

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS RETRIGGERED TRAUMA FOR SOME STOLEN GENERATIONS SURVIVORS

Impacts of COVID-19 on Stolen Generations survivors (Research Report)

New research released by The Healing Foundation shows that the strong and necessary public health restrictions introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia since early 2020 retriggered trauma for some Stolen Generations survivors.

The research data suggests an increased and heightened sense of vulnerability; significant disconnection from family, community, and country; and significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing among an already vulnerable cohort of people.

The Healing Foundation CEO Fiona Cornforth (*formerly Petersen) said the research results will assist governments and authorities in future pandemic planning to build on Australia's world-leading public health efforts to ensure the most vulnerable in the community are protected.

"The excellent work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 – as part of national efforts guided by the National Cabinet – ensured that infection rates were very low in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations," Ms Cornforth said.

"There were only minor outbreaks, and they were quickly contained.

"But the pandemic created unprecedented disruption to cultural practices and the normal relational and collective practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Physical distancing restrictions meant traditional celebrations and ceremonies such as births and funerals could not occur.

"Being disconnected from family during Sorry Business and being unable to attend community functions or cultural gatherings such as NAIDOC Week was really challenging, especially for Stolen Generations survivors.

"Isolation and loneliness, the inability to be with family, and strict government controls brought disturbing memories back for some survivors, and retriggered trauma.

"The Healing Foundation is working with survivors and communities to ensure healing.

"Our involvement in the Coalition of the Peaks and participation in the National Health Leadership Forum demonstrates our commitment to Closing the Gap Agreement priority reforms and achieving better life outcomes for Stolen Generations survivors and descendants.

"Importantly, this research provides a better understanding of the pandemic's impact and will inform future pandemic planning to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable in the community, including Stolen Generations survivors," Ms Cornforth said.

Across the 23 social and emotional wellbeing indicators surveyed, the following were important findings:

- Stolen Generations survivors had a significantly increased sense of isolation and loneliness, with more than 90 per cent of respondents reporting an increased sense of isolation. More than 80 per cent of respondents had increased feelings of loneliness, with 65 per cent reporting too much time on their own and more than 70 per cent reporting feeling trapped in their own thoughts.
- More than 90 per cent of Stolen Generations survivors reported feeling disconnected from family, community, and culture, while 77 per cent felt disconnected from country. This is particularly concerning given the degree to which connection to family, community, culture, and country enhances health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and all the more for Stolen Generations survivors and descendants.
- It is not surprising, therefore, that 66 per cent of respondents reported a decline in their physical health during COVID-19, 75 per cent reported a decline in mental health and wellbeing, and 66 per cent reported a decreased ability to cope with stress.
- Importantly, 66 per cent of respondents said the degree to which they felt safe was impacted by COVID-19, and more than 75 per cent were worried about not being able to get to places, with 50 per cent worried about being able to get to a doctor/hospital and/or access the services they require.
- Less concerning is the degree to which employment and financial vulnerability increased during COVID-19, with 70 per cent not at all concerned about loss of employment and more than 50 per cent not feeling financially vulnerable.
- In the context of the above, respondents have experienced an increase in family (almost 75 per cent) and cultural (70 per cent) responsibilities. Alongside this, more than 90 per cent of respondents experienced stress being placed on important relationships.
- Finally, 20 per cent of respondents reported they had no support during COVID-19, while 58 per cent reported having some support.

The research project was undertaken by the Marumali Program on behalf of The Healing Foundation. The findings are based on 60 responses to an online survey in November 2020. The full report is available [here](#).

To raise awareness about Stolen Generations survivors, The Healing Foundation is sharing [this animation](#) about the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

*Fiona has reverted to her family name of Cornforth – the family name she has had for most of her life.

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to heal trauma caused by the widespread and deliberate disruption of populations, cultures, and languages over 230 years. This includes specific actions like the forced removal of children from their families.

Media contact: Ben O'Halloran – 0474 499 911 or ben@healingfoundation.org.au