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MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent call for systems-level change to address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The latest findings from the 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) underscore an urgent need for systems-level change to address systemic racism and improve the safety and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia.

The NCAS, a periodic survey conducted every four years, provides a snapshot of Australian attitudes toward violence against women. This year, 442 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents participated in the survey—92% identifying as Aboriginal, 5% as Torres Strait Islander, and 4% as both.

The report underscored that systemic racism is deeply embedded in societal attitudes, institutions, and public services. This racism continues to compound inequality for and harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Key findings demonstrate that trust in government and police remains low, with less than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents agreeing that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is taken seriously by police (44%) or the government (36%). Trust was even lower among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ respondents, with only 14-22% trusting police to respond appropriately to family violence, compared to 44-58% of heterosexual respondents. More than half reported trust in confidentiality of services (59-66%), but fewer expected fair treatment from police and courts (40-55%). More than one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents did not expect confidential or fair treatment by police, courts, or services (26-53%)

Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine, ANROWS CEO said, "Ending violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women requires addressing the ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic racism. This report shows the critical role for addressing the attitudes that shape those ongoing impacts. Urgent changes are necessary within policing, judicial systems, and social services to foster environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access support and justice without fear of being further impacted through culturally unsafe practices or worse."

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The survey points to gaps in understanding about the gendered nature of violence. While most respondents reject harmful attitudes towards gender equality, violence against women, and different types of violence, 70% indicate a belief that domestic violence is equally perpetrated by men and women, underscoring the need for greater awareness of gendered violence. These findings should be considered in the context that, while gender inequality is a driver of violence against women, other intersecting factors also influence violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The NCAS findings signal the urgent need for systems-level reform to dismantle systemic racism and ensure culturally safe, trustworthy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The findings reinforce the role for policymakers, service providers and community leaders to work together to create a society where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are safe, respected, and able to seek support and services justice without fear.

*****PLEASE NOTE: We do not compare results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with non-Indigenous respondents. This decision was made with guidance from the 2021 NCAS Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group of experts. Such comparisons can be misleading as they group diverse peoples together, and harmful as they risk ignoring the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and overlooking the impacts of colonisation and systemic racism on attitudes and understandings.*****

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About ANROWS

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.