**SUPPORTING HEALING IN THE REFRESH OF THE CLOSING THE GAP AGENDA**

**2019-20 Pre-Budget Submission of the Healing Foundation**

**31 JANUARY 2019**

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**PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING TRAUMA IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES CAUSED BY THE FORCED REMOVAL OF CHILDREN, OTHER HISTORICAL WRONGS, AND UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES INCLUDING LOSS OF CULTURE AND ENTRENCHED INEQUALITY**

1. **Who we are**

The Healing Foundation is a small national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by the forced removal of children from their families and other unique circumstances, linked to the legacy of colonisation, including Indigenous peoples’ loss of control over all aspects of their lives. It is a highly regarded organisation that responds to the unique circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been dispossessed from their land and culture and whose life outcomes remain well below those of non-Indigenous Australians. It came about after the National Apology in 2009, with the strong support of the Federal Government that resourced a national consultation process led by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team. The Healing Foundation is independent of any government and run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Federal Government initially committed $26.4 million to the Foundation over four years in the 2008-09 Budget to establish the Healing Foundation to provide practical and innovative healing services as well as education, training and research on Indigenous healing. A second 4 year commitment to $26.4 million was made in the 2013-14 Budget. However, a funding agreement was not finalised and following the change of Federal Government, the Healing Foundation’s funding has been continued under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) managed by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The current short-term funding agreement offered by the Department expires on 30 June 2019. Accordingly, the Healing Foundation proposes that long term funding to increase the effectiveness of its healing work ought to be a priority for the Federal Government’s 2019-20 Budget.

The Healing Foundation is led by an all Indigenous Board made of distinguished achievers including the Chair, Professor Steve Larkin (CEO of the Batchelor Institute), and Deputy Chair, Ms Leann Wilson (a director of Regional Economic Solutions which supports economic development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). Its CEO, Richard Weston, is a descendant of the Meriam people of the Torres Strait who has worked in Indigenous Affairs for more than 20 years, 14 of these in Indigenous controlled health services. The Foundation has 23 staff, 61% of whom are Indigenous. Because of its focus on the Stolen Generations, it has a Stolen Generations Reference Group made up of survivors (including its Chairperson, Ian Hamm, a Yorta Yorta man), to guide its Stolen Generations work and particularly to make sure that its programs are effectively meeting the unique healing needs of Stolen Generations members and their families. It has also established a Youth Advisory Group comprised of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to advise the Healing Foundation on a range of youth healing initiatives, including the development of a national youth healing framework.

The success of the Healing Foundation is undeniable. It has supported more than 175 culturally strong, community led Indigenous healing projects around Australia and assisted more than 45,000 community members and 7000 Stolen Generations survivors along their healing journey. The Healing Foundation has provided nearly 500 organisations with grants for local commemorative events. Positive results are being seen at the community level, including: more than 70% of Stolen Generations members that have participated in projects reporting an improved ability to care for their grief, and nearly 80% reporting an increased sense of belonging and connection to culture.

But most importantly it has succeeded in demonstrating that healing programs and services are essential for Closing the Gap. This has been recognised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and Australian Governments alike. In February 2018, a Special Gathering of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians presented the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) with a statement setting out priorities for a new Closing the Gap agenda. One of those priority areas was Healing. COAG agreed that all of the priority areas identified by the Special Gathering were important. In its Statement on the Closing the Gap Refresh released after its meeting on 12 December 2018, COAG recognised specifically the need to address healing and trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It indicated that healing and trauma was one of the cross system priorities for all policy areas of a refreshed Closing the Gap agenda.

The Healing Foundation agrees with COAG. Moreover, it is not possible to respond to COAG’s priority for healing and trauma to be a key part of the Closing the Gap agenda without a national organisation that supports healing services and research and recognises that trauma is inter-generational and affects far more Indigenous people than just the Stolen Generations.

1. **The Proposal**

The Healing Foundation’s proposal comprises 4 measures to be funded over 4 years starting on 1 July 2019 in order to give certainty to its operations. The measures respond to COAG’s agreement that healing and trauma should be explicitly included in the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda as a cross system priority for all policy areas. The measures also respond to the landmark analysis of the demographic profile and outcomes of the Stolen Generations conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which found that survivors of the Stolen Generations continue to experience alarming levels of social and economic disadvantage and poor health and cultural outcomes compared to other Indigenous Australians[[1]](#footnote-1). The 4 measures are:

1. Sustaining the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to support healing and service delivery initiatives for the Stolen Generations, descendants and other groups impacted by intergenerational trauma including youth;

2. Developing a national team of 7 Indigenous service navigators, one in each State and the Northern Territory, to support Stolen Generations survivors and descendants in securing much improved access to Commonwealth funded mainstream programmes including the National Disability Insurance Scheme, using the Families and Communities Programme (FCP) of the Department of Social Services;

3. Boosting the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program to enable it to support appropriate aged care services for Stolen Generations survivors including employing 7 Indigenous Aged Care Connectors in each State and the Northern Territory and allocating high end home care packages that meet their specific and complex needs; and

4. Establishing a new Communities for Healing Program.

**3. Implementing the proposal**

1. Sustaining the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to support healing and service delivery initiatives for the Stolen Generations and other groups impacted by intergenerational trauma.

It is critical that the Healing Foundation is able to secure long term funding to provide the stability to enhance the effectiveness of its healing work. It is proposed that the Commonwealth grant fund the Healing Foundation at existing levels, $6.6 million per annum, for the next 4 years starting on 1 July 2019. It is important to note that the Healing Foundation’s remit extends to supporting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have been impacted upon by inter-generational trauma, not just Stolen Generations survivors and descendants. However, it was established after the National Apology and its focus remains on this group.

The Foundation is a national not-for-for profit company. As part of the Council of Australian Governments’ Closing the Gap strategy, funding was provided by the Commonwealth starting in 2009 to address the harmful legacy of colonisation, in particular the history of child removal that continues to affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It has been a good partner to the Commonwealth in responding to the needs of the Stolen Generations, particularly in achieving more stability following a period of considerable litigation and political conflict concerning the Stolen Generations across Australia. The Healing Foundation’s approach has been responsible and balanced, and meanwhile it has conducted research to build an evidence base to support best practice in Indigenous healing linked to inter-generational trauma. Increasingly, the Healing Foundation has been a major policy adviser to the Commonwealth on the needs of the Stolen Generations and the importance of an evidence based healing approach in responding to inter-generational trauma. The Foundation has complied with all of its funding and incorporation requirements since 2009, including producing annual unqualified audits that are included in public annual reports.

The task of repairing the damage caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were removed from their families, and their descendants, is far from over. In addition, their needs are changing as they age and that poses a new and complex challenge to the Commonwealth’s service system. The Commonwealth has taken a national leadership role for good reasons including that a national approach is needed, it has responsibility in the Northern Territory and because the very poor outcomes of the Stolen Generations are making it even harder to close the gap nationally. For the Commonwealth to continue to do this will require a partnership with the Healing Foundation. However, the Foundation’s role will need to expand to supporting the Commonwealth’s mainstream service system to be more responsive to the Stolen Generations and their descendants by becoming trauma informed.

A key deliverable will be the development and implementation of a National Intergenerational Trauma Strategy to underpin all existing and future plans and strategies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. A national strategy will provide an understanding of the role Intergenerational Trauma plays in prolonging social, health, wellbeing and economic problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and will give Governments the evidence they needs to invest in a more solution focused way. It is premised on the Healing Foundation’s research undertaken since 2009 that trauma and healing strategies must be implemented alongside enablers like employment and education in order for traumatised people, such as the Stolen Generations, to transform their lives.

2. Developing a national team of 7 Indigenous service navigators, one in each State and the Northern Territory, to support Stolen Generations survivors and descendants in securing much better access to Commonwealth funded mainstream programmes including the National Disability Insurance Scheme using the Families and Communities Programme (FCP) of the Department of Social Services.

The Families and Communities Programme (FCP) of the Department of Social Services provides support in accessing mainstream services for families, children, young people, volunteers, refugees, migrants and other individuals with special circumstances. It is proposed to supplement the FCP to respond to the special circumstances of the Stolen Generations survivors and descendants, and to enable it to grant fund the Healing Foundation to build and sustain a national team of Indigenous service navigators. The navigators will be hosted by agreed Link-Up and Stolen Generations organisations in the different jurisdictions. However, a national team supported by the Healing Foundation will produce a better outcome because it will allow for the navigators to have a high standard of training including to be trauma informed, and to be able to provide a consistent and high level of service in the different jurisdictions.

Key deliverables will include building a baseline of current access to services and barriers, particularly Commonwealth services, which will enable improvements to be measured over time.

3. Boosting the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program to enable it to support appropriate aged care services for Stolen Generations survivors including employing up 7 Indigenous Aged Care Connectors in Stolen Generations organisations and allocating 70 additional high end home care packages a year that meet their specific and complex needs

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program supports culturally appropriate aged care services and so far has focussed on remote needs. However, it should also be able to be used as a vehicle for supporting Stolen Generations who have unique and complex aged care needs. In this case, the Healing Foundation believes that the funding for the Indigenous Aged Care Connectors should be allocated to the Healing Foundation to establish and train a national team made of up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are hosted in local stolen generation organisations where there is a high need for appropriate aged care. It is also proposed that 70 high end aged care packages are quarantined from the national allocation each year to be used to enable Stolen Generations survivors to be supported at home rather than having to enter into an aged care facility. Their circumstances are unique in having been put into an institution in brutal circumstances as children and the Healing Foundation research indicates that many do not want to be forced into going into another institution at the end of their life. However, there are insufficient high end aged care packages available nationally and a significant waiting list exists which Aboriginal people find difficult to access. In these circumstances, we believe the Government needs to act now to quarantine a small allocation annually for Stolen Generations survivors which we think will have significant public support.

Key deliverables include improving access and the quality of aged care for Stolen Generations.

1. Establish a Communities for Healing Program

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, healing is a holistic process, which addresses mental, physical, emotional and spiritual needs and involves connections to culture, family and land. Healing works best when solutions are culturally strong, developed and driven at the local level, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is proposed that the Healing Foundation be funded to support young people and their families to address the devastating impacts of intergenerational trauma. [[2]](#footnote-2) To implement the programme, the Healing Foundation will use its proven co-design methodology to respond to trauma that is based on international evidence and considerable community experience. The Healing Foundation’s evidence demonstrates that effective community healing should comprise a number of key elements:

a) developed to address issues in the local community;

b) driven by local leadership;

c) have a developed theory and evidence base;

d) combine Western methodologies and Indigenous healing;

e) understand the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma and grief;

f) build individual, family and community capacity;

g) be proactive rather than reactive; and

h) incorporate strong evaluation frameworks

The key deliverable will be establishing and sustaining the program in 4 communities that the Healing Foundation’s research demonstrates have serious inter-generational trauma in NSW, Qld, WA and SA. The identified communities will also be ones where the Healing Foundation already has strong community relationships and existing partnerships.

1. **Measuring progress and success**

UNSW’s Institute of Social Sciences in its qualitative analysis concerning the contemporary experience and needs of Stolen Generations (2017)[[3]](#footnote-3) identified improved data, monitoring and evaluation as a critical need frequently mentioned in the literature. The Healing Foundation proposes that an index of distress should be developed in partnership with Australian Governments that enables the impact of initiatives to support the Stolen Generations, their descendants and other groups impacted by inter-generational trauma to be measured over time. In addition, in the 3rd year of the Healing Foundation’s proposal, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) ought to be asked to update its 2018 analysis on the demographics and outcomes of Stolen Generations. Indigenous Affairs in the Federal Government should then arrange an independent evaluation of the entire proposal to enable evidence based decisions to be made about future funding.   
 **5. Estimated Cost**

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| **Measure** | **Annual Cost** | **4xYear total** |
| 1.Sustaining the Healing Foundation | $6.6M | $26.4M |
| 2.Indigenous Service Navigators | 7x$200,000 = $1.4M | $1.4Mx4 = $5.6M |
| 3.Aged Care | 7x$200,000 = $1.4M  70X$55,000 = $3.850M | $1.4Mx4 = $5.6M  $3.850MX4 = $15.4m |
| 4.Communities for Healing Program | $4x$250,000 = $1M | $1Mx4 = $4M |
| Total | $12.85 | $51.40M |

**6. Reasons for Government to support**

1. What is the problem or issue that the proposal seeks to address?

The research of the Healing Foundation has demonstrated beyond doubt that trauma, whether caused by the removal of children from their families in the era of the Stolen Generations, or because of rapid cultural and social change that leads to confusion or because of high rates of family violence, is a major factor influencing life outcomes of Indigenous Australians. There is also now very strong evidence that the trauma is being passed onto next generation[[4]](#footnote-4)s.

To that extent, the findings of the AIHW’s report on the demographics and selected outcomes of the Stolen Generations including descendants and a second report recently published for survivors aged 50 and over come as no surprise[[5]](#footnote-5). The AIHW’s primary report estimates that in 2018 there are 17,150 survivors of the Stolen Generations, most of whom live in non-remote areas in New South Wales (around 6,200, or 30% of the total), Western Australia (around 4,600, or 22%) and Queensland (around 4,400, or 21%). On average, around 56% are women and 44% are men.

The AIHW analysis, as already noted, also found that survivors of the Stolen Generations continue to experience alarming levels of social and economic disadvantage and poor health and cultural outcomes compared to other Indigenous Australians. The extent of the problem can be found in some of AIHW’s key findings including that:

1. Survivors of the Stolen Generations are more likely to have experienced discrimination, be unemployed or not own a home, and less likely to report good general health;

2. 1.7 times more likely to experience violence compared to those who were not removed;

3. 66% of survivors reported a disability or a restrictive long term condition and 15% live with a severe or profound disability;

4. 33% of survivors have problems accessing services; and

5. Almost 66% of survivors had household incomes in the bottom 30% (1.4 times the rate of those not removed).

AIHW’s analysis also demonstrates that the story of alarming disadvantage in poorer health, socio-economic and cultural outcomes doesn’t end with the Stolen Generations survivors. The disadvantage at higher levels than the rest of the Indigenous population extends to the descendants of the survivors. There are some 114,800 descendants, and AIHW compared their outcomes with a reference group of Indigenous people who reported neither being removed themselves from their own families, nor having any relatives removed. Having a similar demographic profile to that of survivors, according to AIHW, descendants were still 1.6 times as likely not to have ‘good health’ and 1.5 times as likely to have problems accessing services in the last 12 months There is strong evidence for concluding that this is because the burden of trauma experienced by survivors, caused by their removal from families, their culture and land, is being passed onto new generations.

Ageing of Stolen Generations survivors is a significant concern. The AIHW report confirms that approximately 66% of the Stolen Generations were aged 50 and over in 2014-15, and all survivors will be eligible for aged care by 2023. Stolen Generations survivors, however, have consistently raised their fears to the Healing Foundation about moving into residential aged care, a reasonable reaction for people who were institutionalised in brutal circumstances. UNSW’s Institute of Social Sciences found from its analysis of the literature surrounding Stolen Generations that it was not just that survivors may be reluctant to go into a nursing home but that many may not have family to support them at home.

It is evident from the research of the Healing Foundation that the aged care system does not have the capacity to respond effectively to the complex needs of Stolen Generation survivors, the majority of whom are also dependent on Centrelink payments. Accepting that many will ultimately need to go into government funded residential aged care, others with more support could remain at home.

The contemporary experiences of Stolen Generations obviously include trauma, grief and loss. Again, UNSW’s Institute of Social Sciences analysis is illuminating in finding that the literature suggests that the scope and impact of this is not well understood. That includes insufficient understanding and acknowledgement of the long term impacts on communities including the transmission of the trauma to descendants and carers. The Institute confirms that a priority need recognised in publications about the Stolen Generations is healing including collective healing and healing centres. In fact, the Institute says in its analysis that:

“Healing and the forms it should take to best address the needs of Stolen Generations members was the issue most raised” and

“Need for a holistic interpretation of healing involving families and communities as well as individuals and which incorporates a broad range of social and cultural activities”.

1. What outcomes are expected?

If the proposal is funded, the Healing Foundation believes that healing as a key component to Closing the Gap can be sustained and enhanced including being able to fund long term initiatives for communities and building the capacity of service providers to respond to inter-generational trauma. The impact on those suffering trauma will include improved social and emotional well-being.

AIHW’s analysis provides the opportunity to significantly enhance how Australia responds to the needs and priorities of Stolen Generations. For the Healing Foundation, it’s critical to focus not just on survivors but descendants of the Stolen Generations. This is because the research conducted by the Healing Foundation demonstrates that the trauma of Stolen Generations is being passed onto new generations and is a major cause of very poor social and health outcomes. It is also critical to address the unique needs of the Stolen Generations, including improving their access to front line services such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) given the very high burden of disability. Using the evidence that trauma and healing informed approaches are an important part of improving outcomes for the Stolen Generations, the proposal’s intended outcomes include:

* Improved social and emotional wellbeing and health of Stolen Generations survivors and descendants; and
* Improved access and quality of aged care for Stolen Generations.

1. Relevant previous commitments or decisions of the Government

Initially, the Government provided $26.4 million over four years for the Healing Foundation to support healing initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a strong focus on the unique needs of the Stolen Generations. The funding was used to establish a national organisation that provides practical and innovative healing services as well as education, training and research on Indigenous healing. In May 2013, the Federal Government approved a further $26.4 million over 4 years, to ensure the Healing Foundation’s significant work with communities throughout Australia continued. However, that agreement was reduced to one year’s funding at the same level after a change of Government and then a further year at the same level. The Healing Foundation’s received a 3 year funding agreement under the newly established Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) which ended on 30 June 2018. The current one-year agreement finishes on 30 June 2019 and there is no commitment to extend its funding past that date. The prospect of a Federal Election in May 2019 adds to the uncertainty for the Healing Foundation and Stolen Generations.

In the meantime, to coincide with the 20th Anniversary of the Bringing them Home Report (BTH) in 2017, the Healing Foundation commissioned a study to review the progress made on its recommendations. Its report, ‘Bringing Them Home 20 Years On: An Action plan for Healing’ found that the majority of recommendations in the BTH Report had not been implemented and that this had resulted in negative outcomes for Stolen Generations which remain far worse than those of the Indigenous population as a whole. It also found that addressing the underlying trauma of these issues through healing was the only way to create meaningful and lasting change. It recommended:

1 A comprehensive assessment of the contemporary and emerging needs of Stolen Generations members, including needs-based funding and a financial redress scheme.

2 A national study into intergenerational trauma to ensure that there is real change for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the future.

3 An appropriate policy response that is based on the principles underlying the 1997 Bringing Them Home report.

Subsequently, in June 2017, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs made $1.375M available to the Healing Foundation to implement the immediate priorities of the Action Plan for Healing, which was announced on the 10th Anniversary of the Apology on 13 February 2018. The Minister said the additional funding was to research the emerging needs of Stolen Generations members and their families, improve the preservation of family records and develop trauma informed packages for aged care service providers to better meet the needs of the Stolen Generations in aged care.

The Minister also stated that “The Government will continue to work with the Healing Foundation, and other stakeholders, including states and territories to ensure the needs of the Stolen Generations continue to be addressed”.

Good progress has been made in implementing the priorities of the Action Plan for Healing. In particular, the AIHW report was described as a “landmark analysis” when it was released by Minister Scullion in August 2018. The Minister Scullion stated that:

"The Stolen Generations have experienced a lifetime of trauma, grief and loss, a legacy which is still felt in families and communities across Australia," and

"The results are significant and illustrate the enduring devastation of past government policies” and

“The Government will consult with the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council and continue to work with members of the Stolen Generations to ensure that the Stolen Generations and their families receive the support they require.”

1. Consequences of not taking action or agreeing the proposal

If this proposal is not supported, the Australian Government is left without a financially secure national backbone organisation that it is able to partner with to respond to the priority area of healing and trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Without the Healing Foundation, nor will the Australian Government have the capacity to develop effective services for the Stolen Generations and descendants. There will be a negative reaction from the Indigenous sector, including Stolen Generations, if the Healing Foundation’s funding is not renewed. Other sectors including the mental health sector are also likely to be very concerned. It is likely to also receive international criticism in organisations such as the United Nations that Australia is reducing its commitment to a high profile group, the Stolen Generations, within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

1. Reasons why the Government should agree to the proposal

There are good reasons for the Government to agree to this proposal including:

1. The commitment of COAG to including trauma and healing in the next phase of Closing the Gap;
2. There is strong evidence that ongoing trauma is a problem across Indigenous Australia and that it is contributing to poor life outcomes;
3. If the serious disadvantage of Stolen Generations is to be reduced, a national approach is needed led by the Commonwealth that includes improving access to its own mainstream services.
4. Since its inception, the Healing Foundation has been an effective partner for the Commonwealth in responding to the Stolen Generations and has also encouraged State and Territory Governments to do more.
5. The Communities for Healing Programme is based on successful men’s and women’s healing projects already delivered in places such as the Darwin town camps and Tiwi Islands that have been shown to reduce trauma and support greater social and economic participation. In the Tiwi community of Wurrumiyanga where the ‘Our Men Our Healing’ program has been running the longest, the number of men registered with the NT Department of Correctional Services has dropped by 50 per cent and levels of domestic violence have also dropped.
6. **Implementation Plan**

The Healing Foundation acknowledges that the proposal is complex and it will need an implementation plan agreed to with the Commonwealth. It proposes that a joint project steering committee be established to develop and implement an implementation plan for the proposal.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen

   Generations and descendants: numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes.

   Cat. no. IHW 195. Canberra: AIHW. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Bringing them Home (BTH) report documented stories of individuals and families affected by the systematic policy of Australian governments to remove Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The report also described the extent of harm created for, and the burden suffered by, both those individuals who were removed, and their families and descendants. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dr Ruth McCausland, Dr Anna Nettheim, Ms Casie Kang 2017 Qualitative analysis of documentation of the contemporary experience and needs of the Stolen Generations [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Healing Foundation has established an impressive body of evidence with over 20 evaluations and publications, relating to trauma and its impact on social and health issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait lslander communities (see the Healing Foundation’s website for more information (<http://healingfoundation.org.au>). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations aged 50 and over. Cat. no. IHW 199. Canberra: AIHW. This report presents data on a range of health and socioeconomic outcomes, and analysis of differences with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander comparison group to examine the effects of removal from families. The findings will help to inform the needs for health, disability and housing services for the older Stolen Generations members. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)