



MEDIA STATEMENT

Reconciliation Australia and The Healing Foundation today brought together experts from around the country to develop a set of guiding principles to progress truth telling in Australia.

Truth telling was a major driver of a recent report authored by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and commissioned by The Healing Foundation that found a direct link between the forced removal of tens of thousands of children from their families and the real life experiences of Intergenerational Trauma.

The Healing Foundation CEO Richard Weston said truth telling was about the past, the present and the future.

“The trauma we face in our day-to-day lives, either directly or indirectly, has its genesis in the violent early history of Australia’s Frontier Wars and the genocidal policies that followed, including the forced removal of children,” he said.

“We must remember that the reason for removal in all policy documents was to give people a better life. The abuse our people suffered as a result demonstrates the exact opposite.”

The need for truth telling is also evident in the results of Reconciliation Australia’s biennial barometer research, which found that 68 per cent of Australians accept that government policy enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be removed from their families until the 1970s.

Reconciliation Australia’s Reconciliation Barometer research shows that about a third of Australians do not know or accept some fundamental aspects of our shared history, including the occurrence of mass killings, incarceration, forced removal from land and forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine said before Australia could really move on – we have to know what we’re moving on from.

“Truth telling is essential to build a shared understanding of our history and of the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as it stands today,” she said.

“This is the necessary foundation for us to move forward together.”

This lack of a shared understanding of history is a source of ongoing trauma for many First Australians and a roadblock to reconciliation.

Speakers at the Symposium included Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner, Dr Marie Wilson, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts in areas such as the arts, healing, and cultural heritage.

Participants shared knowledge and experiences of truth telling to develop a fuller understanding of what truth telling should look like in the Australian context, and how individuals and communities can best be supported to safely and respectfully explore truth telling initiatives.

Recently, truth-telling in Australia has been given renewed national prominence and attention through the *Statement from the Heart*.

In May 2017, around 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates gathered at Uluru to hold an historic First Nations Convention, resulting in the Statement from the Heart.

The Statement was informed by regional dialogues conducted by the Referendum Council with more than 1200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates nationwide. It called for a Makarrata Commission to supervise agreement-making (treaties) between government and First Nations' Peoples, and facilitate a process of local and regional truth-telling.

Truth telling takes a range of forms, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, historical monuments, community commemorations and education, and can take place at interpersonal, local, state, national and international levels.

These processes promote awareness of the historical and ongoing impact of past actions, and encourage all sides to forge ahead in an educated, reconciled and peaceful way.

The symposium took place at Barangaroo, a Sydney precinct named after a Cammeraygal woman and leader who was influential in the early days of European colonisation.

