

#unfinishedbusiness

#bringingthemhome



Senate Select Committee on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations Communities
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

20 March 2025

Dear Committee Members,

The Healing Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the **Senate Select Committee on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations Communities**

The Healing Foundation is the national organisation that platforms and elevates the voices and lived experiences of Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and their communities. We work closely with survivors and communities to create environments for survivors to tell their stories and drive their healing.

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families was a groundbreaking process of truth-telling in Australia, where Stolen Generations survivors' voices were elevated, and the intergenerational impacts of their experiences of removal were heard across the nation. *Bringing Them Home*, the final report handed down in 1997, provided a suite of recommendations to address intergenerational trauma and improve outcomes for survivors, their descendants, families, and communities. In making these recommendations, the correlation between the impacts of forced removals with a number of key indicators relevant to the Closing the Gap targets was clear.

In 2025, The Healing Foundation released a new report '**Are you waiting for us to die?': The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home** ([attached](#)), which showed that nearly 30 years later, only **6 percent** of the recommendations made have been clearly implemented.

With only five of the original 83 recommendations clearly implemented, The Healing Foundation has made 19 recommendations to urgently address this across six key areas: reparations; rehabilitation and research; records, family tracing and reunions; acknowledgements and apologies; education and training; and monitoring and accountability. Action in these areas is critical in addressing ongoing intergenerational trauma.

We know from research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that there is a '**gap within the gap**' – Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants are more likely than the general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population to experience poor social, social and emotional wellbeing, health, educational and economic outcomes, and are more likely to have negative experiences with the justice system, including higher rates of incarceration.¹

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over: updated analyses for 2018-2019', 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d7a0f2d9-c965-471c-86a7-919edcb3458f/aihw-ihw-257.pdf?v=20230605181817&inline=true>

The impacts of forced removal are still being felt in families and communities. Until intergenerational trauma caused by previous policies of removal is acknowledged and appropriately addressed, these impacts will continue to intersect with all Closing the Gap targets.

Addressing the unfinished business of *Bringing Them Home* is directly relevant to closing the 'gap within the gap' and promoting better outcomes for survivors and their descendants across all of the targets.

The Healing Foundation provides the following evidence relevant to the Committee's terms of reference:

a. the ways in which the targets are funded

Targets must be funded by through investment in the Community Controlled sector in alignment with Closing The Gap Priority Reform 2. As the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement found, many Community Controlled Organisations are passively funded, with note that "governments to not recognise ACCOs are critical partners in delivering government serviced tailored to the priorities of their communities".²

To address the 'gap within the gap' and tailor services that meet survivors' complex needs, Stolen Generations organisations must be supported to provide holistic, trauma-informed, and survivor-led services. Currently, organisations face inconsistent funding from federal, state, territory, and local governments, leading to many critical areas remaining underserved, which directly impedes on improving outcomes across the priority areas.

Appropriate investment looks like ensuring Stolen Generations organisations receive targeted funding across:

- Core operations.
- Workforce development and training.
- Scaled up capacity building to support organisations into expanded service delivery.

b. the ways in which the targets are measured and evaluated

Monitoring, measuring, and evaluating targets must be underpinned by a genuine power sharing and partnership, with communities determining what improved outcomes looks like for them. Without direct community input into determining success across the priority area improvements, key outcomes will continue to fall short of what is needed.

Targets must be co-designed with Stolen Generations survivors and organisations to ensure they are appropriately aimed at addressing survivors' complex needs, including individual, collective, and community healing from intergenerational trauma. Measuring and evaluating targets must be framed around *holistic* person-centered wellbeing to see genuine long-lasting improved intergenerational outcomes.

To support community-led partnerships, there must be structural change in how targets are currently being measured. Without it there will not be sustained improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

² Productivity Commission, 'Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Study Report, Volume 1', 2024, p.5.

c. the priority of the targets in the National Partnership Agreement and progress under the National Priority reforms

As outlined earlier, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family was either directly or indirectly impacted by the systemic removal of children from their families up until the 1970s.

As outlined in The Healing Foundation recent report, informed by research conducted by the University of Canberra, the failure to systematically implement the Bringing Them Home report's recommendations and comprehensively respond to the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and their families has exacerbated intergenerational trauma, causing more pain and distress across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.³

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including the Priority Reforms is currently the biggest policy instrument to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Yet survivors are not represented as a unique and vulnerable cohort within the Agreement with associated targets or measures.

The Healing Foundation is a member of the Coalition of Peaks and a member of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership.

However, the lack of an articulation of the significant ongoing impact of policies to remove Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in the National Agreement means there is a corresponding lack of accountability for governments, departments and organisations to consider policy and programme design that is grounded in an awareness of this ongoing historic harm.

The Healing Foundation has heard consistent feedback from Stolen Generation survivors, their descendants and Stolen Generation Organisations that their outstanding needs must be included in the bipartisan commitment to reduce inequality and achieve better life outcomes.

The Healing Foundation is recommending a National Healing Package of urgent changes to enable remaining elderly survivors to live out their days with dignity.

We cannot close the gap without prioritising the needs of survivors and their descendants.

e. the possibility of incorporating broad ideas about wellness into measurements, with a view to promoting mental, physical, and spiritual health and wellbeing

Holistic wellbeing must be considered in any measurement of health, particularly through policy aimed at improving specific outcomes.

The importance of healing from intergenerational trauma is critical to improving health and social wellbeing, improving outcomes for individual and making communities stronger. Central to this is investment in key areas that promote intergenerational healing, including family and community reunification, reconnection, and commemoration of past injustice. These activities must be seen through the lens of holistic health, and integral to improving health outcomes.

Critical to Stolen Generations survivors is holistic, survivor centered, and culturally safe ageing and aged care services. Stolen Generations survivors are an ageing population, and their experiences with accessing aged care services, and the lack of services that can meet their complex ageing needs, which includes holistic wellbeing and healing.

³ The Healing Foundation (2021), Make Healing Happen, It's time to act, The Healing Foundation, Canberra.

f. the incorporation of alternative measurements as a complement to existing measurements

A whole of government approach is needed to ensure accountability for the governments, agencies, and organisations responsible for the design, implementation, and delivery of services. Failure to implement systemic whole of government monitoring and accountability will see indicators continue to worsen.

Nearly a generation after *Bringing Them Home* was handed down, it's suite of 83 recommendations remain largely unmet and with no measure of accountability. This has necessarily meant failures in how services are designed and delivered to survivors, their families, and communities.

In response to this whole-of-government failure, The Healing Foundation is calling on the Federal Government to urgently establish a coordinated national framework to monitor the implementation of the outstanding recommendations, including building accountability expectations for relevant organisations, agencies, departments and governments.

This can be realised through the existing structures of the Priority Reforms set out under Closing the Gap National Agreement, between governments and the Coalition of Peaks. The framework should be linked to the Closing the Gap targets and outcomes, and implementation tracker to ensure survivors are adequately represented as a unique and prioritised group as part of the agreement.

g. opportunities for building on and expanding the current Closing the Gap framework

Stronger measures of accountability and oversight are urgently required for Stolen Generation survivors and their descendants, and there is an opportunity to use the existing Closing the Gap framework, including the Coalition of Peaks, to monitor progress against existing recommendations and frameworks.

Since *Bringing Them Home* was handed down almost 28 years ago, there has been no nationally coordinated response or mechanism to monitor implementation of the report's recommendations.

As a result, only six percent have been realised, and key indicators, including child separation, continue to worsen.

The same monitoring and accountability failures have seen incarceration rates increase, despite the Royal Commission's suite of recommendations being handed down over forty years ago, and again many remaining unmet.

Developing an accountability and oversight mechanism to see critical existing knowledge implemented in meaningful ways can be linked to Closing the Gap targets and outcomes, with implementation trackers developed to ensure community-led design, implementation, and evaluation processes are in place.

Yours sincerely,



Leonie Williamson

Deputy CEO – The Healing Foundation

Attached: The Healing Foundation, *'Are you waiting for us to die?': The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*, 2025.

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