Australian Government
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

infocus

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over

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In 2014–15 there were an estimated 13,800 surviving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over who had been removed from their families and communities as a result of past government policies.

This group of people, referred to in this report as the 'Stolen Generations aged 50 and over', represent around 14%—or 1 in 7—of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over (estimated in 2014–15), and two-thirds of the total 20,900 estimated population of all survivors of the Stolen Generations.

This report focuses on the characteristics of, and outcomes for, the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over, given their expected special needs for health, disability and housing services.



13,800 people in Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over



1 in 7 Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over were removed from their families



This group is more likely to have been charged by police, have been to jail, have felt discriminated against; and is less likely to own their home and be in good health

AIHW

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience widespread disadvantage and health inequality. This report shows that the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over are more likely to be worse off than other Indigenous Australians of the same age on a range of health and socioeconomic outcomes. This was the case when looking at surveys from 2002, 2008 and 2014–15, and these differences remained, even after accounting for other factors that can influence these outcomes.

In 2014–15, significant effects of being removed from family among people aged 50 and over were estimated for 10 of the 20 selected outcomes. Compared with the reference group, the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over were:

2.8 x as likely to have government payments as their main income source

2.7 x as likely not to be the owner of a home

2.3 x as likely to have ever been formally charged by police

2 x as likely to have ever been incarcerated

2 x as likely not to have good health (measured using a composite index)

1.9 x as likely to be a current smoker

The Stolen Generations aged 50 and over were also more likely to have had problems accessing services, more likely to have experienced discrimination, more likely to have poor self-assessed health, and less likely to be employed (among those aged 50–64), compared with the reference group.

Stolen Generations

The Stolen Generations are the current survivors among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families as a result of government policies across Australian jurisdictions in the 20th century. As described in the Bringing Them Home report (HREOC 1997:31):

> *'... between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970.'*

Using data from surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), it is possible to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were born before 1972 and who have reported being removed from their families. This group can be used as a proxy for the 'Stolen Generations'. Analysis of the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) suggests that in that year there were almost 20,900 survivors of the Stolen Generations (AIHW 2018).

This report focuses on the subgroup of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over (at the time of each survey) who reported having been removed from their families. This group is referred to in this report as the 'Stolen Generations aged 50 and over'.

This In Focus report complements a larger report prepared for The Healing Foundation on the Stolen Generations (AIHW 2018), visit <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/stolen-generations-descendants/contents/table-of-contents>.

We acknowledge the suffering of Stolen Generations members across Australia, including those who have passed on, and thank them for their ongoing courage in sharing their experiences.

Demographic characteristics

There were an estimated 13,829 people in the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over in 2014–15. This represents two-thirds of the total Stolen Generations population (20,891) born before 1972 (AIHW 2018).

These 13,829 people represented 14.3% of all Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over. There was a greater proportion of women (55%) than men (45%), and 3 in 10 people (30%) in the group were aged 65 or over. Most people (77%) lived in non-remote locations, reflecting the distribution of the broader Indigenous population (Table 1).

More than 3 in 4 people in the total Stolen Generations aged 50 and over in 2014–15 were living in New South Wales (4,102 or 30% of the total), Queensland (3,448 or 25%) or Western Australia (2,934 or 21%). About 9% of the total lived in the Northern Territory, 7% in South Australia, 4% in Victoria, and the remaining 4% lived in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Figure 1).

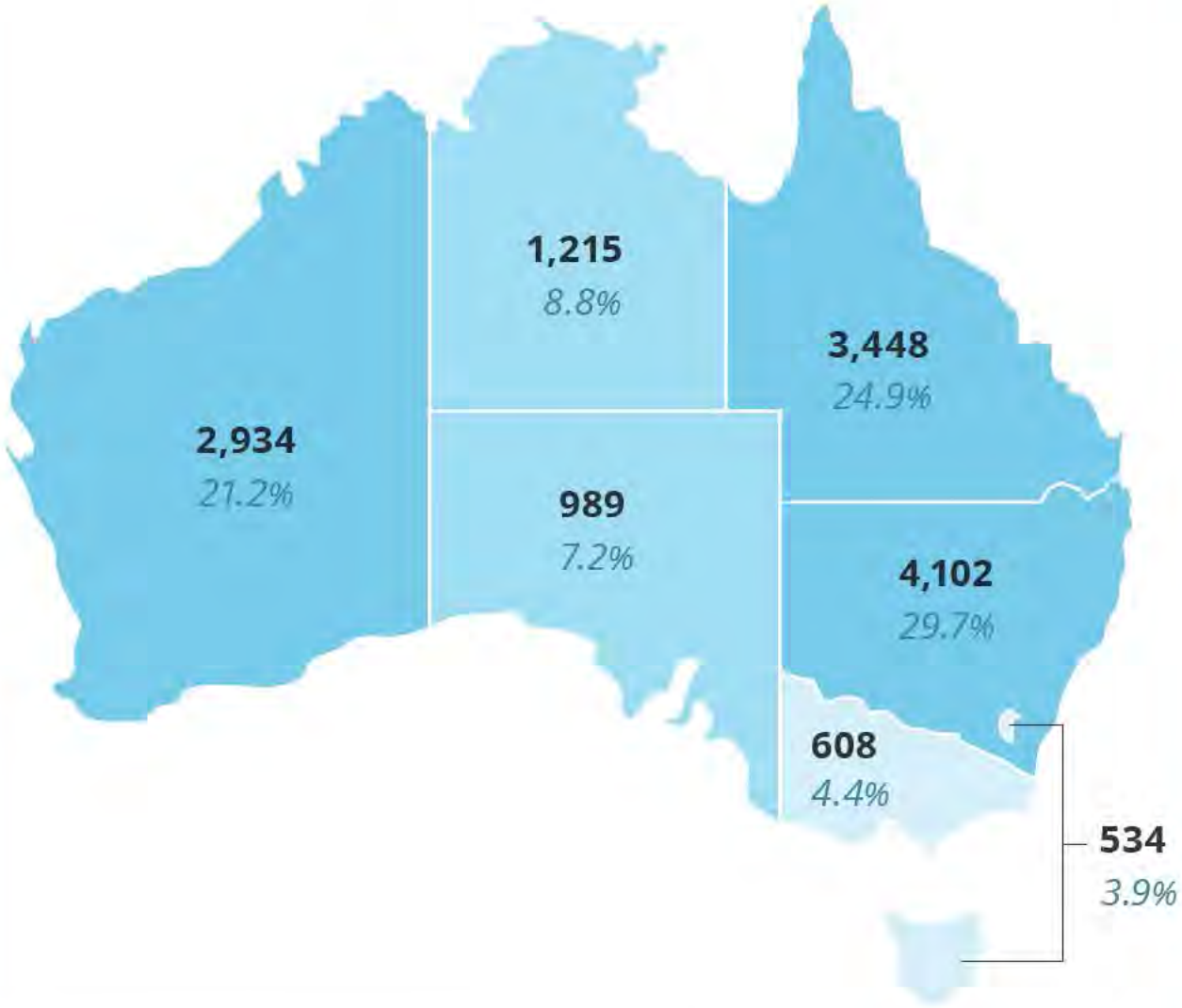
Table 1: Estimated population and proportions of Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over, who reported having been removed from their families, by age, sex and remoteness, 2014–15

	Estimated Indigenous population	Estimated number reporting being removed	Distribution of removed (%)	Percentage who were removed (rate of being removed)
Total 50 and over	**96,591**	**13,829**	..	**14.3**
By age group (years)				
50–64	71,754	9,691	70.1	**13.5**
65 and over	24,837	4,138	29.9	**16.7**
By sex				
Men	45,279	6,222	45.0	**13.7**
Women	51,312	7,607	55.0	**14.8**
By remoteness				
Remote	21,620	3,166	22.9	**14.6**
Non-remote	74,971	10,663	77.1	**14.2**

.. not applicable

Source: AIHW tabulations of ABS 2016.

Figure 1: Number and proportional distribution of the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over, by state or territory, 2014–15



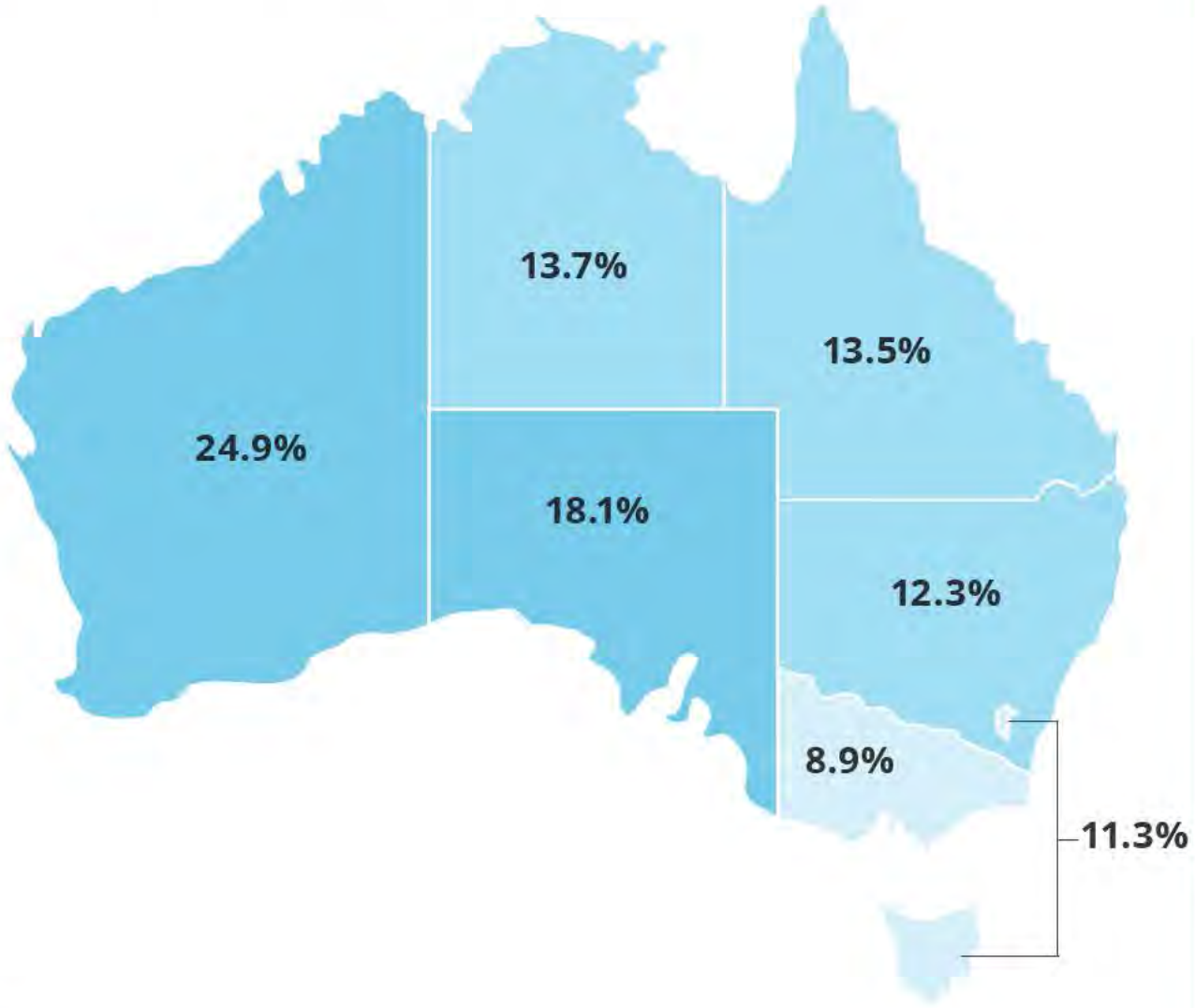
Note: The estimate of the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over for the ACT has been combined with Tasmania due to small numbers reported in the ACT. A similar approach was adopted in AIHW (2018).

Source: AIHW tabulations of ABS 2016.

The distribution of the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over by state and territory of current residence shows large differences in the estimated rates of being removed. The highest rate was estimated for Western Australia, where 25% of all Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over reported they had been removed from their families. The next highest reported rate of removal was in South Australia (18%), followed by the Northern Territory and Queensland (both 14%) (Figure 2).

Around one-third (34%) of the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over in 2014–15 reported they were living alone, a significantly larger proportion than among the reference group aged 50 and over (25%). In both groups, the proportion living alone was higher among those aged 65 and over (39% of the Stolen Generations population and 32% of the reference group). However, given the smaller sample sizes of the 65 and over age group, the difference in these proportions was not statistically significant.

Figure 2: Proportion of the Indigenous population aged 50 and over who were removed, by state or territory, 2014–15



Notes:

1. The reported rates of being removed by jurisdiction are likely to be less reliable than the estimated national rate of removal in this cohort aged 50 and over because of the smaller number of individuals within each jurisdiction who report having been removed in the 2014-15 NATSISS.
2. Estimate of the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over for the ACT has been combined with Tasmania due to small numbers reported in the ACT. A similar approach was adopted in AIHW (2018).

Source: AIHW tabulations of ABS 2016.

How are the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over faring?

This section summarises how the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over are faring in life, drawing on results for 20 selected 'life' outcomes that include socioeconomic status, health and cultural engagement using the 2014–15 NATSISS.

Results for the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over are compared with a reference group of Indigenous Australians also aged 50 and over, but who were not removed from their families. This reference group was selected as a comparison group due to their similar demographic characteristics; the comparisons aim to highlight the differences in outcomes between those older Indigenous Australians who were removed, and those who were not.

Note the result and comparisons in this section look at each outcome individually, and do not adjust for other potential influences on the outcomes. The next section of the report (Effects of having been removed from family) looks at differences that remain between the Stolen Generations and the reference group aged 50 and over even after accounting for differences in other factors that might contribute to the outcomes for each group.

Outcomes in 2014–15

In 2014–15, among the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over:

89% did not have good health, determined using the composite health measure

79% relied on government payments as their main income source

56% had poor self-assessed health

50% had been charged by police at some time in their life

46% were current smokers

38% had felt discriminated against in the last 12 months

76% did not own their home

32% had problems in accessing services in the last 12 months

69% of those aged 50–64 were not employed

20% had been jailed at some time in their life

14% had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years

64% had a household income in the lowest 30% (bottom 3 deciles)

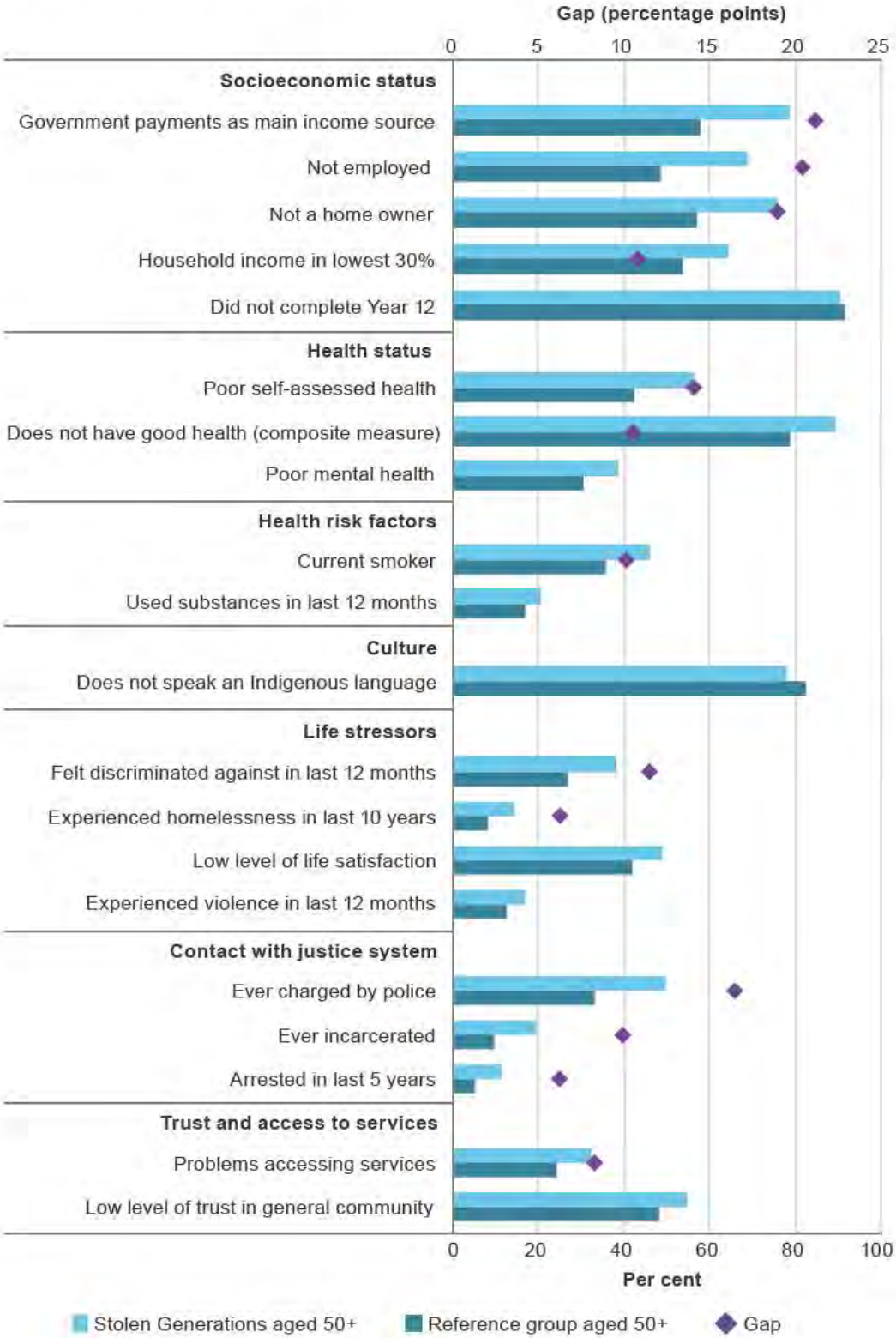
11% had been arrested in the last 5 years.

Differences between the Stolen Generations and the reference group

Differences in socioeconomic outcomes were some of the most pronounced when comparing the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over with their reference group in 2014–15. These include significantly lower rates of home ownership and employment, lower household income and more reliance on government payments (Figure 3).

Significant differences between the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over and the reference group were also observed for poor self-assessed health, not having good health (using a composite measure), smoking, having felt discriminated against in the last 12 months, having been homeless in the last 10 years, having been jailed, arrested, or charged by police, and having problems accessing services (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Selected outcomes among the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over and the reference group, 2014–15



Notes:

1. Gap values in percentage points are to be read from the top horizontal axis and only values that are statistically significant at 5% test level are presented in the figure. Gap values displayed denote that on a specific outcome the rate for the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over is significantly higher than that of the reference group in the same age cohort. When gap values are not shown, the differences are not statistically significant.
2. The composite measure of good health covers multiple dimensions of health to represent overall wellbeing. Further details on the composite health measure calculation are in Appendix C of AIHW (2018).

Source: AIHW analysis of ABS 2016.

Effects of having been removed from family

Many aspects of health and wellbeing are interrelated, and influenced, for example, by a person's experiences of home, community and social institutions (CSDH 2008).

This section presents the same 20 outcomes from the earlier sections of this report and uses the same reference group of Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over as a comparison group. The analysis used in this section (multivariate logistic regression models) aims to account for the way many factors interact and influence each outcome.

As such, the results for each outcome in this section can be interpreted as the estimated effect on an Indigenous person aged 50 and over of having been removed from their families as a child, after accounting for other factors that might influence that outcome.

The results, presented as odds ratios and summarised in Figure 4, show a significantly higher likelihood of adverse outcomes faced by the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over for a wide range of matters.

What do odds ratios show?

- An odds ratio **higher than 1** indicates that the outcome is **more likely** to occur in the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over, than in the reference group of other Indigenous Australians also aged 50 and over.
- An odds ratio of **less than 1** indicates that the outcome is **less likely** to occur in the Stolen Generations population aged 50 and over than in the reference group.
- An odds ratio **of 1** indicates **no difference** between the two groups.

The further away the odds ratio is from 1, the stronger the effect of being removed. Standard statistical procedures are applied to test if the estimated odds ratios for the effects of being removed are statistically significantly greater, or less, than 1.

The analyses used here are the same as those used in the larger report (AIHW 2018) which also contains an explanation of the methods (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/stolen-generations-descendants/contents/table-of-contents>).

Worse life outcomes compared with other Indigenous Australians

In 2014–15, the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over experienced higher odds of an adverse outcome in 10 of the 20 selected measures, when compared with the Indigenous reference group aged 50 and over. These are marked in gold in Figure 4. For example, they were 2.8 times as likely to have government payments as their main income, twice as likely to have ever been incarcerated, and 1.9 times as likely to be a current smoker.

Two other outcomes showed marginally significant effects, marked in pink in Figure 4.

For the remaining 8 outcomes, the effect of being removed was not statistically significant when compared with the reference group.

Overall, these results reflect the greater adversity experienced by the entire cohort of the Stolen Generations population as reported in AIHW (2018).

Figure 4: Odds ratio estimates of the effects of being removed for those aged 50 and over, on 20 selected outcomes, 2014–15



Note: The colour scheme indicates whether the estimated odds ratio (OR) is close to 1 or statistically different from 1 at the 5% and 10% test levels.

Gold denotes the OR is significantly different from 1 at the conventional 5% test level, consistent with the 95% confidence interval.

Pink denotes the OR is significantly different from 1 at the 10% level, consistent with the wider 90% confidence interval.

Light blue means the estimated OR is not significantly different from 1 (meaning the outcome measured does not vary significantly between those who were removed from their families and the reference group in this age cohort who were not removed).

Source: AIHW analysis of ABS 2016.

Consistently worse on 7 life outcomes from 2002 to 2014–15

Looking over time, the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over experienced significant negative effects of being removed on 7 life outcomes, in at least 2 of the 3 surveys from 2002 to 2014–15 (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of significant negative effects of being removed, people aged 50 and over, measured in 2002, 2008 and 2014–15

Year	Significant negative effects of removal for	Life outcomes with a significant negative effect of removal in at least 2 of the 3 surveys
2002	4 of 11 outcomes	• Not owning a home • Having ever been charged by police • Having felt discriminated against in the last 12 months • Having ever been incarcerated • Being a current smoker • Having poor self-assessed health • Having experienced violence in the last 12 months
2008	6 of 17 outcomes	
2014–15	10 of 20 outcomes	

Source: AIHW analysis of ABS 2010a, 2010b, 2016.

Only one outcome showed significant differences in all 3 surveys, with a higher likelihood for the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over not to be home owners. Having a higher likelihood of being ever charged by police was statistically significant in 2008 and 2014–15 and marginally significant in 2002.

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