

VICTORIAN TRUTH AND JUSTICE COMMISSION WILL HELP HEAL THE NATION

Statement by the Healing Foundation, 9 March 2021

The Healing Foundation welcomes the creation of the new Truth and Justice Commission in Victoria as a major positive step on the road to national reconciliation and healing.

The Healing Foundation Chairman Professor Steve Larkin said the lack of a shared understanding about the truth of Australia's history is a fundamental roadblock to healing for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Truth telling is at the core of healing," Professor Larkin said.

"Reconciliation and healing can only truly evolve when the Australian community and our governments and major institutions acknowledge and repair the wrongs of the past, understand their ongoing impact – and make sure that these wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are not occurring today, and are never repeated in the future.

"There have been important truth telling initiatives in the past – including the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – but many aspects of our shared history are yet to be reckoned with. They have been hidden, unspoken, and ignored.

"More than 85 per cent of Australians believe it is important to learn about our shared history, including the occurrence of mass killings, incarceration, and forced removal of children.

"It is time for telling, sharing, discussing, and understanding Australia's true shared history.

"Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience trauma as a result of ongoing racism, violence and disadvantage. The lack of shared understanding is also re-traumatising for people already bearing an unfair burden of trauma and it can become a barrier to healing."

Professor Larkin said that international research has found that truth telling is effective at changing racial attitudes because once the truth is shared, people can acknowledge past hurt and accept responsibility as a means to walking together in the present.

"Creating safe places where people can talk and access support is a crucial first step in the healing process. It increases a sense of safety and enables healthy connections to be built. These are essential elements of healing from trauma.

"Making truth telling safe is essential, but it requires proper resourcing of trauma-aware, healing-informed services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities."

Aspects of Australia's history that are not commonly known or accepted by the Australian public – including frontier wars, massacres, children stolen from their families and subjected

to physical emotional and sexual abuse – are a source of ongoing trauma for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and a roadblock to reconciliation.

Professor Larkin said that education is vital if Australia is to achieve proper reconciliation and healing.

“Some people say, ‘it’s time to move on’. But we must know what we are moving on from – and many Australians simply do not understand the impact of colonisation and actions like the forced removal of children from their families.

“In order to build trust and respect, it is also crucial for all Australians to understand pre-colonial history – to recognise and learn from the longevity, diversity, and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

“Formalised truth telling has the potential to unite the nation by giving all Australians a greater connection to, and knowledge of, a shared history.

“It is a pathway for Victorians to address racism and an example for the rest of the country.

“We must build momentum to heal the nation,” Professor Larkin said.

The Healing Foundation’s Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students has been created to educate young people about the Stolen Generations. It makes it easy for school communities to start the conversation and inform classroom discussions using facts, real examples, and stories. It is available [here](#).

To raise awareness about Stolen Generations, The Healing Foundation is sharing this animation about the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

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.