



Fact sheet: What was the Bringing Them Home report?

On 26 May 1997 the landmark Bringing Them Home report was tabled in Federal Parliament. The report was the result of a national inquiry that investigated the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. This marked a pivotal moment in the healing journey of many Stolen Generations members. It was the first time their stories—stories of being taken from their families—were acknowledged in such a way.

It is estimated that between 1 in 10, possibly as many as 1 in 3, Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities between 1910 and the 1970s. These children were taken by the police; from their homes or on their way to school and put in to institutions, fostered or adopted out to non-Indigenous families. Many children suffered harsh, degrading treatment (including sexual abuse) and were frequently indoctrinated to believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were inferior.

The forcible removal of Indigenous children was a part of assimilation policies adopted by all Australian governments throughout the twentieth century. Despite the widespread nature of the practice, mainstream recognition of the experience has only been relatively recent.

In 1995 the Australian Government asked the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to carry out the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. The Inquiry was established because of the efforts of many Indigenous communities concerned that the public's ignorance of forcible removal was hindering the recovery of Stolen Generations members and their families. It was set up to:

- examine the past laws, practices and policies of forcible separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and their effects
- identify what should be done in response, including any changes in current laws, practices and policies with a focus on locating and reunifying families
- examine the justification for any compensation for those affected by the forcible separations
- look at then current laws, policies and practices affecting the placement and care of Indigenous children.

Extensive consultations were conducted across Australia and the Inquiry heard from around 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It gave survivors a space to tell their stories in their own voices, some for the first time, and in doing so provided a starting point for the healing process.





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Two years later, on 26 May 1997, the Inquiry tabled its final report *Bringing Them Home* in the Australian Parliament. This was the first time this tragic chapter of our nation's history was presented in such a public and formal way.

The report extensively documented the experiences of Stolen Generations members and highlighted that many issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (including substance abuse, mental illness and family violence) were strongly associated with the forced removal of children and the failure to provide healing. It concluded the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was a gross violation of human rights.

The *Bringing Them Home* report consists of 54 recommendations to redress the impacts of the removal policies and address ongoing trauma. The recommendations included a national Apology, reparations, improved services for Stolen Generations members and a process for monitoring the implementation of the report's recommendations.

In the testimonies it recorded and the recommendations it made, the report provided a basis for addressing the rights and needs of the Stolen Generations and for progressing reconciliation based on a genuine acknowledgement of Australia's past. In essence, the report was about self-determination, justice and healing.

Two decades on and the *Bringing Them Home* report remains just as relevant because many of the recommendations are still outstanding. Recent independent reviews show limited implementation of the recommendations. This has made additional distress for many Stolen Generations members and there has been a ripple effect to current generations. For example, young people with parents, grandparents or great grandparents who were taken are:

- 50% more likely to be charged by police
- 30% less likely to be in good health
- 10% less likely to have a job.

There is still a lot of healing to be done in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The twentieth anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report provides an opportunity to place the needs of Stolen Generations members and their families back on the national policy agenda.

