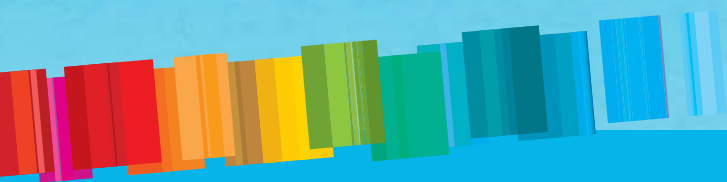


Snapshot of consultations with Forgotten Australians



Acknowledgments

The Department of Communities and RPR Consulting would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of:

- Forgotten Australians in sharing their experiences and providing an informed picture of their current situation, and
- Forgotten Australians Support Service (Micah Projects Inc), Aftercare Resource Centre (Relationships Australia), the Forde Foundation and Mercy Family Services in assisting with the distribution of surveys and supporting Forgotten Australians who participated in the consultation process.

A copy of the full reports by RPR Consulting, *Summary of findings of consultations with Queensland Forgotten Australians* (Volume 1) by Ann Porcino and *Findings of a survey of Queensland Forgotten Australians* (Volume 2) by Dr Ian Watson, is available on the Department of Communities' website at www.communities.qld.gov.au.

Copies of the snapshot are available from the Department of Communities on (07) 3224 8862 or freecall 1300 769 291.



Snapshot of consultations with Forgotten Australians

Over the last decade, governments across Australia have acknowledged the experiences of the many thousands of Australians who were in institutional or out-of-home care as children. State and national inquiries have contributed to a better understanding by governments and the community of the difficult and often traumatic nature of these experiences and the impact on people's lives.

In 1999 in response to the Forde Inquiry, the Queensland Government committed to work with victims of abuse to ensure the provision of appropriate services. This commitment led to the establishment and funding of support services delivered through Lotus Place, the Forde Foundation Trust Fund and the Queensland Government Redress Scheme.

To help ensure that support services change with the needs of Forgotten Australians and emerging initiatives at a national level, the Department of Communities conducted a review of the services delivered through Lotus Place. The purpose of the review was to identify priorities for future service delivery rather than evaluate existing services. In 2010, the department engaged RPR Consulting to consult with Forgotten Australians about their experiences with services, and to learn more about what is needed in the future. Consultations were undertaken by Ann Porcino, RPR Consulting. The report on the findings of the survey was produced by Dr Ian Watson.

The Department of Communities has prepared this snapshot in consultation with RPR Consulting. The snapshot provides an overview of the key findings, with particular focus on the survey results. In many cases, excerpts from the RPR Consulting reports, *Summary of findings of consultations with Queensland Forgotten Australians* (Volume 1) by Ann Porcino and *Findings of a survey of Queensland Forgotten Australians* (Volume 2) by Dr Ian Watson, have been used to convey the key findings. Queensland's Forgotten Australians is a diverse group but with a great deal in common. The extensive reach of the survey and the considerable consistency of the responses lend credibility to the overall findings of the consultations.

The consultation process

The consultation process used two main approaches:

- focus groups: attended by more than 35 Forgotten Australians who provided important information on their needs and contributed to the design of the survey
- a survey: was completed by 603 people. Responses to a combination of closed response and open-ended questions provide a reliable indication of the situation and preferences of Forgotten Australians.

Who are the Forgotten Australians?

76 per cent of people who completed the survey were in orphanages or children's homes, approximately 22 per cent were in youth detention centres, and 21 per cent were in foster care (respondents could be in more than one type of care) as children.

Gender

251 men and 313 women responded to the survey: a further 39 people did not indicate their gender.

Age

79 per cent of the respondents were aged over 50, and nearly one half were aged over 60.

Indigenous status

15 per cent of respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Location

42 per cent were based outside of South-East Queensland with a further 26 per cent were based in Brisbane and 12 per cent interstate.

What is their current situation?

Survey findings present a picture of poverty, with 18 per cent of respondents identifying as 'poor or very poor' compared with a figure of 3 per cent among other Queenslanders. A further 46 per cent of respondents identified themselves as 'just getting by' compared with a figure of 26 per cent among other Queenslanders. Source: *Findings of a survey of Queensland Forgotten Australians* (full report).

Living situation

- 29 per cent were retired
- 24 per cent were living with a disability
- 32 per cent were married couples, with about 10 per cent living with their children
- 30 per cent were living alone
- 7 per cent were in prison

Financial situation

- 18 per cent were in paid work
- 27 per cent were living on the age pension
- 31 per cent were living on a disability support pension (particularly those in the age range of 40-64)

Long-term impacts of care

Survey responses reveal a consistent pattern of adverse impact of institutional and out-of-home care on the lives of Forgotten Australians. While some respondents reported positive outcomes involving independence and resilience, a far greater number identified negative impacts.

Many Forgotten Australians bear ongoing mental and physical health issues relating to their time in care, including lack of self-confidence and feelings of distrust and betrayal by adults, particularly of those in positions of authority. Many also live with the impact of loneliness and lack of love and caring as a child, the loss of family connections and poor education and the many benefits in life which go with that.

'Issues of lack of trust, no matter how much I try to overcome it. It permeates so many areas of life – the end result being isolation, loneliness and emotions which I try to avoid even thinking about...' (respondent to Question 9).

Barriers to service access

To help inform planning for future services, the survey sought to gain a better understanding of what services Forgotten Australians are currently accessing, and any difficulties encountered in accessing these services. Access issues that were most consistently reported for general services and services for Forgotten Australians were:

- **psychological barriers**

Approximately 22 per cent of people do not access services for reasons which relate directly to their negative experiences in care. Key reasons include mistrust of others, the pain of revisiting their past or a sense of futility in seeking help so long after their time in care.

- **physical barriers**

29 per cent of respondents who provided reasons for not using services for Forgotten Australians gave distance or travel issues as being the most significant barrier. Most of these people reside outside South-East Queensland and also find accessing mainstream services difficult.

- **lack of awareness of services**

10 per cent reported not using generalist services because they were not aware of the services, and 19 per cent reported not using specific services for Forgotten Australians for the same reason.

Other reasons for not using mainstream services included unresponsiveness of services due either to the poor reception Forgotten Australians received when they approached services or the limited availability of services such as long waiting times. This was given as a barrier by 15 per cent of respondents. 9 per cent of respondents indicated that their experiences with dedicated Forgotten Australian services had been unsatisfactory, either because they felt the service was unresponsive or people felt unsafe using them. About 10 per cent of Forgotten Australians indicated they did not need to use services as they were independent or they had other support networks.

'... some professionals and also doctor, nurses and social security still have never heard of us. A doctor told me once to get out of his office and stop lying because if it was true I would be living in a mansion from compensation and there would be a lot of people sitting in jail...' (respondent to Question 11).

'Because of constraints imposed by distances. I don't use any of the services provided if I lived closer I would use them...' (respondent to Question 13).

'I have learnt. To stand on my own' (respondent to Question 13).

'I become too emotional and it takes a long time to settle down again' (respondent to Question 13).

'Shame, abuse, confuse, trust' (respondent to Question 13).

What has been most helpful in the past

Survey respondents identified the following services and activities as having been most helpful in the past:

- a payment from the government or past providers (59 per cent)
- apology from government or past provider (44 per cent)
- assistance to make a complaint, make a submission or to complete an application (43 per cent)
- seeing a counsellor face to face or over the phone (41 per cent)
- providing or getting support from other Forgotten Australians (35 per cent).

'The centre (Lotus Place) is a lifesaver — even though it isn't perfect I am happy it is here' (Brisbane focus group participant).

'Thanks for the months of counselling I have received — it is much appreciated, helping keep me calm many times...' (respondent to Question 25).

Priorities for future services

To assist with future planning, the survey asked Forgotten Australians to nominate what services were likely to be most useful to them in the future. A summary of the key findings and service priorities that emerged are detailed below.

Entitlements and benefits

60 per cent of Forgotten Australians who responded identified access to information about entitlements and benefits as the most important priority for future services.

This category of assistance was nominated as the highest priority across all groups of respondents with the strongest support from people who were socially isolated (76 per cent compared with 54 per cent for those who had access to support).

The need for such assistance is reflected in the following quote:

'I do not understand Centrelink system as I have never been on it and my reading and writing is not real good and it is hard to understand all the forms...' (respondent to Question 25).

Health and ageing

42 per cent of respondents nominated better access to health services as one of their top priorities. This was particularly important for people aged 60 to 69 years with 49 per cent indicating it as a priority.

Suggestions as to the type of assistance needed include:

'Help when you have to go to the hospital or nursing home — someone to look after you and get what you need' (respondent to Question 25).

Fears about growing old and entering nursing homes was also a common concern. The nature of these concerns, in particular the fear of re-entering institutionalised care, is echoed in the following quote:

'I'm very frightened about getting old and going into a nursing home. I still at 61 have awful dreams about ...when I get to the stage where I have to go into a home again, I have no health records about myself as a child...' (respondent to Question 25).

Study, education and employment

A total of 45 per cent of Forgotten Australians indicated a preference for assistance with personal and professional development. Within this percentage Forgotten Australians nominated help with study and education (26 per cent) and employment or volunteering (19 per cent).

Those under the age of 50 were more likely to want help with study, education or employment than older Forgotten Australians. The following quote illustrates the views of many respondents on this issue:

'I feel education is the most important thing for us to have access to. I feel the biggest problem that comes from a past like ours is feeling dumber than everyone else and not capable of doing anything without being told how to do it. Of course intellectually we are no different from everyone else but education further is expensive and therefore not really an option for us. Education is empowerment' (respondent to Question 25).

Records and reunions

38 per cent of Forgotten Australians prioritised the need for support to navigate the systems and records of past providers, and also assistance with reuniting with family.

43 per cent of Forgotten Australians living in Brisbane and South-East Queensland selected assistance with records and reunions, more often than 35 per cent of those living in other parts of the state.

Suggestions for services include:

'Better access and trained personnel to help Forgotten Australians to find their roots and connection... Please make the services easy to access for Forgotten Australians, as I for one, do not know how to go about tracing my history (not computer literate)' (respondent to Question 25).

Counselling

36 per cent of Forgotten Australians ranked individual counselling as one of their top priorities for future services.

Analysis of the subgroups of Forgotten Australians indicates that the greatest level of support for counselling was among younger people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Forgotten Australians and those living alone.

In terms of the preferred type of counselling, Forgotten Australians overwhelmingly regarded face-to-face counselling as the most useful type. For example, 86 per cent of those who thought counselling was important indicated a preference for face-to-face counselling: this response was consistent across all subgroups.

Meeting with other Forgotten Australians

35 per cent of Forgotten Australians identified having a place to go and meet with others as a priority. A further 21 per cent indicated a preference for participating in group activities. Being able to interact with other Forgotten Australians was identified as a priority for people living alone, those on government payments and Indigenous Forgotten Australians. Suggestions for future activities include:

'Some group interaction would be good (something like swimming, movies, art and crafts. A chance to share poetry and music etc)' (respondent to Question 25).

'A home reunion for ex-residents from other homes like... would be appreciated. I would like to see more Forgotten Australians involved in Remembrance day...' (respondent to Question 25).

Redress and justice

36 per cent of Forgotten Australians identified help with making complaints or seeking compensation as one of their priority service needs.

Analysis of responses indicates strong support for services to help Forgotten Australians advocate for justice. This is reflected in the many comments about the Redress Scheme for example:

'What about the people who didn't know about the redress system, those who did not get the applications in on time?... I think it was very unfair' (respondent to Question 25).

There was also support for perpetrators of abuse to be brought to justice:

'If I did half the things my abusers did to me, I would be in jail. Yet they've answered to no-one. Faced no court of law to this day they still walk the street free whilst I've been condemned to a life of painful memories, hatred and irreversible consequences!' (respondent to Question 25).

Housing

The issue of better access to public housing and rental assistance was identified by a number of Forgotten Australians as an area of priority.

These views were echoed in the following quote:

'Rent is expensive and is becoming very difficult to afford renting. Living in small cramped housing is difficult and disheartening. Access to public housing is slow and many people find it undesirable to live in a section of the community where social problems (alcoholism, unemployment, domestic violence) is rife. Provisions need to be made so Forgotten Australians can afford adequate, safe housing' (respondent to Question 25).

Other important considerations for future services

Peer leadership

More than half of the survey respondents supported the provision of assistance to become peer leaders, however, no clear preference was expressed for the types of activities peer leaders would undertake.

Respondents also ranked the following activities as being important: peer support with other Forgotten Australians (25 per cent), educating professionals (23 per cent) and public awareness-raising (22 per cent). Helping to plan services or activities for Forgotten Australians was ranked lower at 11 per cent.

40 per cent of all respondents did not answer the question on peer leadership or indicated that they 'did not know' suggesting that a large number did not understand the concept.

Peer leadership was the subject of much discussion at the focus groups with Forgotten Australians. Suggestions were made about how peer leaders could be selected, trained and developed in the future, although there were different perspectives on what type of peer leadership was needed and the role that these leaders should play.

Support for people living in regional Queensland and interstate

To ensure that the support needs of Forgotten Australians living in regional Queensland and interstate are considered in the planning of future services, survey respondents were asked to indicate 'what type of contact would be most helpful?'.

The most popular option identified by interstate and regionally based Forgotten Australians was face-to-face contact (20 per cent). This was often expressed as a desire for visits from persons based elsewhere. Telephone contact and regular newsletters were also often identified as appropriate options. Only a small percentage of respondents suggested the establishment of support groups or drop-in centres. Suggestions for contact include:

'Newsletter with info what other people, groups, drop in centre are doing and what help is available. A yearly bbq or get together with city folks in same situation...' (respondent to Question 19).

'Short term - internet, longer term - occasional face to face contact even group wise (may be councillors visit areas. let people know when visiting Brisbane where they can call in for chat etc.)' (respondent to Question 19).

Voices of Forgotten Australians

The high participation rates of Forgotten Australians in the consultation process reflects the value that Forgotten Australians place on having an opportunity to voice issues that are relevant to their personal histories. In particular, many provided a wealth of information when asked to describe what other issues were important to them for future services. The following quotes provide a picture of the depth and diversity of responses received. The full report provides more detail on the needs, experiences and feelings of Forgotten Australians.

'As people we have to get over what happens to us. It did happen but you can either stay a victim or you can choose to make it not better but not so confusing. I was lucky I had ... as my counsellor. She could not let me fail and for that I am eternally grateful. You can offer all the support and services you can but if the person doesn't have the will to pull themselves out of the hole nobody can help them and that means that those who abused us have won. I don't think so. Thanks'.

'The most important issue to me is to find my sister who was in the home with me, they said she was adopted. Because she had different name than me, I can not get any records of her when I rang the nuns, they could not confirm or deny her existence.....I'm 66 years old, and I fear that, I would not see her, or get I know her in my life time. This is the most important issues to me, more important these any other issues'.

'I believe the major thing that needs to continue, is that if people need help to confront their demons, it has to be ongoing. I think the older we get the past becomes more important and people are needed who have experienced the very depths of despair. The only people who can truly appreciate how a bad situation can be made better are people who have lived and survived it'.

'More access to psychological support services. Help to be able to rise above what has been done to you. Help to stay positive and productive. Help to find a network and build friendships and partnerships'.

'I feel the 'freedom of information' has let me and many more in my age group down. I would like to know from 'freedom of information' why I was taken from my brother, put through a children court and sent to a children home. All I can be told how many teeth I had out. My sickness I had where I fitted in the family, the only reason for all of this (and I don't believe it) the floods of 1974 washed all records away seems like some information was stored in one place and another somewhere else'.

'I am not knocking your work but they took my childhood and then raped me on a church alter then lost me in paper work. How would you "feel"? This is a 62 year old man writing this badly spelt note so how has your life been a lot better than mine'.

'Stop putting band aid solutions on the situation and fix the problem so it does not occur again and the kids of the future do not have to go through inquiries again. We have proven what has happened in the past. Have you listened and learnt or is the government still in denial'.

'I think the redress was unfair I can't read and write good and didn't know about it'.

'I have issues with the police, housing and government I would like help to overcome these issues as I now have 2 grandchildren I don't want to pass on my hatred to them'.

'We are damaged people and our needs are unique it's hard to explain. I would like to have been educated instead of made to work at 13 years as domestic and never paid. Never to go to high school nor have a normal life. We were so disadvantaged by our abusive life the emotional scars have damaged me so bad I suffer very bad depression and the medication. I can't always afford. I suffer from loneliness but I can't make friendships because I don't think I'm good enough. My life has been like a helter-skelter and I don't know how I can't fix it...'

How the consultation findings will be used

The Queensland Government is committed to supporting the delivery of community-based support services for Forgotten Australians. The consultation findings will help to inform the key service delivery priorities for funded support services for the next 5 to 10 years. In particular, the findings will assist the Department of Communities to plan for the delivery of services which are accessible, effective, efficient and well targeted. It is also important that these services complement new initiatives at a national level for Forgotten Australians such as the Find and Connect Service.

It is hoped that the consultation reports will provide a valuable educational tool for professionals supporting Forgotten Australians, help inform the development of services and responses in other jurisdictions, and future research. The report contributes to the growing body of knowledge into the needs and experiences of the many thousands of Australians who spent their childhoods in institutional and out-of-home care and represents an important milestone in Queensland's response to Forgotten Australians.

