

Acting Now for Healing

Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23



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Foreword

The journey of healing for the nation continues, with more evidence and healing know-how on hand and ready to drive a national intergenerational healing strategy.

In 1997, the *Bringing them Home* report was tabled in the Australian Parliament, telling the world that healing was critical for addressing the hurt and harm revealed previously in the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. 20 years on in 2017, The Healing Foundation was well established, and highlighted again for the world, that little had been done to address the hurt and harm. That is despite too, the Australian Parliament delivering a formal Apology in 2008.

Since being established in 2009, The Healing Foundation has worked closely with Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and communities to elevate their voices in this journey of healing. The Australian Government heard these voices in 2017, and we received funding of over a million dollars for three years for developing an action plan for healing. This plan was launched as *Make Healing Happen – It's Time to Act* in June 2021 at The National Press Club.

We have held firm to our mandate, which was created upon national community consultation and demanded we lead this continent through a process that ensures Stolen Generations survivors are seen and heard. We have successfully centred the need for trauma recovery and healing in the national discourse, and today survivor-led healing influences policy and program design on a scale not previously seen.

At the same time, data experts at The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a complimentary report, telling the world that the poorer life outcomes experienced by Stolen Generations survivors today are a direct result of being removed from their families, and this factor alone. The impacts of intergenerational trauma arising from past policies of removal are therefore now well-evidenced.

The choice to leave hurt and harm unaddressed, yet again, is a choice to allow these impacts and the burden of disadvantage to remain. Many Stolen Generations survivors are elderly and passing away with no known peace or hope that their children or grandchildren will know a life less impacted by trauma.

The demand for trauma-aware and healing-informed organisation-to-organisation support from The Healing Foundation is growing, as more and more Australians understand both why healing must happen, and that healing know-how is available and accessible. It is The Healing Foundation alone that equips healing champion sectors, workforces and systems with survivor-led know-how on making healing happen.

Significant new funding is required to get this done, and to get it done now. We are already the trusted partner to do this work with a range of organisations across this nation of many nations, across sectors and across government portfolios in all tiers. Working alongside the Coalition of Peaks and the network of Stolen Generations organisations, Link-Ups, and social and emotional wellbeing service and support organisations, we stand in our strengths ready to equip all systems – workforce by workforce and sector by sector – with the knowledge, tools and skills to Make Healing Happen.

It's time to act.

Fiona Cornforth

CEO, The Healing Foundation

The Healing Foundation identify two focused areas for the 2022-2023 Federal Budget to take our most powerful next steps together on the journey of healing. We will build an Australia-wide community of trauma-aware, healing-informed practitioners through:

- a National Healing Strategy
- well-resourced survivor-led healing.

1. Intergenerational healing

The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- Invest in a **National Healing Strategy** to address the impact of intergenerational trauma and the 'gap within the gap' of disadvantage for both survivors and the descendants of Stolen Generations arising from past government policies of forced removal of children.

A National Healing Strategy

A National Healing Strategy is the next phase following on the call to action from the *Make Healing Happen* report. Next year will be 15 years since the National Apology to Stolen Generations, yet our survivors, their families, and communities still face the burden of disadvantage. Recent investigations (to be made publicly available) into the adverse and complex health needs that Stolen Generations survivors, and their descendants experience, suggest that in 2019, the economic health costs were in the millions and lost quality of life costs were in the billions. These ongoing health costs are expected to span far into the future. These costs could have been avoided and future costs can be reduced if there was more investment into healing.

Healing enables people to overcome trauma and restore wellbeing and is fundamental to First Nations peoples reaching full personal, cultural, social, educational, and economic potential. Healing allows people to act from a place of strength rather than a place of distress. The development of a National Healing Strategy will not only aid in reducing health cost but also provide the care and quality of life that Stolen Generations survivors and those families affected by past government policies deserve.

More than a third of all adult First Nations peoples in Australia are directly descended from Stolen Generations. In 2018-19, this was approximately 142,000 people, with descendant numbers increasing over time. Stolen Generations survivors have endured a lifetime of trauma, grief, and loss, and as a result they carry a significant burden of health, wellbeing, social, and economic disadvantage. Past government policies of forced removal of children have created a cycle of intergenerational trauma, where the impact is passed from one generation to the next. This had led to a 'gap within the gap', which has resulted in Stolen Generations survivors and descendants living with more complex needs and greater disadvantage than other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the same age.

Stolen Generations survivors have significantly poorer mental health and are more likely to be living with severe disability compared to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the same age who were not removed. Survivors are also more likely to be living in tough economic circumstances and to have experienced racial discrimination and actual or threatened physical harm in the past year. Stolen Generations survivors are growing older, and are now **all** aged at least 50, and eligible for aged care. They have increasingly complex and overlapping needs yet face personal and systemic barriers to accessing services.

For Government investments in Closing the Gap to succeed, a National Healing Strategy that addresses the 'gap within the gap', intergenerational trauma, and promotes healing urgently needs to be developed. This will provide high level, strategic direction and guidance for Australian governments and service providers to better design and implement programs and services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A strategy will provide a framework for coordinating evidence and action, and will form the basis of a comprehensive, long-term approach where governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and key partners work together to co-design methods of intergenerational healing.

The strategy must link to, and complement, existing national strategies such as the new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse.

This must be addressed urgently, and reflect the complex needs and disadvantage to support Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and descendants. The National Healing Strategy should include increased investment into following areas:

- Stolen Generations organisations, including Link-Ups to strengthen their capacity and support for **fair and equitable reparations** for Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and communities, particularly in Queensland and Western Australia.
- **Support to services** and upskill the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (including health and allied health professionals) to embed and provide trauma-aware, healing-informed care.
- **Aged care** that offers a more holistic social and cultural support in order to access the services that Stolen Generations survivors need.
- Co-design and implementation of strategies for **strengthening connection** and supporting Stolen Generations at times when physical connections are restricted.

Reparations

The Healing Foundation welcomes the bipartisan commitment to the newly established Commonwealth Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme. The opportunity to work with Stolen Generations organisations, survivors, and government agencies to co-design a trauma-aware, healing-informed scheme requires a genuine commitment to ensure no further harm is brought upon survivors navigating and participating in the scheme.

Tasmanian, South Australian, New South Wales, and Victorian governments have accepted responsibility for the harm caused to Stolen Generations survivors by establishing reparations schemes that include ex-gratia payments to survivors, as well as community reparations to promote healing.

More than half the estimated Stolen Generations population from Queensland and Western Australia do not have access to redress schemes. It is now the turn of the Queensland and Western Australia governments to redress past removal policies in those states to acknowledge the:

- collective fear, grief, and discrimination Stolen Generations survivors experienced and continue to experience
- complex and overlapping needs, the burden of social and economic disadvantage, and the lost quality of life that Stolen Generations survivors experience enable Stolen Generations survivors to age with dignity as determined by them as individuals.

The Australian Government has an important leadership role in encouraging those States to embrace reparations for Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and communities. This includes funding Link-Ups and other Stolen Generations organisations to strengthen their capacity to advocate for fair, equitable, and accessible redress schemes, and provide navigation support for redress applicants.

Support and services

The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to significantly increase investment in the community-controlled organisations that support healing for Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and communities, including:

- enabling Link-Ups and other family history organisations to improve their records management systems, and their capacity to support survivors and their families on their healing journeys
- resourcing Stolen Generations organisations to strengthen their capacity to advocate for universal and equitable reparations for survivors, families, and communities impacted by past policies of forced removal of children.

As a national organisation, The Healing Foundation works closely with State, regional, and local community-controlled organisations to amplify the voices of Stolen Generations survivors and descendants.

These organisations – Stolen Generations organisations, Link-Ups, and other healing services – provide the front-line support for the healing journeys of survivors and their families. Many organisations are small, with limited or insecure funding. All report being under-resourced to meet the demands for their services. As front-line service providers, they inevitably preference individual and community needs over advocacy. The support is technically complex and multi-disciplinary in nature.

The Healing Foundation regularly assists these organisations to come together and to raise issues, and is working with these organisations to co-design and deliver capacity-building activities. However, this in itself requires them to allocate scarce time away from front-line activities.

As government and mainstream providers become more aware that Stolen Generations survivors and descendants have specific and complex needs, so pressure grows on organisations to engage externally on behalf of their survivors and families. They need additional funding to effectively respond to this new level of demand.

Aged care

This year, all Stolen Generations survivors will be aged 50 and over, and eligible for aged care. It is essential that they are offered more holistic social and cultural support in order to access the services that they need. Addressing these needs requires effort at all levels to co-design policies and programs that are healing-informed and trauma-aware, and that enable Stolen Generations survivors to live with dignity and respect, in the knowledge that their families will thrive into the future.

As a nation we owe a duty of care to ageing Stolen Generations survivors to ensure they can access the health services they need, when they need. By doing so we can provide Stolen Generations survivors a healthy and dignified aging experience.

The Healing Foundation proposes a universal Healing Card for Stolen Generations survivors modelled on the existing Veterans Gold Card scheme, which entitles the cardholder to funding for all clinically necessary health care needs for all conditions.

Eligible card holders will be entitled to:

- all primary health care needs to support Stolen generations survivors to stay out of hospital
- all clinically necessary treatment to meet health care needs
- supports and services that assist them to live at home, including respite services for survivors and their carers
- access healing programs that involve family and community.

Staying connected

Connection to family, community, culture, and country are central to Stolen Generation survivor healing journeys, and lead to improved health and wellbeing. The cultural determinants of health have

a positive impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and disruptions to these connections can impact negatively on health and wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional pressure on Stolen Generations survivors and their families, who already experienced disproportionate social, emotional, and financial disadvantage before the pandemic began.

A recent study found that Stolen Generation survivors were negatively impacted by the restrictions implemented (e.g., lock downs, social distancing, limited gatherings). Over 70 per cent of Stolen Generations survivors healing journey were affected, while there was an alarming decline in physical and mental health, and the (re)triggering of trauma from past and present government policies. The (re)triggering of trauma was attributed to being isolated, locked down, the in-ability to be with family (particularly when ill or in hospital) and (re)triggered memories - 'the old days came back' and in the past of 'being controlled by government'.

The very elements that support peoples' healing journeys (connection to family, community, culture, and country) and lead to improved health and wellbeing are those most at risk during a pandemic, particularly when restrictions are introduced. This must be addressed urgently, to support Stolen Generations survivors and their families who are already at a disadvantage, to better understand their vulnerabilities and needs. This could include investing and/or developing co-designed strategies or policies to:

- develop a more in-depth project for maintaining connection and avoiding triggering trauma when physical connections are limited
- support the healing journey to continue under restrictions to counterbalance negative impacts
- support the use of technologies to connect Stolen Generations survivors to family, community, culture, and country.

2. Survivor-led healing

The Healing Foundation calls on the Australian Government to:

- Support survivor-led healing by doubling the base funding to The Healing Foundation, to ensure voices of survivors and community are not only amplified but embedded in national policy forums and decision-making processes.
 - Acknowledge that The Healing Foundation has reached capacity as a direct result of the surge in national interest to contribute to making healing happen. We require additional resources so we can continue to deliver on core business supporting the Stolen Generations organisation sector.
 - Support the next part of the journey, by acting now to embed evidence-based truth telling within systems, sectors, and workforces. The Healing Foundation requires additional funding to scale-up and meet the increasing engagement demands from governments and industries leaning in.
 - Recognise that The Healing Foundation are the national technical experts in survivor-led healing, we are the only organisation that can do this as we are led by survivors and have the evidence to support best practice in intergenerational healing.
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Survivor-led healing – embedding survivor voices

There is an urgent need to heal past wrongs – for the wellbeing of those who were stolen, their descendants who have inherited their trauma, their communities who continue to hurt, and for Australia as a nation. It must be acknowledged that the continuing growth in demand for knowledge and advice about healing cannot be met from within The Healing Foundation's existing base funding. In 2009, when The Healing Foundation was established, its core Commonwealth grant was \$6.6 million per year. Thirteen years later, it remains \$6.6 million.

By increasing funding to The Healing Foundation this will ensure the voices of Stolen Generations survivors are leading national policy conversations on intergenerational healing for survivors, families, and communities. Stolen Generations survivors know what works and what doesn't, and they bring with them their undeniable lived experience to influence change at all levels. The Healing Foundation is the conduit to ensure their voices are heard, included, and embedded in decision making processes.

Survivor-led healing can only occur if survivor voices are embedded into policy forums, reform agendas, and decision-making processes. The Healing Foundation is committed to continuing to advocate for survivors and their descendants across all intersecting policy platforms.

Additional funding will provide:

- increased technically specialised workforce capability development to meet the current high service demands
 - increased support for survivors and their families.
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Responding to the surge in national interest

The Healing Foundation are leading the national conversation on intergenerational healing for First Nations peoples.

Awareness of the need for healing for First Nations peoples, and in particular for Stolen Generations, continues to grow across communities, governments, and service providers. The amplifying of survivor voices and their call to action is far reaching and challenges systems, sectors, and workforces to commit to genuine and authentic behavioral change, to improve the experiences of Stolen Generations survivors, their families, and communities.

This is a critical step to facilitate long overdue changes across systems, services, and workforces, and to improve outcomes for First Nations peoples and communities, especially for Stolen Generations and their descendants, to assist in their healing journeys.

We know that formal evidence-based healing methodologies need to be established now whilst we have the momentum. The Healing Foundation can do this, but we need to significantly bolster our technical specialised resources so that we can deliver to meet the demand.

Acting now to Make Healing Happen

To date, government and industry engagement has been largely driven by demand from the health and social services industries. Key partnerships have been established with the Australian Red Cross, the Metro North Hospital and Health Service, and several Primary Health Networks. These organisations have committed to embedding trauma-aware and healing-informed principles across all aspects of their governance and operational structures.

If systems, sectors, and workforces understand and commit to their role in intergenerational healing, both the experience and outcomes for First Nations peoples will improve. Trauma-aware and healing-informed practice requires organisations to understand the manifestation of past and current trauma, and then make changes to take an active role in championing healing, wellbeing, and subsequently closing the gap.

Being culturally aware is simply not enough. Challenging systems, sectors, and workforces to commit to genuine and authentic change requires the embedding of trauma-aware and healing-informed principles across all aspects of organisational governance and operations. Through gaining a greater understanding of why and how First Nations peoples experience complex intergenerational trauma - systems, sectors, and workforces will adjust to ensure individuals have increased positive experiences - every warm interaction matters.

The Healing Foundation as a backbone organisation, is committed to championing trauma-aware and healing-informed principles within all systems, sectors, and workforces that intersect with First Nations peoples. This requires additional investment to ensure The Healing Foundation can meet the increasing demand for trusted partner support from government agencies, particularly aged care, social services, justice and housing, and industries.

Walking alongside survivors to lead healing nationally

The Healing Foundation is a trusted, reliable partner and advisor for the sector, governments, service providers, and organisations. The Healing Foundation has played a pivotal role contributing expertise, knowledge, and experience in trauma-aware and healing-informed approaches across policy and program development, including systemic reforms. Examples of this work include working with Coalition of Peaks on priority reforms identified in the National Agreement for Closing the Gap; influencing national policy and programs for women's, children's and family safety; and, contributing to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Moreover, The Healing Foundation is a founding partner of the new Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse together with the Blue Knot and Australian Childhood foundations.

The Healing Foundation continues to stand in its strength as experts in supporting trauma-aware and healing-informed champion partnerships with First Nations peak bodies, including SNAICC, Gayaa Dhuwi, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and its affiliates, Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives and Queensland's intersectional domestic and family violence sector and disability sector.

Our remit to elevate survivor-led testimony and evidence to influence national systemic change remains clear. Expanding our influence across multi-disciplinary sectors requires additional funding to build our evidence base and best practice frameworks. Additional funding will provide:

- strengthened capability to build the Australian evidence-base for healing
- increased partnering opportunities with research and sector organisations and First Nations peoples to identify and apply evidence-based practice, including evaluation
- investment into knowledge translation and to support behaviour change in order to build the capacity of systems, services, and workforces to be trauma-aware and healing-informed.

The Healing Foundation acknowledges Country and the Traditional Owners of the Lands on which we live and work. We also pay our respects to the Elders and Stolen Generations survivors. We recognise the intergenerational trauma that remains and our commitment to build an Australia that can heal. We acknowledge all who will carry the healing spirit into the future.

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