

MEDIA RELEASE – 18 March 2021

2021 Close the Gap report is wake up call to governments on Indigenous leadership

The 12th annual Close the Gap report — *Leadership and Legacy Through Crises: Keeping our Mob safe* — is a wake up call to Australian governments that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the solutions to health inequity in our grasp.

Lowitja Institute CEO Dr Janine Mohamed said this year's report showcases the outstanding leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through critical health crises in 2020, particularly the coronavirus pandemic, the devastating 2019-20 bushfires and the ongoing mental health emergency facing First Nations people.

Prepared by Lowitja Institute for the Closing the Gap Campaign Steering Committee, the report was released today to mark National Close the Gap Day. Available at [Lowitja.org.au/CloseTheGap](https://www.lowitja.org.au/CloseTheGap)

“There is no more a glowing example of our leadership than our COVID-19 rates where the number of cases among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is six times lower than the rest of Australia,” Dr Mohamed said.

“Some of our homelands — only recently threatened with closure by governments — were among the safest places in Australia,” she said.

“That is an outstanding result, not just nationally but globally where so many Indigenous communities have been devastated by the virus.

Dr Mohamed said 2020 showed that strong health outcomes can be achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through strengths-based community-led action — when there is matching and continued political will to support it.

“I hope this leads to more trust and commitment to work with us,” she said.

But the past year of crises have also highlighted ongoing inequities that continue to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

They include housing overcrowding and food insecurity, over-incarceration of young people and women in particular, an inequitably distributed and stretched health workforce, racism in health and emergency responses, and failure to act on the Uluru Statement from the Heart, climate and to protect sacred sites.

“The Black Lives Matter movement has put the spotlight globally on systemic racial injustices and we have also seen the growing toll of the climate crisis, amid the ongoing aftermath of the 2019-20 bushfires.”

Lowitja Institute urges Australian Governments to embrace and act on the recommendations of the 2021 Close the Gap report and to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the answers.

“We must be allowed to lead, and we will only ever travel at the speed of trust,” Dr Mohamed said.

“Governments are not the solution, we as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the solutions to governments,” she said.

For media queries and/or to arrange an interview with Dr Mohamed, please contact Amy Hofman on 0405 114 930.