

Att: Kate Harkins
Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme
Department of the House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email [REDACTED]

Dear Kate

Joint Select Committee on Implementation on the National Redress Scheme Responses

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further responses to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

The National Redress Scheme is a fundamental part of the healing journey for survivors. However, unless trauma is actively addressed at every point of contact in the Redress response, there is a significant risk that survivors of institutional abuse will not be allowed to heal.

I acknowledge the interest the Committee has taken to improving the response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors of abuse, and answers to the Committee's questions are provided below.

1. What does survivor feedback indicate as the main concerns or limitations of the Scheme? Has your organisation spoken with the Department of Social Services to try and find ways to address these concerns?

Key concerns and areas of improvement include a lack of cultural capacity and safety from organisations such as Centrelink when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; transparency and consistency of application process; referral pathways; accessing Legal Representation; and inconsistency in timing and payouts.

The Healing Foundation has monthly meetings with the Department of Social Services as the contracted support provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Redress Support Services. In line with this function, the discussions place a priority on operational matters. In addition we have facilitated similar feedback to the matters raised in our submission to the Committee, and remain committed to further collaboration to identify solutions.

Lack of cultural capacity and safety from organisations such as Centrelink when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- The Healing Foundation's submission to the Committee highlighted this as a key issue. Survivors report discrimination and alienation in their contact with both staff and application processes, which can contribute to trauma and create a barrier to accessing redress.

- All organisations that regularly work with survivors must have the workforce capability to work effectively with people and communities impacted by trauma. Accordingly, The Healing Foundation recommends these organisations invest in staff development to help recognise and address trauma, and contribute to healing.

Transparency and consistency of application process

- Survivors feel that for redress to contribute to healing, it must give them the opportunity to take control and make their own choices. As anticipated by the Royal Commission, the application process frequently triggers a trauma response. This is because Stolen Generations survivors must describe and re-live painful events in great detail – and then must wait for decision-makers to determine the outcome.
- Particular attention must be given to ensuring support is available for applicants who have been rejected, and to making review processes accessible and transparent. Unfortunately, the current processes do not meet this expectation.

Inconsistency in timing and payouts

- Survivor feedback suggests that apparent inconsistencies in timing and payout amounts are undermining confidence in the Scheme and discouraging survivors from applying. Survivors have shared knowledge of applicants in Western Australia who have been waiting since 2018 for an outcome, while younger survivors in other jurisdictions have already received payouts. While The Healing Foundation acknowledges there may be procedural and evidentiary reasons for this discrepancies, the perception of a lack of fairness and inconsistency is real for survivors.

2. As you know, prior to the Scheme commencing, it was expected that up to 60,000 people might apply for redress. Actual applicant numbers are tracking at far lower rates. What suggestions would you offer in relation to how the Scheme can better engage with survivors, with the aim of encouraging them to apply for the Scheme?

- The Healing Foundation recommends communication and information-sharing solutions which are co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be meaningful and impactful. In addition to survivor feedback outlined above, there are a number of complex issues that will only be overcome by the delivery of information from trusted, credible, accessible and culturally-relevant sources. For example, potential applicants may have previously received reparations or redress for other wrongs, and may believe that they are not eligible for any further redress.
- Information needs to be delivered in a way that benefits from local, cultural knowledge. Co-designing this with Stolen Generation Survivors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will ensure that there is a clear message that is understood and culturally applicable.

3. What is your experience of survivors being able to access specialised financial counselling services?

- The Healing Foundation supports the delivery of specialised financial counselling for Stolen Generation Survivors. This is a potentially powerful enabler by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take control of their financial wellbeing and invest in their future and their families' futures. Redress Support Services have noted the importance of working with banks and

establishing trust funds for Stolen Generation Survivors who are wanting to learn about future investment for their families and future generations.

4. Do you have any member feedback in relation to the accessibility of psychological care in regional, rural and remote communities that you can share with the Committee?

- Unaddressed intergenerational trauma is a driver of some of the most serious social and wellbeing issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today, including drug and alcohol addiction, criminal behaviour, violence and suicide. Stolen Generations Survivors have multiple complex, compounded needs and their health and wellbeing is significantly poorer than that of Aboriginal people of a similar age who were not removed.
- Stolen Generations carry a legacy of social and economic disadvantage, and often lack access to appropriate services including to address their needs as they age. As a result of this, access to psychological care for Stolen Generation Survivors should be accessible and local. Services should be accessible, especially in regional, rural and remote areas, where there are high suicide rates amongst communities. Phone services may work but do not provide a culturally safe environment, considering in some remote communities there is one public phone that works for the whole of the community.

5. The Committee is aware that there are concerns relating to the consistency of decisions being made. Is that a concern that you share?

- Stolen Generations survivors report receiving different payouts to other individuals, even where they have been in the same institutions and have been affected by the same perpetrator. This can cause confusion and re-traumatisation for individuals, particularly for who have not been paid and see their fellow survivors receiving payments.

If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Petersen
Chief Executive Officer
23 October 2020