

# Productivity Commission Interim Report - Review

## Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review

The purpose of this submission is to provide feedback from The Healing Foundation, as a member of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Policy Partnership on the [Productivity Commission's Interim report – Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review](#).

## The Healing Foundation

We are the national [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander](#) organisation for Stolen Generations survivors and the incredible [Stolen Generations](#) organisations that tirelessly support survivors on the ground. We provide expert advice on the needs of ageing survivors, support survivor-led healing projects, and help educate future generations about the continuing impacts of Australia's Stolen Generations history.

## The Healing Foundation Insights

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 report noted that these experiences of forced removal contributed to ongoing social and economic challenges, such as those targeted in the Closing the Gap framework, as well as psycho-social impacts that the National Mental Health and Suicide Agreement seeks to address.

In 2025, The Healing Foundation released a new report '[Are you waiting for us to die?': The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home](#)' 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 a series of 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 and creating improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Islander people.

As a member of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership, the Healing Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Productivity Commission, as well as members of the SEWB Policy Partnership on this important review. In line with the Discussion Points for the SEWB Policy Partnership circulated by the Productivity Commission (PC), The Healing Foundation shares the following insights:

### The recommendations in our interim report, are there any gaps?

- We agree broadly with the observations and recommendations within the PC's Interim Report.
- The recommendation to include a new separate schedule on services to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and suicide prevention is timely, supported and provides a critical opportunity to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in reform.
- As noted by the PC, we agree there needs to be a closer strategic alignment between the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020).
- To realise this alignment, The Healing Foundation encourages identifying opportunities to implement the recommendations of both the Productivity Commission and the recommendations of the [Closing the Gap Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Led Review \(2025\)](#).
- Specifically, The Healing Foundation strongly recommends that in the context of implementing a SEWB schedule, there is an appropriate focus on **intergenerational healing** a **LifeCourse** approach (SEWB from childhood to ageing) and addressing the **unfinished business of Bringing Them Home**.
  - As clearly outlined by the Jumbunna Institute in the independent review of CTG, 'somewhere in the past 17 years of Closing the Gap implementation, Stolen Generations has slipped off the radar'.<sup>1</sup> This is despite the well-established evidence demonstrating the increase in socio-economic and psycho-social disadvantage survivors experience, compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age who were not removed.
  - Further, the independent review recommended that all parties to the National Agreement take steps to ensure the histories, experiences and ongoing needs of Stolen Generation survivors are made visible across implementation; and that parties explicitly recognise the cultural repair and intergenerational healings needs of Stolen generation survivors.
- Nearly every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family was impacted by the systemic removal of children from their families up until the 1970s and 1980s. The failure to systematically implement the Bringing Them Home report's recommendations and comprehensively respond to the needs of Stolen Generation survivors and their families has exacerbated intergenerational trauma, causing more pain and distress across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>2</sup>
- The ongoing impacts of forced removal and structural disadvantage are accepted as causal factors that led to the contemporary statistics on mental ill health and suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research (2025) Closing the Gap Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Led review. Available [online](#).

<sup>2</sup> The Healing Foundation (2021), *Make Healing Happen, It's time to act*, The Healing Foundation, Canberra.

- It is therefore critical that the design of a SEWB schedule is rooted in holistic understandings of intergenerational healing, resilience and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The extensive experiences of Stolen Generation Organisations must be acknowledged and included in the design of a SEWB schedule, as this workforce has been at the forefront of supporting healing for Stolen Generation survivors and descendants, and communities. Further detail on their work is described below.

#### The priority issues that should be covered by a dedicated schedule

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led body of evidence on the protective determinants of social and emotional wellbeing must guide the co-design of a dedicated SEWB schedule.
- There is also a critical opportunity for a dedicated SEWB schedule to recognise that access to culturally-safe mental health and SEWB services are fundamental human rights, enshrined in international agreements including but not limited to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- The Healing Foundation welcomes the PC's acknowledgement within the Interim report that Stolen Generation survivors are more likely to experience poor SEWB outcomes.
  - In 2018-19 survivors aged 50 and over were 1.4 times more likely to have poor mental health and 1.3 times more likely to have been diagnosed with a mental health condition than other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age.<sup>3</sup>
- It follows that a dedicated SEWB schedule should seek to address the unfinished business of Bringing Them Home, noting many of the original recommendations to address the holistic healing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed were never implemented.
  - For example, the Federal Government's response to the Bringing Them Home report at the time it was published promised to invest \$63million over four years on family reunion assistance, emotional and social wellbeing regional centres, specialist Indigenous counsellors, expanding the Indigenous parenting and wellbeing network, language and cultural centres and archives records accessibility, and money for an oral history project.<sup>4</sup>
  - These efforts were plagued by the insufficient targeting of resources.
  - It is also worth noting that Recommendation 36 for adequate funding for all relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in each region to establish parenting and family wellbeing programs was not implemented.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over: updated analyses for 2018–19. Cat. no. IHW 257. Canberra: AIHW

<sup>4</sup> The Healing Foundation (2025), Are you waiting for us to Die? The unfinished business of *Bringing Them Home*, (p44). Available [online](#)

- As such, the recommendation to co-design a separate SEWB schedule offers a critical opportunity to address the unfinished business of Bringing Them Home and implement recommendations relevant to strengthening the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- It will also be important to avoid a narrow definition of mental health and suicide prevention being applied in a dedicated SEWB schedule.
  - To illustrate, Outcome 14 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> However the associated target is limited to ‘significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero’.
  - An unintended consequence of this framing of social and emotional wellbeing that has been observed is that policy action, funding investment and coordination of activities on SEWB has been reduced to only be associated with suicide prevention – yet the SEWB model is broader than this: it is a holistic concept that encompasses body; mind and emotions, family and kin; community; culture; Country and spirituality and ancestors.<sup>6</sup>
- Due to this narrow framing of SEWB, there has been an overly hierarchical western-clinical approach that has prioritised clinical expertise. Whilst these professions are valid and necessary in the context of mental health and suicide prevention, this has led to the exclusion of large sections of the SEWB workforces.
- SEWB practitioners are critical in their local communities given they may be easier to access and do not typically incur high costs to the consumer for their services. Often they are roles filled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- This SEWB workforce can include *Aboriginal health practitioners, social workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, SEWB care coordinators; Bringing Them Home Counsellors; Aboriginal counsellors, family reunification/research officers, community connectors, Aboriginal Liaison officers* and other local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members working in *case management*. These roles should be acknowledged as directly contributing to those determinants that lead to high levels of SEWB.
- It is The Healing Foundation’s position that in keeping with the broad, holistic determinants of SEWB, a more inclusive recognition of these workforces will be critical to the design of a future dedicated SEWB schedule.
- Taking the time to address workforce shortages and respond through coordinated reform by ensuring a SEWB schedule *includes* those broader SEWB workforces would also align with the Government’s Care and Support Economy vision being led by Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.<sup>7</sup>
- As outlined in The Healing Foundation’s recent [report](#), there is an existing network of Stolen Generation Organisations who already deliver holistic SEWB healing services yet are not

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<sup>5</sup>National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020). Available [online](#).

<sup>6</sup> Gee, Dudgeon, Shultz, Hart and Kelly (2013) A Model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing. Available online within the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023

<sup>7</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2024). ‘Care and Support economy reform at a glance’. Available [online](#)

sustainably funded or routinely included as key partners in Commonwealth planning for mental health and suicide prevention services.

- It is The Healing Foundation's recommendation that the dedicated SEWB schedule look to the network of Stolen Generation Organisations to understand the examples of strengths based, trauma-informed, culturally safe services that are already being delivered in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and have demonstrated positive impacts on the individual and collective healing of communities.
- Given the statistics have not improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide rates over the course of the current agreement, a different approach will need to be taken and a dedicated schedule offers a critical opportunity to recognise the significant contribution of Stolen Generation Organisations.
- **To illustrate, case studies are provided on healing projects and work done by Stolen Generations Organisations that support the concepts of both SEWB across the LifeCourse and intergenerational healing:**

***Stolen Generation Organisations empowering individual, collective and intergenerational healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.***

*“Our organisation structure is built on that circle of survivors who came together all those years ago.”*

There is a network of approximately 19 Stolen Generation Organisations (SGO's) operating nationally that serve to address the physical, emotional, social and spiritual healing needs of Stolen Generation survivors and their families. These organisations understand that healing works best when solutions are survivor-led, culturally strong and developed and driven at the local level. Importantly, all SGO's are involved in delivering services that respond to the SEWB determinants. Examples of healing (SEWB related) projects and initiatives currently delivered by SGO's through small annual grants supported by NIAA (through The Healing Foundation) :

**Yorgum Healing Services Aboriginal Corporation & Link-Up (WA):**

- Yorgum Link up staff are involved in taking many Stolen Generation clients and their families on Back to Country and Graveside reunions which provide incredible opportunities for healing, remembrance and connection with their ancestral roots.
- As well as providing Link-UP support for Stolen Generations survivors including records, reunification, redress support and healing events - Yorgum delivers a range of culturally safe and trauma-informed social and emotional wellbeing services for the community, ranging from Indigenous healing services, family support and youth counselling. However, fragmented funding streams do not provide the resources to support Yorgum to develop valuable data linkages that would help to shape a holistic picture of the intergenerational and LifeCourse healing journeys supported by their service.

**Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency (VACCA) – Link-up VIC:**

- Has delivered cultural healing camps for both men and women respectively where participants can begin their connection to community collectively, safely and well supported.
- Are working on a broader state-wide forum to bring together survivors from across the state to discuss the findings of the recent review into the Bringing them home report recommendations, and discuss issues around access and support for ageing survivors.

**Teralba Park Stolen Generations Support Group**

- “Voices from the Past – Healing our Future” is for a small grant for 2025-2026 to a volunteer-led organisation to develop an engaging, culturally safe, and interactive educational resource series that supports collective healing by preserving and sharing the stories of the Stolen Generation, designed to teach primary school students about the Stolen Generations and Australia's shared history beginning with the story of the Enoggera Boys Home near Teralba Park, Brisbane. Guided by survivors including the story of Aunty Flo Watson OAM, and developed in partnership with educators and Five Storey Films, the project will include printed workbooks, digital storytelling elements and classroom engagement sessions.

**Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation**

- Coota Girls is actively delivering culture and wellbeing camps, as-well as language and culture retreats to support survivors and descendants in their local communities.

### How could governance be improved in the next agreement?

- As observed by the PC in this review, ‘national governance arrangements set up under the Agreement have emphasized the perspectives of government agencies and the health system, rather than fully incorporating the voices of people with lived and living experience of mental ill health and suicide. These arrangements tend to be opaque; there is very limited public reporting on the structure and progress of working groups convened under the Agreement.’
- As such, governance can be improved in the next agreement, particularly with respect to the development of a specific SEWB schedule, by taking the time to include a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations who work directly with local communities to deliver a range of social and emotional wellbeing services.
- It is our strong recommendation that the perspectives of Stolen Generation Organisations be included in these governance structures.
- There is a need to share information and updates with communities, to ensure transparency and accountability, which can support coordination and links between services on the ground.

### Are there governance issues that have not been addressed?

- It would be beneficial to clearly map the current funding streams for SEWB at the Commonwealth and Jurisdictional level prior to the co-design process of a new separate schedule. There is limited public reporting or monitoring and accountability on current portfolio’s that current provide SEWB funding.
- Whilst there have been attempts previously through the auspices of the SEWB policy partnership to track this funding, in the interest of accountability and transparency, this should be led by the Commonwealth and made available publicly online.

We also recommend an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led review of the next agreement. This would allow community to provide their own insight and perspectives on areas of achievement and how the schedule can continue to improve. What would a best practice community-led review of the next agreement look like?

- It is also The Healing Foundation’s position that the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) can and should be incorporated at regular intervals through the life of the next Agreement, to avoid waiting another five years to measure progress.
- Taking time to establish strength’s-based progress indicators will facilitate all parties in being able to understand whether investment is having impact on the ground with communities that desperately require access to these services.
- Given the closing the gap target for significant and sustained reduction in suicide is not on track to be met, a sense of urgency underscores this position.
- This type of CQI performance monitoring has been established in intersecting sectors such as health and hospital systems so can be done.

### Who else should we engage with?

- The Healing Foundation is well placed to support further engagements including those directly with Stolen Generation Survivors, descendants and the network of SGO's working tirelessly to supporting their healing.