

MEDIA RELEASE
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Prime Minister Rudd's apology to the stolen generations an important step

The Federal Government's plan for a formal apology to the stolen generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who were removed from their families and communities as part of the assimilation policies of the governments of the day, is a welcome and long overdue move, according to the Australian Psychological Society.

"The APS is committed to respectful relationships with Australia's first peoples, and believes a national statement of apology is an important step towards this goal," said APS President, Amanda Gordon. "The value of a heartfelt apology and the opportunity for forgiveness is well recognised in both Western and Indigenous cultures, and the layers of meaning to the word "sorry" can enrich our mutual understanding."

The APS Ethical Guidelines recognise that Indigenous people, both individually and collectively, have been deeply disadvantaged by the European settlement of Australia, particularly by policies of assimilation and inappropriate removal and relocation. Consequently, psychological solutions to present-day issues confronting Indigenous people are likely to be unsuccessful, unless political, legal and social solutions for the restoration of their cultures and individual human rights, privileges and dignity are also found.

"The APS gives unequivocal support to the need for reparation of relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, to actions which, in the view of Indigenous people, restore their human rights, and to informed attempts to address the substandard living conditions that exist in many Indigenous households and communities," said Gordon.

"A formal apology from the Australian Government has been long overdue. Alongside the apologies made by all State and Territory governments, the APS in 1997 was a signatory to the ACOSS Statement of Apology and Commitment to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children. The statement was also delivered directly to the Aboriginal community at Yarrabah in 1997. Many of our members have also participated in Sorry Day and Reconciliation activities over the past ten years, and offered their own messages of apology. While a national apology would represent a culmination of the Reconciliation movement, it is only one step along the road to collective healing for all Australians."

"The APS is gravely concerned about the level of distress that is evident in many Aboriginal communities. Many of our members find themselves picking up the pieces from cultural dispossession and intergenerational trauma, while others are involved in advocacy and prevention projects. It is an issue that deserves special attention from government and the community at large," said Gordon. "We welcome the emphasis on the provision of counselling and link-up services to members of the stolen generations and their families, as part of the Australian Government's commitment."

To ensure that future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up in optimal environments, major long-term investment is needed to develop the resources that any community needs, such as health, education, housing and basic infrastructure. Most Indigenous communities lack these fundamental social resources and middle-level structures and services that most Australians take for granted. What our own commitment to Reconciliation means in practice will never be settled once and for all, but will be a matter for ongoing monitoring, reflection and truth-telling.

For more information please contact Amanda Gordon on 0411 428 250 or see Reconciliation Australia's background statement and FAQs: <http://www.reconcile.org.au/getsmart/pages/sorry.php>

The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 15,700 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.