

A Needs Analysis for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors



HealingFoundation



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which this report was written, read, and shared. We pay deep respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of these lands, and to their enduring connections to Country, community, and culture. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Acknowledgement of Stolen Generations Survivors

We acknowledge and pay tribute to the Stolen Generations survivors, whose courage, resilience, and determination continue to shape the national story. We honour the enduring strength of those who were forcibly removed from their families, communities, and Country, and who continue to live with the intergenerational impacts of these injustices.

We extend particular respect to the LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors who contributed to this report. Their generosity in sharing stories and truths deepens understanding of the many ways that colonialism sought to erase complexity, connection, belonging, and love between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise the many generations of work, resistance and struggle that made this report possible, and pay special respects to trailblazers like Uncle Jack Charles and Aunty Dawn Daylight for their bravery and activism. The stories of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors call us to action, to recognise, to heal, and to ensure that their experiences inform a future grounded in dignity, justice, and care for all.

A Note on Terminology

LGBTQIA+

In this report, LGBTQIA+ is used and is an acronym of the terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. The addition of the '+' symbol serves as a reminder that this acronym is not exhaustive and there may be other terms that should be included. This term is used inclusively in reference to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout the report.

LGBTQIASB+

Used specifically in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It has the addition of 'SB' to include Sistergirls and Brotherboys, which are two terms used primarily by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men who are transgender, but not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transgender and gender diverse peoples. It is important to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages including Aboriginal English and Kriol include a range of terms to describe sexual and gender diversity.

Stolen Generations

Refers to the tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities between the early 1900s and the 1970s (Read, 1981). Specifically, the children who were removed as part of deliberate assimilation policies adopted by Australian governments). It is important to note that not all people who were forcibly removed during this period choose to identify as Stolen Generations.

LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors

Used throughout the report to describe a distinct community of people who were impacted by the Stolen Generations policy era and actions by Australian governments, who are also Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and/or Sistergirl or Brotherboy.

Cultural erasure

A term widely in use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ communities to describe the way that colonialism attempted and continues to attempt to erase their existence.

Queerphobia

Describes discrimination and violence that targets people who are not heterosexual or who do not adhere to strict ideas of how a man or woman should act or appear. Queerphobia is systemic in Australian society and targets all people in the LGBTQIASB+ community.

Transphobia

Specifically targets transgender and gender diverse people. Transphobia is also systemic in Australian society and causes widespread violence and discrimination against people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and people who do not fit into the gender binary (man/woman). There is evidence at an international scale to suggest that both queerphobia and transphobia come from Europe and were introduced to other places by colonialism.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the first study to investigate the needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex or Asexual, Sistergirl, Brotherboy or otherwise diverse in terms of gender, sex or sexuality (LGBTQIASB+) Stolen Generation survivors and their families. Conducted by the Centre for Critical Indigenous Studies in partnership with The Healing Foundation, this qualitative research foregrounds the lived experiences, voices, and aspirations of a community that has been historically excluded from research, policy, and healing frameworks.

Eleven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participated in this study. Eight identified as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and three as family members of survivors. Through in-depth interviews and long-form qualitative surveys, participants shared experiences of cultural erasure, marginalisation, and ongoing discrimination—yet also spoke of resilience, strength, and a desire for healing and reconnection.

Findings reveal a need for recognition of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors as a distinct group whose experiences of forced removal intersect with queerphobia, transphobia, racism, and intergenerational trauma. Participants described the absence of safe and appropriate health, counselling, and healing services and emphasised that many mainstream and Aboriginal community services lack cultural competence regarding gender and sexual diversity. The compounded effects of exclusion have deep impacts on social and emotional wellbeing, leading to ongoing grief, isolation, and mistrust of services.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed strong commitments to reconnection, with family, community, and culture, and a desire to help others through education, advocacy, and storytelling. They emphasised that collective healing requires truth-telling and community acceptance, and that future strategies must centre their realities rather than treat gender and sexuality as secondary to their experiences of removal.

The findings demonstrate that acknowledging and addressing the unique experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors is not only a matter of justice but also essential to national healing.

Their stories reaffirm that healing must be inclusive, intersectional, and Indigenous-led.

This report calls for widespread change grounded in recognition, advocacy, support, and connection, and recommends that The Healing Foundation and partner organisations including Stolen Generations Organisations nationally:

- Recognise LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors as a distinct group with specific healing and wellbeing needs.
- Advocate for inclusion of LGBTQIASB+ survivors in national and community-level healing and truth-telling initiatives.
- Support organisations to build competency in addressing the intersecting impacts of colonialism, racism, queerphobia, and transphobia.
- Connect survivors to one another and to wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through safe, culturally grounded spaces for healing and storytelling.

Introduction

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that platforms and elevates the voices and lived experiences of Stolen Generations survivors and their families and communities. It works closely with survivors and communities to co-create environments for survivors to tell their stories and drive their healing.

In 2025, The Healing Foundation (2025) issued an urgent call to all political parties, governments, churches and other non-government agencies across Australia to work with Stolen Generations organisations, survivors and The Healing Foundation to finally deliver on the full recommendations and intent of the 1997 landmark *Bringing them home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*.

Since the *Bringing them home* (1997) report, research efforts led by The Healing Foundation have focused on the experiences and needs of Stolen Generations survivors, their descendants and their families. However, to date there has been no research focused on the experiences and needs of those survivors who are LGBTQIASB+.

Internationally, there is a growing awareness of the specific harms that colonial policies and governments enact on Indigenous LGBTQIA+ peoples (Lezard et al. 2021; Phelan & Oxley 2021; Phelan 2023).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples are significantly under-represented in research and, to date, have been largely absent from national studies on LGBTQIA+ issues (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2021, 2022). In 2015, Black Rainbow Living Well (cited in AHRC, 2015) highlighted the absence of a national strategy, plan, or dedicated research to identify and address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples. While some recent health and wellbeing policies have begun to acknowledge these communities, there remains limited guidance for service providers on how to engage appropriately and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples or to understand where and how they seek care (Uink et al., 2020).

Background

Although there is a substantial evidence base of testimonials from Stolen Generations survivors (The Healing Foundation, 2021), there have not been specific opportunities for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors to share their distinct experiences of removal due to colonial policies and their reconnection.

In global studies of colonialism, it is widely accepted that queerphobia and transphobia are not inherent traits of Indigenous communities, and are introduced globally through similar tactics of European colonialism (see Balsam et al., 2004; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Elm et al., 2016; Passante, 2012; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014; Hunt, 2016; Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021; Day, 2021; O'Sullivan, 2021; Pickering-Martin, 2022), including forced removal and assimilatory actions and policies.

At the international level, there is increased attention to the specific impact of targeted colonial policies and actions against LGBTQIA+ Indigenous people and the need for distinct processes of truth-telling to address this (Lezard et al., 2021; Phelan 2023). Columbia, Canada and South Africa, for example, included LGBTQIA+ specific information in contemporary Truth and Reconciliation processes (Phelan 2023). Canada's *National Action Plan for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples* (Lezard et al., 2021) has also recognised the role of Residential Schools and institutional abuse in introducing queerphobic and transphobic violence and discrimination to Indigenous communities.

The impact of forced removal and assimilatory policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people has only recently gained attention in Australia. A clearer understanding of the impacts of stigma and discrimination associated with queerphobia and transphobia has emerged through research leadership

and participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people. Existing literature emphasises the compounding impact on LGBTQIASB+ communities of racism in mainstream Australian society and within LGBTQIA+ communities, and of queerphobia and transphobia within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also highlights the impact of colonial policies and the influence of Christianity on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples identities, families and relationships (Hill et al., 2022; Soldatic et al., 2020; Kerry, 2014; Smallacombe 2014). Experiences of discrimination and exclusion from both Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ communities result in social isolation, poorer health and mental health outcomes, and higher rates of suicidality among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples (Day et al., 2022; Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Kerry, 2014). Discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people also fuels high rates of assault and violence against this community (Soldatic et al., 2023), and high daily anticipation of rejection and violence (Bonson, 2016; Farrell 2015, 2021).

The current study is significant because although there is a substantial evidence base of testimonials from Stolen Generations survivors (The Healing Foundation, 2021), there has not yet been a study that gave participants an opportunity to speak directly to their experiences as LGBTQIASB+ survivors. There is already a 'gap within a gap' (The Healing Foundation, 2021, p.21) in terms of health and life expectancy for Stolen Generations survivors compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Due to the compounding impacts of racism, queerphobia and transphobia on the health and life chances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people (Kerry 2014; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021; Day et al., 2024), it can be reasonably extrapolated that this gap is even wider for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors.

Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTQIA+ communities were also both severely impacted by inequalities in health access during the height of HIV and AIDS (Farrell, 2021; Fela, 2024) which has ongoing population and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people of this age group.

Although there is no existing research about the experiences and needs of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors, there is some existing research that can provide insight into their social and emotional needs. Across the literature more broadly, protective factors for mental health and physical health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples include feeling accepted and connected, both as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and as LGBTQIASB+, and being able to fully participate in community, culture and society (Soldatic et al., 2020; Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021; Day et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2022).

Research by Soldatic et al. (2020), Liddel-Hunt et al. (2021), and Sullivan et al. (2023) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people has also shown that the influence of Christian institutions and values is still impacting rejection and acceptance of LGBTQIASB+ people in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In Canadian research (Wilson 2008; Lezard et al., 2021), LGBTQIA+ Residential School survivors describe the need for recognition of the psychological, sexual and physical harm perpetrated against them by members of the Church.

The Healing Foundation and the Centre for Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University partnered to undertake foundational research that culminated in this report.

This national project specifically examines the healing needs of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and their families in relation to queerphobic and transphobic colonial violence, and its ongoing connection to experiences of removal and intergenerational trauma. The information in this report was gathered to inform the design of future resources and research.

Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who also identify as LGBTQIASB+ and who are members of the Stolen Generations or their descendants/families. Key objectives were to identify emerging research, evidence and recommendations relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generation survivors, and to seek their input in terms of further programs, policy and research.

Methods

This qualitative study was designed to centre the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and their families. The study privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing, foregrounding cultural safety throughout the research process.

A total of 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants contributed to the study. Of these, eight participants self-identified as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors, and three identified as family members of Stolen Generations. All participants but one were aged over fifty years.

Prior to participation, all prospective participants were screened through email and phone correspondence to confirm eligibility, ensure informed consent, and discuss any support requirements. This project had ethics approval through Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee Project ID 15803. Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the study design, including adherence to Indigenous data sovereignty principles, the protection of participant confidentiality, and the prioritisation of participant wellbeing.

11

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
participants

8

participants
self-identified as
LGBTQIASB+ Stolen
Generations Survivors

3

participants identified
as family members of
Stolen Generations
Survivors

50+

all participants but
one were aged over
fifty years

Data were generated through in-depth qualitative interviews and long-form qualitative survey responses. Six participants who identified as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and two participants who were family members of survivors participated in semi-structured interviews conducted via telephone or Zoom. These interviews provided space for participants to share their experiences, reflections, and aspirations in their own words and at their own pace. Two additional participants who identified as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and one participant who was a family member of a survivor contributed long-form written responses to the qualitative survey. This mixed-method qualitative approach ensured flexibility and accessibility, enabling participants to choose the format that best suited their needs, comfort, and communication preferences.

LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors are a unique group to work with in terms of research, and there are specific challenges in terms of capturing their experience as well as optimising participation. Working with this group requires a level of cultural sensitivity to the distinct needs and experiences of older Aboriginal and Torres LGBTQIASB+ people, and an understanding of complex communication sometimes used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to speak about stigmatised issues. For example, not all participants were comfortable openly referring to themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Brotherboy or Sistergirl. Some felt these were terms used by younger people, others were not comfortable speaking openly about their gender or sexuality.

Similarly, family members of Stolen Generations survivors did not openly speak about their loved one's gender and sexuality. For this reason, when conducting interviews and surveys we asked participants a preliminary open-ended question about how they met the criteria for this study regarding Stolen Generations and gender and/or sexuality. There are also significant barriers for Stolen Generations survivors interacting with physical and mental health services and research including fears of re-traumatisation (The Healing Foundation, 2025). For this reason, survey and interview questions were designed with a focus on what types of research and resources participants and their families would find helpful, rather than asking directly about their experiences.

Establishing trust and safety in this way meant that the decision lay with participants whether they would share more about their experiences.

Data was analysed at the end of the interview process and organised thematically according to recurring needs expressed by participants across interviews and surveys, prioritising quotes from the Eight participants who were survivors. At the end of the analysis and write-up, we presented each of the themes in the findings and the recommendations to participants so they could have final review and input. We also showed them the direct quotes we used in this report so they could review their contribution and influence over the project. This ensured that the themes and recommendations that the research team derived from the data were consistent with participant experiences.

Findings

The findings presented in this section reflect the voices, experiences, and insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and their families. Through interviews and long-form qualitative surveys, participants spoke with honesty, strength, and care about the challenges they have faced and the hopes they hold for healing, recognition, and connection.

Their stories reveal the enduring impacts of forced removal and the ways that racism, queerphobia, and transphobia have compounded experiences of trauma and disconnection. Yet, alongside these experiences of pain and exclusion, participants also spoke of resilience, cultural pride, and the importance of community and belonging.

These findings are presented thematically to highlight the key priorities that emerged across participants' contributions: the need to be seen and recognised; the need for safety, inclusion, and appropriate support; and the need to connect with others and inform future generations.

Together, these themes illuminate a path toward recognition, understanding, and collective healing for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors.

The Need to Be Seen

Participants in this study spoke about their experiences of cultural erasure as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors. Cultural erasure, or the experience of being invisible or erased as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person AND an LGBTQIASB+ person, is a widely reported issue impacting social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people (Day et al., 2022).

In the first question for this study, we asked participants to share how they fit the criteria for participation. We began by explaining that this was a study to ascertain the needs of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors, and their family members, and asked them to speak to how they connected to these criteria. Most LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors who participated led with their experiences of removal and spoke of experiences relevant to their gender and sexuality later in the interview or survey. Others shared that no one had ever asked them to think about being LGBTQIASB+ and a Stolen Generations survivor at the same time.

I, well, I don't think anyone's ever really sort of asked me about, you know, the two things together.

...they don't even ask about our sexuality at all, you know, and ... so, yeah, and the few people ... that have ever found out...that have already, you know, put a stigma on me anyway.

Findings

For many participants, cultural erasure also impacted what they were told about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by foster families, adoptive parents, other people in homes, people in their families of origin, people in their communities and people in wider Australian society. One participant recounted:

Yeah, we weren't imagined as queer, you know. ... what was queer before colonisation is really hard to tell, and we're all searching for it. But we're here now, so we need to service it.

Another participant recalled:

[...] in my life, I've sort of found that if you're Aboriginal, they don't expect you to be gay. It's really strange, you know, they just don't.

Another participant spoke about how the category of Stolen Generation Survivor also felt influenced by this kind of erasure.

[...] the category of being identified as Stolen Generation, you know, it particularly really dealt with those kids who were in homes. And even though I'd been in a home, in one of my placements, the whole discussion around it really was a straight sort of thing. [...] Like you were Stolen Generation and, you know, sexuality was a separate thing.

Participants described the separation of being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and being LGBTQIASB+ as diminishing of their experiences as Stolen Generations survivors and impacting their sense of belonging. This is consistent with existing research which suggests that social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIA+ people is deeply impacted by feeling they have a place in wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities (Liddelow-Hunt et al., 2021; Soldatic et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2021; Day et al., 2022).

Participants spoke about the need for meaningful intersectional approaches that did not just treat being LGBTQIASB+ as something additional about them, but something that fundamentally informed their experience of removal as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. As one participant said:

People think being intersectional is about how many different identities you have...it's really about how much a person is carrying... everything we've been through...

Another participant said:

I think we were talking about earlier in another consultation thing and talking about having a queer identity and Black identity and often having to choose between those two where we're actually all in one.

The same participant also commented on how this impacted their sense of belonging:

I think it's a sense of belonging. You know. We all want that. And all these little microaggressions and stuff eat away at that. You know, that sense that you belong, or- and then you could feel like I'm never gonna fit in anywhere.

Another participant asked for recognition of cultural erasure and:

[...] how that plays out on people who've experienced trauma of removal from parts of their identity or not being recognised in how they identify and how there's a sort of collision there, in a way that then becomes diminishing for people.

The Need for Recognition

Participants in this study spoke about being deeply hurt by experiences of stigma and discrimination when trying to access or reconnect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and communities.

For the LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors who shared their needs with this study, there was a deep unrecognised pain from experiences of discrimination with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services.

One participant felt that the distinct pain and isolation she had experienced as an LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivor had been overlooked:

[...] particularly by people who haven't had these kind of experiences, as a kind of, almost like, what we complain about with non-Indigenous people is like, okay, that's over, let's move on already. And that's hurtful. It's quite hurtful because it feels like it's a shutting down and a minimising of that sort of unresolved grief and unwitnessed grief.

Another participant commented on how queerphobia and transphobia had impacted their sense of belonging in community and their social and emotional wellbeing:

We want that sense of belonging, yeah, and our queerness tends to make that happen less. I think you know the mobs don't understand when you come back, you know, and if the mob don't fully get what Stolen means, you know what effects that has on us. You know, our social, emotional wellbeing.

Reflecting on her experience as a Sistagirl, another participant spoke about the impact of stigma within her own community and family:

We do face that, uh, that stigma in our homes that, you know, they are, and this can be mentally draining for us as a LGBTQ+ person.

She also spoke about the effects of this on mental health for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors.

...if us as First Nations... don't feel accepted in our home, you know, it's the first thing that we want to turn to is suicide. We feel unacceptable, depressed, low self-esteem, don't know what to do because, you know, family don't really accept their sexuality.

LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in this study also spoke about their distinct experiences as older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people, and the different experience of discrimination in their lifetimes compared to younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people. For one participant, it was extremely important that this was remembered and recognised:

Today they are freely living their best lives. It's important for everyone to be reminded that some persons set the pace and it wasn't easy. Some of us had to grow [up] in a foster home. I stayed at a mental home because I was assumed to be mentally unstable for choosing myself. These things shouldn't just go down the drain. We need to be heard.

Similarly, another participant reflected that:

I think if it's a certain age group, you know, we didn't have the visibility.... there weren't positive role models for us. There was only negative terms about our sexuality or gender.

This pattern of discrimination was also reflected in the workplace, as illustrated by one participant, who stated:

You know, it was easier to come out as Stolen Gen than it was, as you know, to talk about sexuality.

The compounding impacts of stigma and discrimination deeply impacted LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors experiences of belonging and acceptance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For one participant, the combined experience of discrimination and removal has had life-long impact on their relationships:

I can't even imagine how different my understanding of relationships would have been if I hadn't gone through what I've gone through.... And that's a loss I can never get back, you know. And I think that's one of the things people fail to really, really understand, is that our relationships are forever fractured.

The Need for Safe and Appropriate Support

LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in this study were navigating all the same challenges to social and emotional wellbeing for Stolen Generations survivors aged 50 and over, including living in difficult economic circumstances, impacted physical and mental health, stressors such as racial discrimination and the threat of or actual physical harm, and living with higher levels of some health risk factors such as smoking (AIHW, 2021, p.v). However, they were also navigating additional challenges as older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people.

Rebecca Johnson is a founding member of the Tekwabi Giz National LGBTI Health Alliance, comprising up to 160 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of varying ages. Johnson (2018, para 2) has previously identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people already navigate 'complex generational layers of trauma, rejection, social marginalisation, sexual, physical and mental abuse, inequalities and isolation'. LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors are navigating this on top of the 'gap within the gap' in health, aged care, education, social justice, and equity for Stolen Generations survivors as an aging population (The Healing Foundation, 2021, p.2).

In the absence of health services that specifically provide care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples (Day et al., 2022), the choice often lies between LGBTQIA+-specific services that fail to appropriately encompass their Indigeneity, or Indigenous-specific services that are not accepting or suitably skilled to handle LGBTQIASB+ issues (Soldatic et al., 2020; Liddelow-Hunt et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2022). As Day and colleagues (2022, p.16) explain, "This choice means again having to navigate, negotiate and 'shape-shift' between identities, to receive safe and appropriate care".

This was evidenced by the experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in this study. As one participant succinctly stated:

[...] especially from the LGBTQ community, we've actually had, like, a different experience entirely with healthcare facilities. So, it's more like trying to solve two problems at the same time, right? Yeah. So, we're going to talk about, you know, feeling represented as LGBTQ members in the healthcare facilities, and also as Stolen Generation survivors. [...] So I feel there should be that opportunity to actually get access to healthcare easily, without tension and feeling discriminated against.

Most LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors who participated emphasised the need for safe and appropriate mental health, counselling services and opportunities for healing in a group setting. In absence of safe spaces for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in the wider community, participants emphasised the need for opportunities to connect with one another. As one queer-identifying participant said:

So, I think spaces for us together would be really good as well, and to share the yarning circles. Or yeah. I think that'd be nice, face-to-face sometimes as well. Yeah, I'd be really keen to do that and talk to other Stolen people who are queer as well. And just to hear your story; sometimes you don't hear your story, you know, like I've really struggled with that as well.

Another participant spoke about a desire for tailored support for redress:

[...] and information and support around how to deal with redress, and the support around redress, and even the legalities around it...

Other participants also voiced desire for safe and appropriate support:

Family conferencing and mental therapy would be great. Programs that would foster and bring more unity and togetherness in the family.

Yarning circles. They're the best: get a mob around, sit around [a] circle, you know. If it's a fireplace, that's good; if not, just inside, somewhere nice, and have a good, confidential yarn about our stories and share our stories.

Online cultural and support groups so we know we are not alone in this and we need each other.

Research into intergenerational trauma and its effects that require support and intervention, counselling, empathy...

So, if the resources could be like maybe counselling sessions, or resources could also be like a gathering, yeah, so lots of resources like that improve mental health.

Each participant reiterated the need for safe and appropriate support, but particularly mental health support, tailored to them as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors.

The Need to Inform and Connect

Connection was a central theme throughout this study. Although LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in this study had experienced stigma and discrimination, they were still deeply committed to healing relationships and educating and improving circumstances for others. It was also extremely important to participants to share their stories with each other and with future generations.

I've had time to reflect on some of the things that might have helped me along the way, and I don't want younger people falling into the same stuff. We have such high rates of out-of-home care and that loss of connection to culture[...]. I don't want them feeling like that either.

Despite significant advocacy from Stolen Generations Survivors and community organisations, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and LGBTQIA+ youth (Phelan & Oxley 2021; Johnston et. al. 2025) are still overrepresented in out-of-home care in Australia, which means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ youth face double the risk.

It was important to LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors who participated that their stories were not forgotten and that they had the opportunity to share them with younger people.

It is very important to document and conduct research on our experiences because the younger LGBTQIA+ need to know how we were treated just because we wanted to identify with what resonates more with us.

For some participants, this was also about healing. One said:

...but it's nice to hear a variety of stories, whichever way...I think that helps heal us as well as adopted queer mob. Hearing other stories of stolen-ness and disconnection and reconnections.

Another said:

It's more like a storytelling process that will actually lead, and should lead to, you know, kind of feeling of hope or maybe healing from trauma.

One participant also discussed the need for sharing with other LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors, and needing access to spaces with people of the same age group:

[...] sometimes it would be good just to be able to speak to people of your own age. [...] the last thing I'd ever want to do is to scare one of the younger people that's coming up, you know, by listening to some of my sorrowful tales.

Another felt there was need for truth-telling about their experiences as an LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivor:

[...] and even like a truth telling around that, I think needs to happen at some point. You know, of how we've been treated by, yes, non-Aboriginal people, but also how we've been treated by our own mobs [...] because we feel failed by that.

Another participant, who identified as a gay man, felt strongly about connecting with and informing other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people via videos and social media:

Tell our stories through social media, whether it be on video or written form. They need to get out. We need to tell our stories. And I think that's the best way to inform people.

Discussion

The findings from this study identify depth and complexity of experiences shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors and their families. Their stories demonstrate how forced removal, discrimination, and cultural erasure continue to intersect and shape lives across generations. Participants described both the enduring impacts of these injustices and the strength, agency, and pride that sustain their survival and healing.

For participants in this study, there was a sense that the separation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQIASB+ identities, and the erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people, had impacted their sense of belonging and their social and emotional wellbeing as LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors. It was important to them to be seen as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors. Existing health research emphasises the need for specific services where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people are seen for who they are, as people with both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander AND LGBTQIASB+ identities that are not separate but comprise a whole person (Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021; Soldatic et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2021).

As highlighted by The Healing Foundation's (2025) *'Are you waiting for us to die?' The unfinished business of the Bringing them home report*, time is of the essence in terms of seeking justice and adequate services for Stolen Generation survivors whose numbers are reducing every year. While the number of participants in this study is small, their contributions are invaluable as they offer insights into the experiences of a previously overlooked and under-supported group of survivors with specific needs. As is outlined in the existing literature about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people's social and emotional wellbeing, and evidenced further by the findings of this study,

there is a stark absence of safe and appropriate mental and physical health services for this community (Soldatic et al., 2020, 2021).

Across the interviews, participants described ongoing experiences of marginalisation, isolation, and social exclusion that have deeply affected their social and emotional wellbeing. Many expressed a strong desire to connect with other LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors, emphasising that experiences of queerphobia and transphobia had disrupted or prevented reconnection with family, community, and culture.

The compounding impacts of racism, queerphobia and transphobia on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIA+ people have been captured in existing research (Kerry 2014; Day et al. 2022). There is a well-documented relationship between the discrimination and isolation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIA+ people and higher rates of family violence, assault, houselessness, drug and alcohol use and suicidality (Dudgeon et al., 2015; Liddel-Hunt et al., 2021). For the LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors who shared their needs with this study, there was a deep unrecognised pain from experiences of discrimination with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services.

This paucity of culturally safe data, policy, and practice has profound implications for the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples (Soldatic et al., 2020). Without targeted research and resourced strategies, service systems risk perpetuating the harms of exclusion and misunderstanding, further entrenching barriers to care, support, and healing. Implementing the recommendations of this report has the potential to shift these experiences by informing trauma-aware, culturally grounded, and community-led approaches. Such actions could strengthen service provider capacity, improve health and wellbeing outcomes, and contribute to broader systems change by embedding the voices and lived realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples in national healing and policy frameworks.

Another consistent message throughout the study is the need for recognition, safety, and connection. Overall, participants expressed the need to connect with one another to share their stories in healing settings but also to inform the broader community about their experiences, and they felt sharing their stories was the best way to do this. Participants called for meaningful inclusion within healing programs, community services, and truth-telling processes that have historically overlooked their experiences. They spoke of wanting to be seen and valued in their full identities as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people – people whose histories, relationships, and contributions are integral to the collective story of the Stolen Generations. As one participant described, there is an unwitnessed pain and grief from stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors that is impacting on their social and emotional wellbeing. It is essential that services and communities designed for Survivors recognise this pain and work towards wider community acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people.

Despite enduring challenges, the strength and resilience of participants shine through. They spoke of survival, cultural pride, and the ongoing work of healing and reconnection. Their willingness to share their experiences reflects a profound commitment to ensuring that future generations will not endure the same silencing and exclusion.

Their voices remind us that healing is not only personal, it is collective, relational, and grounded in recognition, truth, and justice.

In terms of challenges and limitations of this study, as participants explained, there has been stigma and negative past experiences of discrimination and exclusion which likely affected recruitment into the study, as this was challenging. The Covid-19 pandemic also negatively impacted participation, despite use of a variety of recruitment approaches. The health, socioeconomic and wellbeing challenges often experienced by many survivors in their day-to-day lives likely also affected willingness and ability to participate.

Despite enduring challenges, the strength and resilience of participants shine through. They spoke of survival, cultural pride, and the ongoing work of healing and reconnection.

Conclusion

This report represents an important first step in documenting and understanding the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors and their families. Their contributions provide insight into a history that has long remained unacknowledged within national healing discourses and truth-telling frameworks.

Their stories reveal the deep intersections between colonial assimilation policies, queerphobia, transphobia, and racism, and their ongoing effects on identity, belonging, and social and emotional wellbeing.

Participants underscored the urgent need for research, resources, and healing programs that explicitly recognise and affirm the existence, histories, and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ peoples. These insights may point to a significant gap in current healing and support frameworks, suggesting that meaningful recognition and inclusion of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors within national healing strategies could enhance wellbeing, strengthen community connection, and contribute to more holistic understandings of intergenerational trauma and recovery.

This study articulates that healing for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors cannot occur in isolation from broader community healing. It requires structural change, the creation of culturally safe and affirming spaces, and a sustained commitment to Indigenous-led research and governance.

The following recommendations outline key actions to ensure that recognition, advocacy, support, and connection are embedded in national healing strategies and organisational practice.

Recommendations

This study highlights the urgent need to recognise, advocate for, support, and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors who continue to experience multiple forms of erasure, stigma, and discrimination that profoundly affect their social and emotional wellbeing.

Recognise

LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors must be recognised as a distinct group of people with specific experiences of forced removal, intergenerational trauma, and the compounding effects of racism, queerphobia, and transphobia. Recognition must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural and policy reform. This includes embedding their experiences within data collection frameworks, national healing strategies, and commemorative initiatives that reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.

Recognition also requires acknowledging that particular notions of gender and sexuality were central to colonial control and assimilation practices, shaping how many survivors were removed, institutionalised, or marginalised. Without recognition, the realities of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors remain invisible within the broader narrative of the Stolen Generations, resulting in unmet needs and limited access to healing opportunities.

Recommendations

- 1 Recognise the experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors as a distinct group uniquely impacted by forced removal, intergenerational trauma, and the compounding effects of stigma and discrimination.
- 2 Recognise the needs and experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors to inform all future strategies and programs from The Healing Foundation and other organisations working with Stolen Generations Survivors.

Advocate

Advocacy is critical to ensuring that the voices and experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors are embedded across political, legal, and community contexts. Their perspectives should inform national and local truth-telling, reparations, and redress processes led by governments, churches, and non-government organisations.

The Healing Foundation and its partners are well positioned to lead this advocacy by amplifying the voices of LGBTQIASB+ survivors, promoting inclusive policy reform, and addressing ongoing systemic discrimination. Advocacy also includes education and awareness initiatives within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to foster understanding, reduce stigma, and dismantle the internalised impacts of colonial queerphobia and transphobia.

Recommendation

- 3 Include the voices and needs of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors in advocacy for Stolen Generations survivors with political parties, governments, churches, and non-government organisations across Australia.

Support

Support for LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors must extend to the development of trauma-aware, culturally safe, and affirming healing services. These services must respond to the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, culture, and trauma that shape the lived experiences of this community.

Health, mental health, and counselling providers require dedicated training and resources to engage appropriately and safely with LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors. Support must also include efforts to equip families and communities with the knowledge and understanding needed to affirm LGBTQIASB+ identities and to create safe, welcoming environments. Without this, survivors remain at risk of retraumatisation and social isolation, further compounding historical harms.

Recommendations

- 4 Support Stolen Generations organisations and partner services to understand and address the specific social and emotional wellbeing needs of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors, and to advocate for these needs in reparative and healing processes.
- 5 Support Stolen Generations organisations and partner services to empower members with greater understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors through professional development, community education, and resource development.

Connect

Participants expressed a deep desire to connect with one another, to be seen and heard within their communities, and to share their stories with younger generations. Establishing dedicated spaces—both physical and digital—can foster belonging, peer support, collective healing and intergenerational exchange, support and mentoring. Yarning circles, community gatherings, and online platforms led by LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors can strengthen resilience and create safe places for storytelling and cultural resurgence.

Recommendations

6

Connect LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors to opportunities to be seen and heard by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly at spaces and events where they can speak to their unique needs in terms of social and emotional wellbeing.

7

Empower LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations Survivors to connect with one another and share their stories either online, or through other platforms, with future generations.

Moving Forward

Implementing recommendations requires long-term partnerships between The Healing Foundation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ community leaders and community members, institutions, and organisations working across health, justice, education, and social and emotional wellbeing sectors. Acknowledgement, advocacy, support, and connection must be grounded in Indigenous-led governance and Indigenous data sovereignty principles.

Addressing the needs identified requires sustained institutional commitment, appropriate resourcing, and Indigenous-led governance to ensure that healing strategies, programs, and services are inclusive, culturally grounded, and intersectional. Doing so will not only honour the resilience and strength of LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors but will also ensure that their stories, experiences, and wisdom are central to Australia's broader project of truth-telling, justice, and collective healing.

The findings make clear that national healing strategies need to also include and affirm LGBTQIASB+ Stolen Generations survivors. Doing so requires dedicated advocacy, culturally safe support services, and sustained partnerships between communities, researchers, organisations. The study also joins the calls of the Healing Foundation for governments, churches, and institutions to accept responsibility for their roles in perpetuating harm and commit to repair through action.

As this report demonstrates, the path forward must be guided by the voices and leadership of survivors themselves. Their experiences call for transformation in how healing is imagined, resourced, and enacted, ensuring that every survivor is seen, respected, and supported in ways that reflect their full identities and lived realities. This work is essential to truth-telling, reconciliation, and the collective healing of this nation.

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Notes





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