

Working with the Stolen Generations: understanding trauma

Providing effective **aged care services** to Stolen Generations survivors

This fact sheet provides information for aged care staff to enhance services for Stolen Generations survivors. It will help providers to comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards and meet their obligations to care for Stolen Generations survivors. There is enormous diversity among Stolen Generations survivors, and this fact sheet should be viewed as a starting point only.

Being trauma-aware and informed

Stolen Generations survivors endured trauma and grief as a result of their forcible removal from family, community and culture. Survivors were often subjected to harsh and degrading treatment including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, exploitation and racism, often in institutions.

When interacting with survivors and their families, it's helpful to recognise the trauma many people carry. It's also important to understand that not all identify as Stolen Generations survivors, they may identify as being forcibly removed or taken.

Common triggers for Stolen Generations survivors include reminders of childhood trauma, for example:

- Being touched, particularly without permission
- Clinical settings resembling a dormitory or institution, including certain smells, room or office colour schemes, uniforms and face masks
- Situations that could bring back feelings of the lack of control similar to those experienced when they were taken from their families, including dealing with large bureaucracies like the aged care system
- Being authoritative through tone of voice, body language, facial expressions and/or gestures



Health

- In 2018-19, 61% of Stolen Generations survivors aged 50 and over lived with a disability or restrictive long term condition¹
- In 2018-19, Stolen Generations survivors were 1.4 times as likely to report poor mental health (40%) as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people of the same age who were not removed²

Things to avoid

Making assumptions about people's needs, their level of literacy including health literacy, their healing and who they would like their information shared with

Using medical jargon or acronyms

Shouting, purposefully talking slowly or right in a person's face

Shining torches in people's eyes/faces

Requiring proof of being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Making negative statements that dismiss people's trauma and grief e.g. 'move on'

1. AIHW (2021) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over: updated analysis for 2018-19, Table S1, AIHW, Canberra 2. AIHW (2021) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over: updated analysis for 2018-19, Table S1, Figure 4

How you can help

Survivor-centred, culturally safe practice

- Try to make people as comfortable as possible including building trust, offering options and letting them know what their rights are and that their privacy will be protected. This can be a continuous process as part of maintaining relationships built on trust
- Be guided by each person on whether they want to talk about their past and how much they want to reveal. Use discretion when asking people about traumatic experiences
- If a person discloses they are a survivor or descendant at any point in the client relationship, ask them whether they would like that recorded in their file. Are there things that are important for the other staff in the service to know?
- Talk to Stolen Generations survivors about their individual needs which will vary significantly from person to person
- Ask for permission before doing anything that involves touch and consider alternative arrangements if someone is uncomfortable. Include Stolen Generations survivors in discussions about potential alternative arrangements
- Explain the process and actions involved in an assessment or treatment beforehand, during and afterwards
- Explore cultural and kinship details in people's care plans – for example who visits a survivor regularly, key events/dates of significance
- Be aware that relatives may also be dealing with the impacts of trauma and need additional support. Some survivors may benefit from having a family member stay with them as a carer
- Be aware of the role you have and the power you have and the historical implications of this

Language

- Reframe directions as suggestions wherever possible
- Use plain English and give clear explanations that are tailored to the person
- Be mindful of the language used and be prepared to include survivors in the preparation of any written documentation, such as care plans and reviews

Further information: To learn more about providing effective aged care to Stolen Generations patients view the full version of this fact sheet here <https://healingfoundation.org.au/resources/working-with-stolen-generations/>



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Organisational

Policies

- Ensure transparency of care
- Ensure facilities and services are culturally responsive. For example, incorporate cultural safety requirements and rights into policy, supervision, activity and care design and staff training materials
- Consider providing additional services and healing opportunities for Stolen Generations survivors e.g. art therapy
- Build partnerships with trusted third parties such as local Stolen Generations/Link-Up organisations and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellors to better support Stolen Generations residents/clients and their families
- Check people know their rights, encourage them to speak up if these are not being respected, and support them to do so

Procedures

- Add a tick box to new resident/client forms asking if the person is a Stolen Generations survivor. Include a tick box option of "prefer not to say". This provides an easy way for survivors to identify themselves if they would like to without engaging in a potentially triggering conversation
- Consider informing all prospective residents/clients that the organisation employs both male and female staff and ask if they have a preference
- Consider if a survivor is comfortable speaking to a non-Indigenous staff member
- Where possible, allow additional time and flexibility for delivery of services to Stolen Generations survivors
- Consider whether someone may need support e.g. at an appointment or to complete a lengthy form. Ensure your organisational procedures allow for Stolen Generations advocates to take on this role if preferred by the survivor

Staff capability

- Ensure all staff working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients receive ongoing education about intergenerational trauma, trauma triggers and their impacts
- Provide opportunities and actively encourage all staff to undertake ongoing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety training
- Engage Indigenous-specific trauma informed professionals to assess the impact of grief and trauma and avoid misdiagnosing these as mental health issues

Further resources

