

# Forgotten Australians Premature Ageing

The trauma experienced by Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers has had long-lasting effects on their physical and mental health, contributing to issues such as premature ageing. The Australian Government has since acknowledged these injustices, with formal apologies and redress schemes aimed at addressing the harm caused.

The harsh conditions and abuse many Forgotten Australian/Care Leaver's endured in 'care' settings contribute significantly to early onset ageing. Many were subjected to inappropriate hard labour, leading to chronic physical pain and injuries that persist into adulthood (Fernandez, et al., 2016). Additionally, the psychological trauma from neglect and abuse results in long-term mental health issues, which further exacerbate physical health problems. This combination of physical and mental health challenges often leads to higher rates of chronic illnesses and disabilities, necessitating frequent medical attention and hospitalisations. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that these individuals experience higher rates of premature death compared to the general population.

University of NSW research study on the life outcomes for children who grew up in 'care' in the 20th Century in Australia showed that many participants experienced early onset ageing due to inappropriate hard labour during childhood, leading to significant physical pain and injury throughout adulthood, as well as the severity of physical injuries caused by physical abuse, which were never treated appropriately. The study found that suffering from chronic pain, illness and disabilities were common, with many participants requiring regular specialist medical attention and hospitalisation. It also included anecdotal evidence suggesting higher rates of premature death among Care Leavers compared to the general population. (Fernandez, et al., 2016).

A common perception amongst workers in specialist services was that clients of services were prematurely ageing: "Our population would be +55, average. And many of them, even if they're only 55, look as though they're older. We had a recent death early this week of a guy who was only 52. When I met him in Warrnambool last year, he looked about 70. So there's an ageing process that is early onset really." (Fernandez, et al., 2016, pg 185).

"Many have problems with hearing and eyesight, often due to premature ageing, or the abuse they received as children (children were beaten around the ears and eyes). They may have early onset dementia, or their thought processes are compromised through past substance abuse." (Alliance for Forgotten Australians, 2022, p. 5).

## Key considerations

### Premature Ageing in First Nations People

First Nations People in Australia experience premature ageing due to higher burdens of chronic diseases and socio-economic disadvantages. They are eligible for aged care services from age 50 under the Aged Care Act 1997.

### Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers

This group includes non-Indigenous children, Indigenous children from the Stolen Generations, and child migrants who experienced institutional or out-of-home 'care'. They were recognised as a special needs group under the Aged Care Act in December 2009.

### Health Impacts

Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers face premature ageing due to past trauma, leading to chronic physical and mental health issues. They often require frequent medical attention and experience higher rates of premature death.

### Recommendations

The document calls for lowering the qualification age for aged care services to 50 for Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers and investing in research on premature ageing and trauma-informed services for this group.

## What can be done

There is an urgent need for the Australian Government to provide targeted action to better support the special needs group, who are being forced to wait longer than should be necessary for aged care services.

Prior Governments have turned their backs on the rights and needs of Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers, and for every government and/or politician that ignores the needs of this group are just as responsible for ensuring that unjust revictimisation and trauma is continued to be experienced by this cohort.

It is not enough to simply say sorry, allocate them a label and then wipe governmental hands. Reparation for the abuse experienced requires real, meaningful change, concerted and targeted Government efforts to ensure that Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers are no longer overlooked, cast aside and ignored.

There is an undeniable synergy between the premature ageing needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Forgotten Australian's/Care Leavers populations of Australia. The National Roundtable is calling for the Federal Government to consider replicating the model applied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and lowering the qualification age for aged care services to 50 for Forgotten Australian's/Care Leavers to promote better health outcomes for this demographic who have already suffered too much due to Government neglect.

The National Roundtable is also calling for an investment to be made into future research of premature ageing for survivors of child abuse, the impacts on health equality and trauma informed services for this cohort are crucial to help better support and provide equality to this special needs group.

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