

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Healing Foundation**

**Stolen Generations Initiatives  
Pre-Budget Submission 2017-2018**



**HealingFoundation**

**Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People**

## Introduction

On May 26 2017 it will be 20 years since the Bringing Them Home Report into the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities was tabled in the Australian Parliament.

It is estimated that between one in three and one in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families, communities and culture between 1910 and 1970 – more than 10,000 children.

The resulting trauma has been passed down from generation to generation, contributing to many of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today such as substance misuse, mental illness and family violence<sup>1</sup>.

Ultimately these issues create an ongoing cost burden for Australian governments.

Addressing the underlying trauma of these issues through healing is the only way to change this but governments and service providers are currently ill equipped to deal with the complex trauma facing Stolen Generations members and their descendants.

For an investment of \$900,000 in additional funds the Australian Government can:

- build capacity within the government and service sectors to create trauma informed, culturally safe policies and services that meet the needs of Stolen Generations members and their descendants
- change the life course of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by developing effective intergenerational trauma strategies
- lead the development of a world first reparations scheme for Stolen Generations members

Since 2009 the Healing Foundation has been building the national and international evidence on healing and trauma. We are drawing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, and lessons learned from implementing healing work around Australia and internationally.

Over the last six years we have supported more than 120 community based healing projects designed, developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that have engaged with over 20,000 participants. We have strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and are recognised as a leader in partnering with communities to co-design healing programs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are calling for greater investment in solutions designed, developed and led by them.

This pre-budget submission provides the government with an opportunity to change course. Instead of relying on mainstream approaches to lead change for our communities it provides the opportunity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1997, Bringing them home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, HREOC, Canberra.

There is an urgent need to act before more elderly Stolen Generations members pass away. The 20th anniversary of the *Bringing them Home* report in May 2017 provides the perfect opportunity to address the outstanding needs of Stolen Generations members and their descendants.

## Culturally responsive trauma informed education packages

Inadequate education about the historical and ongoing trauma experienced by Stolen Generations and their families is impairing the ability of governments, service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to effectively meet their needs.

Trauma impairs the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage confidently with mainstream health and welfare services.

The generic cultural awareness and trauma informed training that is provided inconsistently for government and non-government employees working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people does not include information about historical trauma specific to Stolen Generations and its intergenerational impacts.

Existing training also does not support police, welfare services, health and mental health providers and institutions such as aged care to respond effectively to the increasing distress Stolen Generations and their descendants might experience by coming into contact with these services.

### Recommendation

Provide appropriate culturally informed trauma training and development for all government and non-government services to improve the access to and the quality of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Develop a suite of trauma training packages that are designed in conjunction with Stolen Generations survivors to ensure that governments, professionals and services respond effectively to Stolen Generations members.

**Budget: \$200,000**

### The benefits to taxpayers

- will reduce the cost burden on the health system: by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access mental health and support services earlier more costly intensive and lengthier mental health interventions will be minimised

### The benefits to government

- ensuring policy makers are adequately educated and supported in delivering effective initiatives that will change outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- creating more meaningful and informed engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities

### The benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- improved services that are culturally and trauma attuned

- increased local supports available
- improved social and emotional wellbeing
- greater confidence in the service system

## Comprehensive culturally appropriate reparations scheme

The need for reparations, including financial redress, remains a very important aspect of healing for Stolen Generations members and their families. Redress not only provides an acknowledgement that harm was done, it provides an opportunity for Stolen Generations families to meet emerging financial needs as the denial of education and opportunity has resulted in widespread financial disadvantage and poverty.

### Recommendation

The establishment of a Commonwealth reparations scheme, developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to ensure it is culturally safe and trauma-informed.

### Budget: \$200,000 (to establish the scheme)

#### The benefits to taxpayers

- allows for a more effective and cost defined approach, ensuring governments can allocate funds over time and reducing the impact of unpredictable budget costs
- costs can be offset by working with state governments and institutions that perpetrated harm to share the cost burden.

#### The benefits to government

- developing the scheme in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will increase credibility
- improved engagement and relationships with Stolen Generations members that supports intergenerational healing
- prevention of re-traumatisation for survivors by ensuring appropriate care strategies are built in to the process
- represents an act of good faith by government addressing a pressing outstanding moral issue that will give more meaning and credibility to the government's expressed desire for meaningful reconciliation and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution

#### The benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- creates a supportive framework for Stolen Generations members to seek redress
- equity of response ensuring everyone is provided the same outcomes, compared to the current state by state process, limiting distress for survivors and their families
- restores relationships and ensures Stolen Generations members have access to redress and funds in their life time

## Understanding the impact of intergenerational trauma

In Australia there has been no comprehensive research into how trauma is experienced by Stolen Generations members and their families and the effectiveness of healing and recovery approaches.

Traumatic experiences in childhood have lifelong effects including mental ill health, physical illness, poor educational and employment outcomes, alcohol and drug use, difficulties with forming and maintaining relationships, and increased contact with the criminal justice system. These issues add to the government's welfare budget with many of the statistics associated with these issues worsening every year.

Young people who have had parents, grandparents or great grandparents removed are around 50 per cent more likely to have been charged by police, 30 per cent less likely to report being in good health, 15 per cent more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels and 10 per cent less likely to be employed.

### **Recommendation:**

Fund a national research study on intergenerational trauma to ensure that policy and practice approaches lead to real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Research and evidence on intergenerational trauma could lead to targeted and effective solutions included in all national plans including the National Suicide Strategy, National Plan for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children, National Child Protection Framework and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.

**Budget: \$500,000**

### **The benefits to taxpayers**

- better expenditure of Indigenous affairs budget due to availability of evidence based strategies
- reduced costs to health and social services as the life trajectories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people improve

### **The benefits to the government**

- evidence to develop and implement effective strategies to combat intergenerational trauma
- measures available to support implementation of effective programs and services
- improvement in school retention, employment opportunities and health outcomes through targeted strategic investment of program funds

### **The benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

- improved wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and young people
- improved services based on the evidenced needs of communities
- increased opportunities for economic and social participation
- creates a positive legacy for Stolen Generations that demonstrates they have been listened to by their government which has learned from their experiences and will deliver the long promised commitment to never let this happen again to another Aboriginal child