



The Healing Foundation
Pre-Budget Submission
2021-22

HEALING
THE NATION



HealingFoundation
Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

Foreword



Healing the Nation



The journey of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation began in 1997 when the Bringing them Home Report, a Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, was tabled in Federal Parliament.

Among its many recommendations was that healing should be included in wellbeing services provided to survivors of the Stolen Generations.

Following the Apology, and as part of the Council of Australian Governments' Closing the Gap strategy, funding was provided to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing foundation to address the harmful legacy of colonisation, in particular the history of child removal that continues to affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

From May to August 2009, a national consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was held on the role and structure of a healing foundation. On 30 October 2009, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation was established.

In its eleven years, The Healing Foundation has seen its roles, responsibilities, and coverage grow considerably.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reported that, in 2018, there were at least 17,150 Stolen Generations survivors, and 114,800 descendants of Stolen Generations survivors.

It is estimated that the number of Stolen Generations survivors has risen significantly with more people identifying as a survivor in the 2018-19 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS). The Healing Foundation and the AIHW are working together on a report on the latest numbers. This report will be released in the first half of 2021.

There is robust evidence for the effects of intergenerational trauma in a number of key indicators of wellbeing in contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life. These are strongly linked to the experience of unresolved intergenerational trauma, such as the high and rising number of children removed from their families, the incarceration of young people, and family violence. Direct racism and systemic racism are ongoing, contemporary drivers of trauma.

Policy responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage have too often been focused on responding to the symptoms of trauma, rather than prioritising healing to address the cause.

Importantly, there is clear evidence that programs designed to tackle trauma – at its root causes, not its symptoms – through culturally based practices greatly benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, and communities, and also provide substantial benefits for governments.

These include better returns on investments across education, health, justice, safety, and family wellbeing.

Healing enables people to address distress, overcome trauma, and restore wellbeing. It occurs at a community, family, and individual level and continues throughout a person's lifetime and across generations.

The Healing Foundation is currently working with Stolen Generations organisations on more than 100 grassroots community healing projects across the country. The demand for our healing expertise is growing.

Our support comes in many forms – sector development, workforce capacity building, community healing forums and strategies, healing frameworks, teaching resources, Covid-19 Resilience, redress, video and audio recording of the stories of Stolen Generations survivors, mental health, men's sheds, women's groups, youth justice, wellbeing programs, and truth telling.

When The Healing Foundation was established in 2009, the core Commonwealth grant was \$6.6 million per year. In 2021, the core Commonwealth grant is still \$6.6 million per year.

To deliver all the support for the Stolen Generations detailed in this submission, The Healing Foundation requires at least a doubling of its core Commonwealth grant to total \$13.2 million per year.

The need and the demand for trauma-aware, healing-informed expertise from The Healing Foundation has grown significantly over 11 years – and will continue to grow.

Significant new funding is required to cover existing programs and services – and to meet the demand for expanding these services and establishing new ones. Healing done well takes time, effort, and investment.

We are well positioned to show all Australians how healing happens, with a focus on intergenerational healing, rather than intergenerational trauma.

The case for significant new funding is outlined in this Pre-Budget Submission.

The benefits of this investment will flow to all Australians.



Fiona Petersen, CEO

1 Healing for Stolen Generations Survivors



The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- **Lead the design and delivery of financial redress for Stolen Generations, modelled on the National Redress Scheme.**
- **Ensure services meet the complex needs of a growing number of ageing Stolen Generations survivors, prioritising aged care, disability support, health, and housing.**
- **Renew efforts to improve access by Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants to historical records and safeguard contemporary records.**

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Until 1972, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were stolen from their families, communities, and cultures and placed in institutions or adopted by non-Indigenous families.

The removals were racially motivated, designed to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As well as the grief and suffering caused by their removal, stolen children were often subjected to harsh and degrading treatment including abuse, exploitation, and racism.

The breakdown of family and social structures caused by removal decimated communities. It deeply impacted Stolen Generations members. They did not know where to go to seek support for anything; they no longer belonged to a community, held no memories of belonging to one, and were not able to draw on the strengths of the support of their community.

In 2018, The Healing Foundation commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to report on the numbers and demographic characteristics of Stolen Generations Survivors and their descendants, and of the impact of removal on a variety of health, social and economic factors. AIHW estimated that across Australia in 2018, there were at least 17,150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people born before 1972 who had been removed from their families - about 11 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people born before 1972.

The AIHW analysis found that a third of all adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are directly descended from Stolen Generations. In 2018, this was approximately 158,000 people. Three years later, we know this number has increased.

The AIHW analysis found that the Stolen Generations and their families have significantly poorer physical health and over double the rates of mental illness and alcohol abuse compared to that suffered by those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were not removed. They have also, on average, received a poorer education and are more likely to be unemployed.

Reparations

The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report made monetary compensation a central component of redress for Stolen Generations. While some survivors are eligible for redress under the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and other specific schemes, this has left most Stolen Generations without access to compensation.

This must be addressed urgently, and reflect the consistent national model established by the National Redress Scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse. Such redress is justified as:

- an acknowledgement of past wrongs inflicted upon them, and the lifelong experience of trauma and grief that has resulted.
- recognition of the lifelong disadvantage that has resulted from their forcible removal from their families, which has produced multiple overlapping issues of poor health and wellbeing.
- financial assistance to help address the economic effects of removal, including unemployment, poverty, and low rates of home ownership, as well as higher health care and other service costs.
- an acknowledgement that reforms related to land such as native title and statutory land rights schemes have not benefited the Stolen Generations Survivors due in large part to their removal from family and country.

Ageing

Stolen Generations Survivors are ageing, many live with disabilities, and have complex health problems, including poor mental health. They are significantly more likely to depend on government payments, not own their own home, and to live alone than other Aboriginal people of the same age. They carry worries about the future for their families.

Addressing these needs requires effort at all levels to co-design policies and programs that are healing-informed and trauma-aware, and which enable Stolen Generations Survivors to live with dignity and respect, in the knowledge that their families will thrive into the future.

Stolen Generations Survivors are more likely than other Aboriginal people of similar ages to feel discriminated against, and to have problems accessing services.

They are suspicious and fearful of government, and frequently experience mainstream services as racist and exclusionary. With the entire Stolen Generations population eligible for aged care by 2022-23, it is essential that they are offered more holistic social and cultural support in order to access the services that they need. Trauma-aware, healing-informed services targeting experiences of trauma as the root cause of service take-up will allow for effective healing.

Records

Timely and supported access to records is often a fundamental aspect of healing for Stolen Generations survivors and their families. Although records may contain confronting and incorrect information, and do not always tell the full story, they are an important part of finding out about and reconnecting with family, culture, and country; truth telling and sharing history; accessing redress and reparations schemes; and stemming the tide of Intergenerational Trauma.

The Bringing Them Home Report highlighted that access to individual and family Stolen Generations records was fundamental to locating and reunifying families.

It concluded that *'access to records must be made easier and less hurtful. This involves improving access procedures, ensuring culturally appropriate access, and involving the counselling and support assistance of Indigenous family tracing and reunion services ...'*

Problems accessing Stolen Generations records have persisted despite government responses to the report and efforts from Link-Up agencies to prioritise family reunions.

Stolen Generations survivors and their families face multiple and inconsistent processes when seeking their own or their family's records, especially as searches often extend across multiple states and/or territories. Greater consistency across jurisdictions and organisations, preferably through establishing national standards, is a critical step in improving access to Stolen Generations records, both within and across jurisdictions.

Because responsibility for records management is so fragmented, there can be no single solution to improving access to Stolen Generations records.

Work is required on many levels. With its national footprint, The Healing Foundation is well placed to continue a coordinating role. This has begun with the establishment of an ongoing committee with Australia-wide representatives.

2 Intergenerational Healing Strategy



The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- **Invest in a National Healing Strategy to address the impact of intergenerational trauma on closing the gap.**

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If people do not have the opportunity to heal from trauma, they may unknowingly pass it on to others through their behaviour. Children are particularly susceptible to distress and may experience difficulties with attachment and other developmental issues, disconnection from their extended families and culture, and high levels of stress from family and community members who are dealing with the impacts of trauma.

A cycle of trauma is created where the impacts and responses to trauma experiences are passed from one generation to the next.

In Australia, intergenerational trauma predominantly affects Stolen Generations survivors' children, grandchildren, and future generations. Stolen Generations survivors speak of passing on the impacts of institutionalisation, finding it difficult to know how to nurture their children because they were denied the opportunity to be nurtured themselves.

Trauma is a state of high arousal in which severe threat or the perception of severe threat overwhelms a person's capacity to cope. Overwhelming stress disrupts the connections between the various systems of the body and compromises a person's physical and psychological health, as well as their daily functioning. Post-traumatic growth is possible.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, understanding the origins of trauma and its impacts is fundamental to starting the healing process.

For government investments in closing the gap to succeed, historical and contemporary individual and collective trauma must be addressed as a root cause of disadvantage across a broad spectrum of social and economic outcomes, instead of merely treating its symptoms such as unemployment or health impacts.

Systemic changes are required to policy, legislation, service systems, and the way trauma is recognised and addressed.

A national strategy for addressing Intergenerational Trauma will provide high level, strategic direction and guidance for Australian governments and service providers specifically relating to the design and operation of programs and services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The strategy must link to, and complement, existing national strategies such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, and the new National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Healing and recovery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally, and the Stolen Generations and their descendants in particular, must address the impacts of collective trauma through multi-level and systemic approaches.

A national strategy will provide a framework for coordinating evidence and action, and will form the basis for empowering key stakeholders to understand and take responsibility for addressing Intergenerational Trauma.

It will provide a comprehensive, long term approach where governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and key partners work together to co-design methods of intergenerational healing.

The national strategy would also define healing as a lifelong process that must be integrated across the broad spectrum of laws, policies and services that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Healing-informed approaches must be embedded in all aspects of systems that engage with, and impact on, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A national strategy requires coordinated action across four core elements:

- Creating an overarching policy commitment that promotes integration of healing approaches across sectors including health, justice, children and family services, education, and employment.
- Investing in community-led services and programs.
- Co-designing the tools to inform planning, design, and implementation of trauma-aware, healing-informed models centred on culture with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and experts.
- Consolidating and applying a strong evidence base, with embedded monitoring and assessment of the impact of healing approaches, and a capacity to commission and apply research.

The national strategy will also include a sustainable and robust monitoring and accountability process.

3 Healing Workforce



The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- **Invest in building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, government, policymakers, and program designers to address trauma, including building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and the trauma competence of all workforces.**

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Healing is an ongoing journey that needs to be integrated across the broad ambit of laws, policies, and services that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Healing-informed, trauma-aware approaches must be embedded in all aspects of systems that engage with and impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and in cross-sector initiatives that span the community, health, education, employment, justice sectors, and beyond.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience historic intergenerational and contemporary traumas.

The experiences of families and communities that children were removed from should not be underestimated.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who become trauma-aware and healing-informed are further empowered to take on roles serving survivors and their descendants.

Through its work, the Healing Foundation has developed four pillars of trauma recovery:

- Safety: creating safe spaces, healing places, and identifying safe people to support healing.
- Identity: building a strong cultural identity by reconnecting to cultural values and practice.
- Reconnection: rebuilding relational support systems with family, community, and services that can support us.
- Trauma awareness: learning about the impacts of trauma on minds, bodies, and spirits so we can find paths to healing.

Healing-informed approaches based on these pillars can improve outcomes across a range of health and wellbeing domains, including mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, family violence, child protection, substance misuse, sexual abuse, youth development, justice, and corrections.

Organisations working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must have the workforce capability to work effectively with people and communities impacted by trauma.

Common elements of a healing-informed and trauma-aware service model include understanding trauma and its impacts, creating safe places, employing culturally competent staff, actively involving trauma survivors in their healing, sharing power and governance through community co-design, providing integrated holistic care, and supporting safe relationship building to promote healing.

Services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who may have been impacted by trauma should be alert to the symptoms of trauma to prevent the risk of misdiagnosis, and to focus efforts on healing and trauma recovery.

Services must also be mindful that the presence of trauma can undermine the potential impacts of therapeutic interventions.

Many people do not understand that trauma played a role in their own lives and behaviours. Developing this understanding can be transformative.

Where workforce training enables workers to better understand the impact of trauma and grief on the communities where they work, their confidence to recognise and address trauma increases, which, in turn, better positions service providers to assist in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing.

4 National Memorial/ Centre for Healing to honour Australia's First Peoples



The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- **Commission and fund a scoping study into the establishment of a National Memorial and Healing Centre to honour Australia's First Peoples.**
- **Achieve multi-partisan commitment and timeline to establish a National Memorial and Healing Centre for Australia's First Peoples in Canberra on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, at least of the scale of the National War Memorial or the National Museum – befitting the longest continuing culture and civilisation in the world.**

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It is a national shame that, in 2021, Australia does not have a significant national memorial to celebrate and honour the true history, languages, culture, art, music, customs, and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Healing Foundation joins other groups and individuals in calling on the Australian Government to commence the process to establish a National Memorial in Canberra.

We propose that it be a 'living memorial' that salutes the past, the present, and our shared future.

It would be a national and international attraction that would incorporate the elements of a museum, a gallery, a centre of education and truth telling, a showcase for traditional medicine and healing, and a hub for healing and reconciliation.

As Professor Mark Kenny from ANU said in the 2020 Henry Parkes Oration: "Australia is a lesser nation, a weaker society, for the denial of proper recognition and meaningful reconciliation with this nation's First Peoples – the oldest continuing civilisation on Earth."



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Unit 11 (Level 2), 11 National Circuit Barton ACT 2600
PO BOX 4363 KINGSTON ACT 2604