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MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous Doctors call for urgent reform to address discrimination in the workplace towards trainee doctors

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) is calling for urgent systemic and cultural reform within the health sector, following the 2021 Medical Training Survey results that found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainee doctors had experienced higher levels of bullying, discrimination and harassment – including racism – compared to their non-Indigenous colleagues.

While the latest Survey results from 2021 found that trainees in general continued to experience bullying, harassment and discrimination, it also found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees had been disproportionately impacted.

The Survey results showed that “52% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees reported experiencing and/or witnessing bullying, harassment and/or discrimination (compared with 35% of trainees nationally), and 49% reported a moderate or major impact on their training (compared with 38% nationally).”

“While these numbers are deeply disturbing, to us, they are also not surprising,” said Monica Barolits-McCabe, CEO of AIDA. “We have known that harassment and discrimination, especially racism, has been adversely impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and medical students throughout their medical journey.”

“This is utterly unacceptable,” she said.

AIDA is calling on urgent systemic and cultural reform across the healthcare sector, including robust and ongoing cultural safety training, to address this issue.

“Now is the time for systemic change across the medical training continuum. To eliminate racism, consistent and comprehensive cultural safety programs need to be implemented across the healthcare system. There also needs to be robust systems in place that protect those who call out these insidious acts without penalty or victimisation, and action needs to be taken against those who display or continue to display these appalling behaviours,” Ms Barolits-McCabe said.

The Survey also found that only 51% of participants had an interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health compared to 92% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.

“This further highlights the need to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors to assist in addressing the health disparities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

“In 2020, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors made up approximately 0.51% of the national medical workforce, significantly lower than population parity which currently stands at 3.34%,” Ms Barolits-McCabe said.

“If we want better doctors, we need to respect the needs of our doctors in training. This means understanding the importance of cultural safety, having culturally safe and supportive workplaces to thrive, and remunerating our junior doctors appropriately. Reform in these matters is vital not only for our doctors, but for all patients in the Australian health system,” Ms Barolits-McCabe said.

The 2021 Medical Training Survey (MTS) is an annual national profession-wide survey of medical training, funded by the Medical Board of Australia. More information on the 2021 Medical Training Survey can be found [here](#).

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