



Executive Summary: ‘Are you waiting for us to die?’ The unfinished business of *Bringing Them Home*

The Healing Foundation issues an urgent call to all political parties, governments, churches and other agencies across Australia to work with Stolen Generations organisations, survivors and The Healing Foundation to finally deliver on the full recommendations and intent of the 1997 landmark *Bringing Them Home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*.

“The test of a nation is not how far it advances its brightest and best; the true test of a nation is how far behind it chooses to leave its vulnerable and most hurt.”
Ian Hamm (Yorta Yorta),
Stolen Generations survivor

83 RECOMMENDATIONS

5

IMPLEMENTED
IN FULL

45

NOT
IMPLEMENTED

12

QUALIFIED
PASS

10

PARTIAL
FAILURE

*including component parts of the 54 recommendations

10 = status unclear 1 = no longer applicable

As shown (left), **only five of the total 83 recommendations have been clearly implemented**, 11 recommendations are categorised as a qualified pass, ten are classified as a partial failure to implement and **45 have failed to be implemented**. The status for ten of the recommendations is unclear, and one is no longer applicable.

This verdict is detailed in the *Discussion paper on the unfinished business of the Bringing Them Home report*, written by Professor Alison Gerard and Maureen Bates-McKay from the University of Canberra and commissioned by The Healing Foundation.

The discussion paper examines the *Bringing Them Home* report and implementation of its recommendations since, drawing on other reviews and reports over the years, including *Bringing Them Home 20 years on: an action plan for healing* (2017) and *Make Healing Happen – It's time to act* (2021).

It finds there has been a poor response at many levels to the *Bringing Them Home* recommendations, with the majority still unimplemented nearly 30 years later.

As the authors conclude:

'Whilst the Bringing Them Home report and the testimonies of the Stolen Generations survivors left an enormous legacy, progress against its recommendations has been woeful. It is hard to conceive that gross human rights violations, documented and bravely retold by survivors in public forums, can be met with systematic inaction in so many areas. Yet that is the confronting reality that exists in Australia.'

Notably, it found that the requirement for a 'whole-of-government policy response with immediate targets, long-term objectives and a continuing commitment' has not eventuated and there has been 'no systematic government response to the needs and rights of Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants'.

Many of the failures are significant and damaging, including the failure by Queensland and Western Australian governments to yet introduce any reparations scheme for Stolen Generations. As the discussion paper's authors note: 'This is manifestly unjust'.

The discussion paper also documents flaws in other reparation schemes, lack of apologies from some police forces and other agencies, and failure to invest properly in cultural safety, healing programs, language and cultural facilities, and research, and to provide fair and just access to records.

54%

OF BRINGING THEM HOME RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE FAILED TO BE IMPLEMENTED.

12%

FURTHER RECEIVE A PARTIAL FAIL.

Urgency to act is driven not just by the moral imperative that the recommendations were made nearly 30 years ago, but also by the need to act swiftly to provide redress and other support to Stolen Generations survivors, given their age and often poorer health.

The Healing Foundation makes 19 recommendations as part of a National Healing Package for Stolen Generations survivors across six areas – on reparations, rehabilitation and research, records, family tracing and reunions, acknowledgements and apologies, education and training, and monitoring and accountability.

They have been developed in response to the next steps recommended in the discussion paper and advice from Stolen Generations Organisations who know first-hand the continuing toll of forced removal of children on Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants.

'Us youth must advocate for their hurt and their trauma, because we're the ones that's also dealing with it and that's another way of changing and healing each other, because acknowledging their hurt is also acknowledging our hurt.' Jacinda Blurton, Stolen Generations descendant.

They acknowledge that failure to systematically implement the *Bringing Them Home* report's recommendations and comprehensively respond to the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and their families has exacerbated intergenerational trauma, causing more pain and distress across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendations for urgent action

The Healing Foundation is calling on all governments to lead a comprehensive National Healing Package for Stolen Generations survivors that includes the following recommendations to be delivered through a systematic response.

Reparations

- 1. The Western Australian Government and Queensland Government must act urgently to deliver reparations to Stolen Generations** in line with the *Bringing Them Home* report, particularly as Stolen Generations are ageing.
- 2. Other jurisdictions (particularly South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales) should revisit existing and closed schemes to examine equity and access issues** due to significant discrepancies in some packages across states and territories.
- 3. All schemes should be co-designed and evaluated with survivors, The Healing Foundation and Stolen Generation Organisations** to ensure best practice and that they capture lessons learned from past reparations packages.
- 4. Governments, churches and other relevant parties should fund and work with survivors, Stolen Generations Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to self-determine the use of institution sites** based on the needs of the community, such as for healing purposes, memorials or museums.



Stolen Generations survivors Aunty Cheryl Phillips (WA) and Uncle Robert West (QLD)

Rehabilitation and research

5. **Adequate and sustainable funding for Stolen Generations Organisations and The Healing Foundation is required to ensure they can continue to provide services and support to survivors, their families and communities.**
6. **Governments and other funders must invest in a skilled and sustainable workforce for Stolen Generations Organisations that can continue to provide culturally safe services and support to Stolen Generations survivors, their families and communities.** There is a critical need for a trauma-informed culturally based healing workforce, including research and social and emotional wellbeing workers, that are recognised and supported by training and resources. Funding and workforce development must also recognise the weight of vicarious trauma and the value of specialist knowledge, and reunion and healing work being done.
7. **Culturally safe and survivor led Elder care services are critical for Stolen Generations survivors and descendants.** All services and programs provided to Stolen Generations survivors must emphasise local Indigenous healing and wellbeing perspectives that are grounded in intergenerational trauma-informed healing.
8. **Governments and other funders must support data and research efforts to meet the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and descendants,** including enabling The Healing Foundation to research the effects of forcible removal

and the ongoing impact on survivors and descendants, to better understand their ongoing needs. Governments that collect data related to Stolen Generations survivors must work in partnership to coordinate the collection and sharing of such data to support research efforts. Funding and support are also required for research driven by Stolen Generations Organisations to support the important work they do and the histories that they hold.

Records, family tracing and reunion

9. **Federal, state and territory governments should establish traineeships and scholarships for Indigenous archivists, genealogists, and historical researchers.** These skills and capacities are particularly critical in and for Stolen Generations Organisations and other relevant community owned record keeping places.
10. **Government commitments to Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and the principles for nationally consistent approaches to accessing Stolen Generations records** held by government record holders and collection agencies (including churches), must be implemented through legislative and institutional policy.
11. **The Federal Government should address the needs of Stolen Generations survivors living outside Australia, including citizenship,** working through the offices of the Ambassador for First Nations People and Minister for Indigenous Australians and alongside The Healing Foundation and Stolen Generations Organisations.



Historical Records Taskforce 2024.



Canberra's National Sorry Day Bridge Walk in support of Stolen Generations survivors.

Acknowledgements and apologies

12. **The Australian Federal Police, ACT Police, Queensland Police Service, Tasmania Police and South Australia Police should act urgently to deliver apologies to Stolen Generations** for harm caused to them, as have police in other state and territory jurisdictions.
13. **Churches and other non-government organisations that have not yet delivered apologies for their roles in harm done to the Stolen Generations should do so urgently, and act to ensure safe and easy access to their records.** There may be a role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander churches in this process, through the Australian Indigenous Ministries and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.
14. **Governments should continue to honour the Stolen Generations by supporting and funding National Apology and Sorry Day events and memorials,** to be conducted under the custodianship of The Healing Foundation and Stolen Generations Organisations.
15. **All levels of government should consider grants and funding opportunities to support Stolen Generations memorials,** in collaboration with local Stolen Generations survivors, communities and organisations.

Education and training

16. **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 forcible removal.** 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.
17. **Governments must mandate the inclusion of working with survivors in training 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. Funding must be made available to support the development of survivor led training.



National Sorry Day Policy Forum panellists discuss the priority needs of ageing Stolen Generations survivors, 2024.

Monitoring and accountability

- 18. Federal, state and territory governments must fund and lead a National Healing Package that involves a systematic pathway of reforms for the recommendations of this report including monitoring and accountability efforts.** This should be done in partnership with The Healing Foundation and Stolen Generations Organisations.
- 19. The Closing the Gap National Agreement, aged care frameworks and other relevant policies must include policies for Stolen Generations survivors and descendants.** These are appropriate avenues for pressing accountability on relevant recommendations and on the 'gap within a gap' identified for Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants.

"It is up to all of us to understand the urgency and the need to ensure that those recommendations are implemented fully – not in five years, not in 10 or 20 or another generation, but now." Shannan Dodson (Yawuru), CEO, The Healing Foundation

See the full report: *'Are you waiting for us to die?': The unfinished business of Bringing Them Home*, <https://healingfoundation.org.au/are-you-waiting-for-us-to-die-the-unfinished-business-of-bringing-them-home/>

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