Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

Stolen Generations

Joint Submission
The Healing Foundation
Australian Association of Gerontology Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group

10 September 2019

"Given the spasmodic response to date in addressing the needs of the Stolen Generations, whose life journey has, by any measure, been a difficult one based on the trauma of childhood removal, it is only proper that we do not make the journey into ageing unnecessarily painful or burdensome.

While it is too late for many of the Stolen Generations, we need to get on with this unfinished business and provide for the specific needs of this ageing population, in a way that acknowledges their legacy of social and economic disadvantage.

We need to focus our efforts on breaking the trauma cycle, to relieve the stresses of ageing for the Stolen Generations, otherwise we will not only fail again, there will also be additional and unnecessary costs to the Australian taxpayer."

Ian Hamm, Chair Stolen Generations Reference Group.

About us

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions like the forced removal of children from their families. Under the leadership of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board, The Healing Foundation works with communities to create a place of safety, providing an environment for Stolen Generations survivors and their families to speak for themselves, tell their own stories and be in charge of their own healing. The Healing Foundation is leading the way in research in to Indigenous healing. Studies are unique, valuable and highly regarded both locally and internationally.

Established in 1964, the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) is Australia's peak national body linking professionals working across the multidisciplinary fields of ageing. AAG's purpose is to improve the experience of ageing through connecting research, policy and practice. AAG has over 1,450 members, with 4.2 per cent identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

AAG's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group (ATSIAAG) is formed from AAG members who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. ATSIAAG reports to the AAG Board and assists in building evidence regarding gaps, challenges and opportunities, as well as providing guidance and advice on all issues related to the ageing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The ATSIAAG achieves its objectives through consultation and the development of partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, as well as researchers, practitioners, policy experts and organisations.

Introduction

This submission has been prepared jointly by The Healing Foundation and the AAG ATSIAAG. It draws on comprehensive and evidence-based work undertaken by both organisations. **This submission complements and should be read in conjunction with the AAG ATSIAAG *Response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety* dated 26 June 2019 (Attachment 1).**

The *Actions to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A guide for aged care providers* which was developed under the *Aged Care Diversity Framework* include the following actions for Stolen Generations: [1]

- Be particularly sensitive to the complex needs of Stolen Generations survivors.
- Plan ahead for the provision of culturally appropriate trauma-informed care for members of the Stolen Generations. Ensure aged care workers understand the meaning of 'healing' and the risks of re-traumatising members of this community.
- Co-design facilities, services and programs for vulnerable consumers such as members of the Stolen Generations.

This submission is intended to assist the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety to address inequities of access and outcomes for Stolen Generations. It highlights the key challenges, outlines principles for improvement, and recommends solutions that will lead to better quality, safety and outcomes for Stolen Generations entering the aged care system.

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[1] Department of Health, Actions to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, February 2019 https://agedcare.health.gov.au/actions-to-support-older-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people

AAG Australian Association of Gerontology | ATSIAAG Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group

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Stolen Generations profile

The Stolen Generations are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed as children from their families and communities through race-based policies set up by state and Commonwealth governments from 1910 to the 1970s. They suffered profound trauma, lost their connections to family and culture, and were often institutionalised and abused.

There is a significant body of research, including The Healing Foundation's own experience, which shows that the risk factors that undermine Indigenous wellbeing are symptomatic of, and exacerbated by, the collective and Intergenerational Trauma stemming from colonisation, forced removals and other government policies.

There is a clear and compelling case for urgent action to ensure that we provide for the complex and specific needs of ageing Stolen Generations, and do so in a way that acknowledges their legacy of social and economic disadvantage, and ensures that their journey into ageing is not unnecessarily painful or burdensome.

In November 2018, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a report on *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over* commissioned by The Healing Foundation (**Attachment 2**). [2] The report detailed for the first time the characteristics of Stolen Generations aged over 50, and complemented an earlier, more detailed demographic report about Stolen Generations more broadly.[3] Together, these reports detail the extent of disproportionate disadvantage of Stolen Generations due to the significant trauma they experienced.

There were an estimated 13,829 Stolen Generations aged 50 and over in 2014-15. This represents two-thirds of the total Stolen Generations population born before 1972 (20,891 people). Stolen Generations aged 50 and over comprise around one in seven of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over. **By 2023, all Stolen Generations will be aged 50 and over, and thus eligible for government aged care support.** It is therefore essential that the aged care needs of this group are carefully and appropriately considered by government, policy makers and service providers.

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience widespread disadvantage and health inequality. For example, the 2014–15 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* (cited in AIHW 2019[4]) found that among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over, 29 per cent (approximately 27,500 people) reported experiencing unfair treatment in the last 12 months due to being Indigenous, and 13 per cent (approximately 13,000 people) had avoided situations in the last 12 months as a result of past unfair treatment due to being Indigenous.

The AIHW data reveals that Stolen Generations aged 50 and over are more likely to be worse off than other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age on a range of health and socioeconomic outcomes. The AIHW calculated the impact of removal on Stolen Generations aged 50 and over, compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people of the same age who were not removed, as follows:

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[2] AIHW 2018 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over*. Cat no IHW 199, Canberra https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/stolen-generation-aged-50-and-over/related-material

[3] AIHW 2018 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations and descendants: numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes*. Cat no IHW 195. Canberra https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/stolen-generations-descendants/contents/table-of-contents

[4] AIHW 2019 ***Insights into vulnerabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over***. Cat. no. IHW 218. Canberra https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/vulnerabilities-aboriginal-torres-strait-50-full/contents/table-of-contents

2.8 x	as likely to rely on government payments as their main source of income
2.7 x	as likely to not own their own home
2.3 x	as likely to have ever been charged by police
2.1 x	as likely to have ever been arrested
2.0 x	as likely to have ever been incarcerated
1.8 x	as likely to experience problems accessing services
1.8 x	as likely to be unemployed
1.6 x	as likely to have felt discriminated against in the previous 12 months
1.5 x	as likely to report poor self-assessed health
1.5 x	as likely to be in the lowest 30 per cent household income band

Source – AIHW (2018) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over, published November 2018

Key challenges for Stolen Generations

In June 2019, The Healing Foundation and AAG ASTISAAG convened a national aged care forum attended by Stolen Generations, researchers, policy-makers and service providers. The forum focused on providing Stolen Generations with an opportunity to articulate their own needs and solutions in relation to aged care. Their valuable feedback forms the basis for the challenges, principles and recommendations included in this submission. A copy of the *Stolen Generations Aged Care Forum Report* dated August 2019 is provided at **Attachment 3**.

Key challenges in providing aged care for Stolen Generations include:

Fear and anxiety: Stolen Generations have reported high levels of fear and anxiety about losing control over their lives. Some Stolen Generations survivors shared examples of their family members *'suffering in silence'* due to a fear of asking for help. Other members reported the *'fear of another removal, being re-institutionalised and reliving their experience of trauma'*. A prominent message from Stolen Generation survivors was a *'fear about having to tell their story of trauma over and over again to access proper support.'*

Reliance on non-family care: Many Stolen Generations survivors do not have families who can care for them. They may be disconnected from their families and reconnection/integration has been difficult for them. Many of their families may be struggling with their own Intergenerational Trauma. Some Stolen Generations survivors are homeless.

Low awareness about services: The forum identified that Stolen Generations survivors may not be aware of aged care services that exist, how to initiate obtaining services via My Aged Care, or about their rights in relation to those services. Some Stolen Generations also report a reluctance to deal directly with government agencies or speak up against authorities due to past experiences of discrimination and institutionalisation. This may mean that they are not accessing services or are not complaining about negative experiences.

Assessment pathways and re-traumatisation: The existing assessment pathways through My Aged Care and regional and local assessments commonly involve asking Stolen Generations survivors to tell their story multiple times to people they have not met before. This is likely to risk re-traumatising Stolen Generations.

Aged care workers are not trauma-informed: Aged care providers, policy makers and program managers are unaware of the trauma that Stolen Generations survivors experience and are unlikely to be trained in trauma-informed, healing-focused care. They risk re-traumatising Stolen Generations by not having the relevant knowledge, skills and experience to effectively engage with vulnerable clients.

Poor access to services: Stolen Generations survivors aged 50 and over are 1.8 times more likely than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age who were not removed to report having problems accessing services. The problem is further amplified in rural and remote areas where services simply do not exist or are serviced by under-resourced outreach models.

Aboriginal community-controlled services have limitations: Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled aged care services are not readily available, and waiting lists are long. Most are situated in remote areas, whereas most Stolen Generations survivors live in non-remote areas. Some Stolen Generations feel they are treated as 'add-ons' rather than a central focus of these services.

Principles for improving aged care for Stolen Generations

Key principles for improving aged care for Stolen Generations include:

Urgency: All Stolen Generations (20,891 people) will be eligible for aged care support by 2023. It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a lower life expectancy than the general population. The AIHW analysis confirms that Stolen Generations face serious and complex health and wellbeing challenges. We must act urgently to address their aged care needs.

Self-determination: Self-determination is a fundamental element of healing for Stolen Generations. Appointing Stolen Generations to advisory, decision-making and governance positions will enable them to influence the design and delivery of aged care services. Stolen Generations survivors should be appointed to the boards/committees of mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care service providers, peak aged care sector bodies and government aged care advisory bodies.

Co-design: Involving Stolen Generation survivors in the design, implementation and monitoring of facilities, services and programs will contribute to a more tailored and responsive aged care system that better responds to the complex needs of Stolen Generations. It will also improve transparency and accountability for service providers.

Choice: The diversity of experience and complexity of needs of Stolen Generations means that no single model of care will be universally appropriate. Stolen Generations survivors require services and models of delivery that encompass flexibility and avoid assumptions – not everyone will want an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service; some will have families who can assist, but not all; not everyone has re-connected to Country. Sharing information and collaborating across service providers will enable Stolen Generations to have better access to and choice of services.

Trauma-informed: All parts of the aged care system need to be culturally safe, trauma-informed and provide healing-focused care that recognises the diversity of experience and complex needs of Stolen Generations. In particular, the assessment process needs urgent improvement and communication systems need to enable Stolen Generations survivors to only tell their story once. Quality standards and accreditation frameworks must clearly articulate what trauma-informed care entails in aged care.

Workforce development: Training and accreditation in trauma-informed and healing-focused care should be compulsory for management and staff in aged care. The Healing Foundation's *Submission to the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce* dated March 2018 provides detailed information about workforce development to meet the needs of Stolen Generations **(Attachment 4).**

Trusted support organisations: Support should be available from (or in partnership with) organisations that are trusted by individual Stolen Generations survivors – these may not be recognised under current regulatory frameworks. An important step is to resource and delegate Stolen Generations (and other trusted) organisations as aged care system navigators and assessors. Many of these organisations already play a similar role but are not formally recognised or resourced to do so.

Holistic wrap-around services: Aged care services should provide holistic wrap-around support to Stolen Generations. Many do not have the same kinship networks as other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or Intergenerational Trauma may reduce families' capacity to support ageing Stolen Generations. Wrap-around services are required to address the complex needs of Stolen Generations, which may include other sectors such as housing, disability and mental health services.

Resourcing: Funding programs need to recognise that the disproportionate disadvantage and complex needs experienced by Stolen Generations require additional resources to address. Incentives are needed to ensure that service providers will (and can) address these more complex needs (for example, by resourcing additional time for delivering services to Stolen Generations), as standard program provisions will result in market failure for clients with high needs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were formulated at the Stolen Generations Aged Care Forum in Melbourne on 5 June 2019:

1. Government(s) should urgently fund trusted Stolen Generations organisations to expand their capacity to support ageing Stolen Generations and their families/carers to access appropriate aged care and wrap around services.

2. Government(s) should urgently fund specialist Stolen Generations advocacy services. Evidence and demographic data should inform a placed based approach to prioritising where resources are most needed. Where possible, advocates should be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and have existing links to targeted communities to enable trust and swift results.

3. Government(s) should urgently consider investment in incentives for existing Aged Care service providers to improve their capacity and willingness to service Stolen Generations clients. The incentives would enable service providers to invest in tailoring their service delivery models and ensure that they deliver culturally responsive and trauma-informed service models.

4. The Aged Care Assessment process for Stolen Generations survivors needs to be reviewed and urgently modified so that it doesn't re-trigger or exacerbate trauma for vulnerable clients. This should be undertaken via a genuine process of co-design with Stolen Generations survivors and include in scope minimum standards that can be tracked and measured to ensure compliance.

5. Governance mechanisms need to be established that provide Stolen Generations with a strong voice and opportunity to provide ongoing strategic advice to government in relation to aged care policy, program and service delivery models.

The Healing Foundation and AAG ATSIAAG propose the following additional recommendations, based on more than 10 years of dedicated work supporting Stolen Generations:

6. An Aboriginal workforce development strategy needs to be developed and implemented throughout the aged care sector as a matter of urgency. The strategy needs to focus on recruitment, training, retention and upskilling of workers to build a dynamic culturally responsive and trauma-informed workforce. The strategy should include minimum targets for front line Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, informed by an evidence-based approach (including demographic profiling to identify priority communities where demand is high).
7. A dedicated cultural awareness and trauma-informed training package needs to be developed and rolled out urgently to increase the capacity of aged care service providers to provide quality and safe services to Stolen Generations survivors. The training needs to be accredited and mandated to eliminate unsafe and harmful practice.

Attachments

1. AAG ATSIAAG *Response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety,* 12 August 2019
2. AIHW 2018, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over*. Cat no IHW 199, Canberra
3. The Healing Foundation and AAG ATSIAAG *Stolen Generations Aged Care Forum Final Report,* August 2019
4. The Healing Foundation *Submission to Aged Care Workforce Strategy*, Department of Health, March 2018

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