't have an opportunity to heal from trauma, it continues to impact on the way they think and behave, which can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including poor health, substance abuse, suicide and violence.

"This leads to a vicious cycle of trauma, and its many insidious symptoms, and increasing levels of social and economic disadvantage, across generations," said Professor Larkin.



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“This report shows us that one third of today’s adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are descendants of the Stolen Generations and that number is going to keep growing.

“If we don’t break the trauma cycle soon, adversity for our people will keep increasing, the gaps with non-Indigenous Australians will keep widening and so will the cost to the Australian taxpayer.”

Today’s demographic report is the first step in The Healing Foundation’s *Action Plan for Healing* project, which the federal government funded last year.

Professor Larkin said we need to act quickly to scale up appropriate services, address reparations at a national level and deal with the complex aged care needs that have been outlined in the report.

“We also need a National Intergenerational Trauma Strategy to halt the spread of trauma and attack the root cause of many social and health problems.

“It’s too late for many of the Stolen Generations who died young and tragically because of the poor health and welfare issues outlined in this report, but we can do better for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still experiencing the impacts,” he said.

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to heal trauma caused by the widespread and deliberate disruption of populations, cultures and languages over 230 years. This includes specific actions like the forced removal of children from their families.

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