

Australian Government
Department of Education
Via email: FirstNationsEducationPolicy@education.gov.au

13 February 2026

To whom it may concern,

The Healing Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the **First Nations Education Policy**.

The Healing Foundation is the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that elevates the voices and lived experiences of Stolen Generations survivors and descendants. We provide expert advice on the needs of ageing survivors, support survivor-led healing projects, and help educate about the continuing impacts of Australia's Stolen Generations history.

We are governed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board and Executive, and guided in our work by Stolen Generations Organisations to support survivors to tell their stories and drive their healing. We work with governments, policymakers, organisations and workforces to strengthen accountability and ensure their systems meet the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and support intergenerational healing.

Founded in 2009 following national consultation and the landmark *Bringing Them Home*¹ report, the Healing Foundation was established to progress a key recommendation: that healing must be integrated into services for survivors. Since the report was handed down over 28 years ago, there has been no nationally coordinated response or mechanism to monitor implementation of its recommendations. Our 2025 report, *Are you waiting for us to die? The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*, analysed implementation process and found that only **six percent** of the recommendations have been fully implemented.²

The role of education policy in meeting the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants

Education policy plays a critical role in responding to the enduring impacts experienced by Stolen Generations survivors and descendants. Forced removals disrupted family, culture, identity, and connection to Country, creating intergenerational trauma that continues to affect educational experiences and outcomes for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows this legacy is associated with lower levels of formal school completion and broader socioeconomic disadvantage, survivors experience poorer health, economic, and social outcomes than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were not

¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (1997). *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/?a=51037>

² The Healing Foundation. (2025). *Are you waiting for us to die? The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*. Retrieved from: https://healingfoundation.org.au/media/ak5niup3/bth_report_are-you-waiting-for-us-to-die-final-2025-1.pdf

removed.³ This represents a ‘gap within a gap’, as the consequences of forced removal and institutionalisation continue to impact all areas of life, including education, employment and community participation.⁴

This submission draws on the findings and recommendations of the *Bringing them Home* report, reflecting its ongoing relevance to education policy and broader systemic reform. The report documented the experiences of Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants; however, nearly 30 years after its release, many recommendations remain unimplemented. Despite this, they continue to provide a clear and compelling framework for reform and, together with contemporary evidence, underpin this submission’s response to the identified focus areas.

Focus area one: Embedding culturally responsive curriculum and teaching practices.

This section responds to Questions 5, 18, 19, and 20.

- Education reform must move beyond symbolic inclusion and embed First Nations knowledges, languages and histories across curriculum, teaching practice and institutional leadership. This need has long been recognised in the *Bringing Them Home* recommendations. Recommendations 8(a) and 8(b) called for compulsory curriculum content in primary and secondary education addressing the history and ongoing effects of forced removal. The National Sorry Day Committee successfully advocated for the meaningful inclusion of Stolen Generations content in national curriculum in 2011, successfully fulfilling Recommendation 8a.⁵
- The Healing Foundation launched an education resource kit in 2019, with an expanded version produced in 2023. Lesson plans exist for Years K-12 and an educator guide have been widely used, reflecting the longstanding gaps in curriculum addressing Stolen Generations histories truth-telling and stories.⁶
- Research on the educational experiences of First Nations young people found that the history and ongoing impacts of the Stolen Generations were either absent or insufficiently addressed in the curriculum.⁷ Descendants reported having to reconcile deeply personal and intergenerational family histories with institutional silence in the classroom which was perceived as a denial of lived reality.
- Participants who did not identify as descendants also recognised gaps in how First Nations histories were represented, noting that this limited their ability to develop an informed understanding of their own history and culture. This disconnect was most apparent when school history lessons did not reflect their lived experiences of those of their families or communities.⁸
- While early, primary and secondary education are important formative years of understanding and sense-making for First Nations learners, education opportunities continue and broaden in

³ AIHW. (2021). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over: updated analyses for 2018-2019*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/indigenous-stolen-generations-50-and-over/contents/summary>

⁴ The Healing Foundation. (2025). *Are you waiting for us to die? The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*. Retrieved from: https://healingfoundation.org.au/media/ak5niup3/bth_report_are-you-waiting-for-us-to-die-final-2025-1.pdf

⁵ Rule, J., & Rice, E. (2015). *Bringing them home: scorecard report 2015*, Commissioned by the National Sorry Day Committee, Canberra, 6.

⁶ The Healing Foundation. (2023). ‘Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students’ (Webpage). Retrieved from: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/resources/education-toolkits-lesson-plans/>

⁷ Brown, L. (2019). Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(1), 54-71, p.60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318794295>

⁸ Brown, L. (2019). Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(1), 54-71, p.60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318794295>, p.61.

adulthood. Recommendations 9(a) and 9(b) emphasised extending expending culturally responsive practices into professional education, including university and professional training. Progress across the tertiary sector remains inconsistent, and many professions still lack compulsory education on Stolen Generations history. One clear example is the legal profession, where there is no national requirement for practitioners to learn about the history or impacts of forced removal, despite the legal system's central role in removal policies.

- Embedding culturally safe and responsive curriculum at all levels of education aligns with Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which affirms the right to education that reflects Indigenous histories, cultures and knowledge systems.⁹

Focus area three: Creating culturally safe learning and working environments.

This section responds to Questions 13, 14, 15 and 18.

- A growing body of research indicates that culturally safe and responsive education systems are more likely to support positive engagement, attendance and educational outcomes in First Nations learners.^{10 11} For example, culturally responsive schooling has long been understood to improve academic achievement through cultural recognition and the strengthening of students' cultural identity, highlighting the importance of meaningful recognition in promoting educational success.¹²
- Evidence also suggests that school leadership directly influence student learning, wellbeing and completion rates.¹³ One study drawing on observations across 11 remote schools found that schools with high enrolments of First Nations students achieved stronger student outcomes when teaching was guided by the 'What Works' framework.¹⁴ The framework prioritises cultural respect and integration, requiring that students and their culture are respected and that their participation in learning is always supported by school leadership.
- Culturally responsive teaching equips educators to adapt both curriculum content and their teacher practice to better support First Nations learners.¹⁵ Culture forms a central foundation for learning and development; therefore, education approaches should actively strengthen and affirm First Nations cultures. This requires teachers to engage with the diversity and complexity of culture, recognising and responding to its distinct expressions, histories and languages across communities.
- These findings highlight that creating culturally safe environments, grounded in inclusive teaching practices that respect cultural perspective and knowledges, can significantly improve education outcomes and participation for First Nations learners.

⁹ United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. p.13. Retrieved from: https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/migrated/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

¹⁰ Yoorrook Justice Commission. (2025). *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report*, p.88-116. Retrieved from: <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports>

¹¹ Bodkin-Andrews., G., & Carlson, B. (2014). The legacy of racism and Indigenous Australian Identity within education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 19(4), 784-807, p.793. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.969224>

¹² Perso, T. (2012). *Cultural responsiveness and school education: with particular focus on Australia's First Peoples*. p.28-32. Retrieved from: https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/312407_Cultural_Responsiveness_and_School_Education.pdf

¹³ AIHW & AIFS. (2014). *Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people*. p.13. Retrieved from: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/positive-learning-environments-indigenous-children-and-young-people>

¹⁴ What Works. The Work Program. (2012). *Success in remote schools: a research study of eleven improving remote schools*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nintione.com.au/resources/nol/success-in-remote-schools-a-research-study-of-eleven-improving-remote-schools/>

¹⁵ Krakouer, J. (2015). *Literature review relating to the current context and discourse on Indigenous cultural awareness in the teaching space*. p.8-17 Retrieved from: https://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/42

- The same principles apply beyond school settings, extending to the preparation and ongoing education of the professional workforce. This broader obligation was recognised in the *Bringing Them Home* recommendation 9(a) and 9(b), which called for education on the history and impacts of forced removals be embedded within tertiary and professional training, recognising that professional systems also play a critical role in shaping learning experiences of First Nations people.
- Recent health legislation under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Strategy now mandates cultural safety education for health professionals and students, demonstrating that structural reform is both possible and achievable.¹⁶ This represents a positive step toward strengthening professional standards, consistent with the intent of Recommendation 34 of the *Bringing Them Home* report. However, comparable requirements have not been introduced across other professions, leaving a significant gap in consistent, sector-wide implementation.
- It is also important to note that a substantial body of research on First Nations students and workers in higher education and training settings continue to experience significant barriers to progression and achievement, namely through racism and discrimination.¹⁷ The persistence of racism and discrimination within these settings underscores the continuing relevance of Recommendation 9 and 34, and demonstrates that the systemic reform envisaged by the *Bringing Them Home* report remains unfinished.
- Article 15 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to the dignity and diversity of their cultures being appropriately reflected in education and requires States to take effective measures to combat racism and prejudice and promote understanding.¹⁸
- Culturally safe working and learning environments depend on the integration of cultural safety into professional education and workforce standards. Education outcomes will not improve, and gaps will not close, unless these intersecting barriers are addressed.

Focus area four: Transforming education organisations to improve accountability and to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of First Nations peoples.

This section responds to Questions 16, 17, 26, 27 and 28.

- The education system must be made accountable for incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, knowledge and culture across all levels of education and curriculum. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, education systems have historically been used as tools of oppression and assimilation, through methods of both systematic exclusion and institutionalisation.¹⁹ These experiences are still felt to date with continued widespread mistrust of educational institutions, combined with often alienating learning environments and professionals – contributing to reduced outcomes for stolen generations survivors and descendants.

¹⁶ AHPRA. (2025). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Strategy.aspx>

¹⁷ Ibid, 796; Yoorrook Justice Commission. (2025); Brown (2019).

¹⁸ United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. p.13. Retrieved from: https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/migrated/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

¹⁹ Brown, L. (2019). Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(1), 54-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318794295>

- Globally, Australia, Canada and the United States are among the countries most affected by Indigenous language loss, reflecting the enduring impacts of colonisation.²⁰ In Australia, while hundreds of First Nations languages were spoken prior to colonisation, only a small number are now learned as a first language from birth. Despite the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of education, national policies have often treated First Nations communities as homogenous.²¹ Identified under Focus Area One of this submission, these structural exclusions continue to shape access and safety for First Nations peoples engaging in education today.
- Addressing this language decline and deficit-lens demands meaningful reform across education systems. Expanded pathways are needed to enable community members to learn, teach and formally work in their traditional languages and learn their history in a way that is taught, recognised and supported by their communities.
- Recommendation 12(a)(b) of the *Bringing Them Home* report calls on the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to provide funding to record and maintain local languages, and to establish cultural and history centres within Community. Such measures are especially significant for Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants, as their forcible removal denied them the opportunity to learn and sustain their languages, as well as the generations seeking to reclaim them.
- Our *Are You Waiting for Us to Die* report identified Recommendation 12(a)(b) as a partial failure.²² Ongoing language and history loss demonstrates that further action is required, and that concrete steps must now be taken to give full effect to this recommendation. Building shared understanding across the education workforce supports more inclusive and culturally safe learning environments, while also ensuring that all learners benefit from a fuller understanding of the local and broader histories and knowledge systems.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The Healing Foundation recommends:

1. **Australian universities, vocational institutions and schools must work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to determine how core curricula can effectively include the history and effects of forced removal, including through structured uptake of established resources such as the Healing Foundation Education Resource Kit.**

This would be done through implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority, the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025 and vocational curriculum. Course and training content can be developed with advice from The Healing Foundation. Established resources, including the Healing Foundation Education Resource Kit, provide structured lesson plans, educator guidance and supporting materials that can be adopted nationally to ensure consistent and culturally informed delivery.

²⁰ Reed, L. W., Mount, A. L., & Angelo, D. (2024). Strengthening Australian languages: between policy and practice, AIATSIS, https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/research_pub/Language%20Policy%20Symposium%20report.pdf

²¹ Brown, L. (2019).

²² The Healing Foundation. (2025). *Are you waiting for us to die? The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*. Retrieved from: https://healingfoundation.org.au/media/ak5niup3/bth_report_are-you-waiting-for-us-to-die-final-2025-1.pdf

2. **Governments must mandate the inclusion of ‘working with survivors learning’ for all professionals who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.**

Key workforces and professionals (i.e., health, aged care, social services, child protection, justice and others) must undertake in-service training about the history and effects of forcible removal. Dedicated funding must be provided to support the development and delivery of survivor led training.

Our recommendations are consistent with Priority Reform 1 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which commits governments to formal partnerships and shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in policy design and implementation. Additionally, embedding mandatory professional education and culturally responsive curriculum aligns with Priority Reform 3, which calls for transforming government institutions to be culturally safe and accountable. However, the need for these reforms is not new.²³

Nearly three decades after the *Bringing Them Home* report, the education related recommendations remain largely unimplemented. The evidence now available, including research on culturally responsive schooling and reforms emerging in some professional sectors, substantiates the report’s findings that meaningful cultural recognition embedded across school and professional education systems supports improvements in engagement, participation and achievement for First Nations learners.

At the same time, the persistence of racism, inconsistent curriculum inclusion, and the absence of mandatory professional education requirements demonstrate that implementation remains incomplete. Full and coordinated implementation of the education recommendations is necessary to mitigate ongoing harm, address systemic barriers experienced by First Nations students and educators, and ensure that education systems contribute to healing rather than perpetuating inequity.

The Healing Foundation is calling for a coordinated response to the recommendations in the *Bringing Them Home* and *Are you waiting for us to die?* reports. These recommendations require a systematic approach to address the ‘gap within a gap’ and support Stolen Generations survivors across six areas: reparations; rehabilitation and research; records, family tracing and reunions; acknowledgements and apologies; education and training; and monitoring and accountability.

The Healing Foundation welcomes the opportunity to discuss our concerns further and if additional information is required please contact Nicole Kilby via phone 0409 178 896 or email nicole.kilby@healingfoundation.org.au.

Yours faithfully,



Shannan Dodson
Chief Executive Officer
The Healing Foundation

²³ National Agreement on Closing the Gap. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>

Appendix A: Bringing Them Home report – education related recommendations

The table below includes the *Bringing Them Home* recommendations and the status of implementation based on analysis from the *'Are You Waiting for Us to Die?'* report.²⁴

BTH Report recommendation number	BTH report theme	BTH report recommendation
8a Qualified pass	School education	The State and Territory Governments must ensure that primary and secondary school curricula include substantial compulsory modules on the history and continuing effects of forcible removal.
8b Partial failure		That the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies be funded by the Commonwealth to develop these modules.
9a Partial failure	Professional training	That all professionals who work with Indigenous children, families and communities receive in-service training about the history and effects of forcible removal.
9b Partial failure		That all undergraduates and trainees in relevant professions receive, as part of their core curriculum, education about the history and effects of forcible removal.
12a Partial failure	Language, culture and history centres	That the Commonwealth expand the funding of Indigenous language, culture and history centres to ensure national coverage at regional level.
12b Partial failure		That where the Indigenous community so determines, the regional language, culture and history centre be funded to record and maintain local Indigenous languages and to teach those languages, especially to people whose forcible removal deprived them of opportunities to learn and maintain their language and to their descendants.
34a Unclear	Health professional training	That government health services, in consultation with Indigenous health services and family tracing and reunion services, develop in-service training for all employees in the history and effects of forcible removal.
34b Unclear		That all health and related training institutions, in consultation with Indigenous health services and family tracing and reunion services, develop undergraduate training for all students in the history and effects of forcible removal.

²⁴ The Healing Foundation. (2025). *Are you waiting for us to die? The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*. Retrieved from: https://healingfoundation.org.au/media/ak5niup3/bth_report_are-you-waiting-for-us-to-die-final-2025-1.pdf