

LOWITJA INSTITUTE CONFERENCE 2019 SPEECH PAT ANDERSON

GOOD MORNING!

On behalf of all of us, thank you, Richard, for your welcome today.

We pay our respects to you and Larrakia people and your ancestors, and Elders past, present, and emerging.

I'd also like to acknowledge all First Nations peoples here with us today.

Thank you to June Oscar AO for her words opening the conference this morning.

June is our very first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and we are all very proud of her.

This morning I have three jobs to do:

- First of all, to welcome you to the Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference 2019
- Second, to tell you a bit about the last 22 years as we celebrate the conclusion of the Cooperative Research Centre part of our history, and
- Three: to deliver a very important message from a person whose spirit and values are the flame that keeps us going.

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So... Welcome to all delegates.

Thank you all for being here, thank you to our generous sponsors, and to all the individuals who worked tirelessly to make this event happen.

I acknowledge especially the Australian Government Department of Health, our conference partner.

Let me tell you who is in the room.

There are 760 plus of us in this auditorium, in this Indigenous space.

You come from First Nations from

- Bhutan
- Canada
- Denmark
- Hawai'i
- India
- Indonesia
- Nepal
- Aotearoa / New Zealand
- Phillipines
- Thailand
- United States of America
- And us from across our vast continent

Our aspiration is that this conference will be a place where respectful, provocative conversations can take place about what concerns us today — First Peoples from across the globe — and what our visions and ambitions are for future generations.

We would like these conversations to explore new ways of thinking, speaking and being in the world, serve who we are, promote new ideas, and take a planetary approach.

As an Indigenous space, we want the conference to be an environment where we come together to support each other, where we welcome our non-Indigenous colleagues, and where discussions can be had in safety.

We want to us to take this opportunity for deep thought, to learn from each other, and to plan for future action.

We invite delegates and presenters to consider the global implications of their work, to highlight the role of First Nations people in leading change, and to showcase Indigenous solutions.

I take this opportunity to remind you that 2019 is the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages — of which this conference is an approved event.

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In addition to the many challenges that we, as First Nations people, face constantly, today we have the added challenges — for us in particular — as events globally and nationally swirl around us, moving countries to the right.

With that in mind, we will be working on a Conference Statement to send out to the world. The Statement will help us all, collectively, individually and as organisations and communities, to advocate for change.

With the Statement, we want to achieve a united voice from this floor, so please have conversations among yourselves and let us know.

If you can write down your recommendations and either **hand** them, or **text** them, or **send** them to our conference statement team — and here is a photo of them with the contact details.

You can also approach our session chairs with your recommendations.

We will report back to you with what we have heard tomorrow morning and Thursday morning with the final draft to be presented to you at the end of the conference.

You all have in your conference bag a copy of the 2016 Conference Statement which was distributed to some 10,000 individuals and organisations around Australia and the world.

The Statement gave voice to our common ambitions at the time and made a call to action.

I also want to report that Professor Karina Walters, a 2016 keynote speaker from the Chotaw Nation, took our message of support to the Standing Rock Sioux in its opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States.

Our voices as First Nations peoples must be heard. Here in Australia we have gifted to the nation what has become known as the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* which calls for VOICE, TREATY, TRUTH.

As many of you may know, there is no settlement between us as First Nations peoples and all of those people who came after us. There has been no acknowledgment of us as the First Peoples of this land.

Racism, invisibility and the consequences of colonialism plague us still and remain major obstacles to our health and wellbeing.

As we say in the Uluru Statement from the Heart:

**This is *the torment of our powerlessness*.**

So, lets put our minds together as a conference as we develop the conference statement over the next three days.

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Now, my second job.

By holding this conference in Darwin, the Lowitja Institute honours its origins, which dates to 1997, when the Cooperative Research Centre (or CRC) for Aboriginal and Tropical Health was established.

As many of you will know the current CRC finishes on 30 June but the Lowitja Institute itself continues from 1 July.

The last 22 years have been quite eventful... to put it mildly.

In 1997, Danila Dilba Health Service here in Darwin, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in Alice Springs, and Menzies School of Health Research and others submitted an application to the government for funding, and after long gestation period we were successful.

**Why did we do this?**

Our vision was always, for us — First Nations people — to stop being the subject of research but, rather, to set the research agenda, and control it.

That research would be by us, for us.

This decosion was a risk for Danila Dilba and Congress, but we did it anyhow. And here we are today. Look at this room.

For example, **all projects** funded by the Lowitja Institute have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers in the teams and 68% of the chief investigators are senior Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander researchers.

**What has been achieved in the past 22 years?**

I think it's this:

We have demonstrated what can be achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledges, priorities and leadership are at the centre of the work to improve the health and wellbeing of our peoples.

Each of the CRCs has built on the legacy of the preceding organisation; gathering supporters, partners and a network of researchers committed to its mission, values and methodology – that effective health research requires a process that reflects community priorities.

This approach was in stark contrast to the way things had been done in the past when there was a deep resentment against researchers by us.

The early conversations about finding a new and more effective way of doing research occurred in the early 1990s, a time of growing advocacy and independence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that saw health research — culturally appropriate research — as a rights issue.

And, of course, there were key individuals—too numerous to mention—who were pivotal in pushing for those changes.

It was not an easy task in the early days to bring university-based researchers and representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community health organisations together—myself included, I have to admit—and it took time and inspiration to break through the barriers.

From the beginning, the CRCs and the Lowitja Institute have brought people together into a community of interest that transcends individual disciplines and silos.

The great strength of this approach has been its focus on bringing together researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, developing research capacity, improving ethical guidelines, transferring research outputs, and in new methodologies.

These are now embodied in the key research principles of the Lowitja Institute:

- Beneficence – to act for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the conduct of the research
- Leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Engagement of research end users
- Development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce
- Measurement of impact in improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

By supporting a new generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, we have contributed to the growth of a cohort with high-levels of expertise that will deliver positive health outcomes.

We have awarded, to date, 62 doctorate and PhD scholarships, 33 Masters scholarships, and 15 scholarships for other tertiary courses. We have supported community workers develop research skills; we have supported high school students become interested in health research careers.

We are also committed to recognising excellence in the research workforce with awards that recognise our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and leaders, as well as a lifetime award.

We will be announcing the 2019 winners of these excellence awards at tomorrow's dinner and at the awards ceremony at the conference close.

Guided by key principles and with the support of our many partners, we have contributed to a significant body of knowledge and have earned a place of cultural authority in the health research sector.

I am very grateful for the enormous support, commitment and goodwill by many individuals and organisations in research, communities, government, our CRC partners who have played an integral role in the delivery of our work, and many others. Again, many of you are in the room today.

I acknowledge the investment of the Australian Government in our capacity to deliver this important work.

I thank especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and individuals who have shared their expertise, wisdom and guidance.

Increasingly, we are reaching out to our global Indigenous family through projects such as *The Lancet*–Lowitja Institute global collaboration on Indigenous health published in 2016.

And, we made the decision to hold an international conference like this every two years. We hope that every conference more and more of our brothers and sisters around the world will be able to join us.

We are committed to this.

As we go forward from 1 July, we will continue to demonstrate the centrality of culture in health and wellbeing; will produce knowledge that is ethical and intellectually rigorous; will grow strong national and international networks; provide cultural authority for non-Indigenous researchers; nurture the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers; and take a leadership role in the decisions that affect the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and individuals.

I hope that you will continue to be part of our story.

We also hope — and will continue to work hard — to live up to the vision for us, and expectations of us, of our Patron, Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue, who has also the first CRC Chairperson all those years ago.

In early 2010, when Lowitja launched the Institute that bears her name, she wanted the organisation to reflect her values and her priorities, and to demonstrate a deep commitment to social equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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And that brings me to my third job this morning:

To read out to you Lowitja’s message to this conference.

She is, unfortunately, not able to travel from Adelaide but her presence is everywhere and we welcome her nieces, Deb Edwards and Lyn D’Donoghue, who joins us here today.

Lowitja’s role ensuring the survival and robustness of the early organisation cannot be overestimated and we take very seriously her vision and wishes for our organisation — and the responsibility that that entails.

### **MESSAGE FROM THE PATRON**

Hello everyone,

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where the conference is being held.

When I agreed to have the Lowitja Institute named after me, I entrusted in the Institute my spirit and energy, my values and priorities.

I told them that I wanted them to be a courageous organisation committed to social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

To match words to action

To achieve real, tangible and immediate outcomes.

And today I entrust YOU — at this Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference 2019 — to put your thinking, speaking and being to work.

To achieve tangible outcomes for our peoples.

We want to hear all the ways that we, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — and the First Nations of the world — come up with solutions and build our futures.

For the next three days, I want you to have a conversation with the future

With your grandchildren and their children.

Tell them — show them — how you are going to build a better world for them.

With courage, determination and confidence.

I will be with you all the way.

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And with those words in mind, I remind all delegates that, as First Nations peoples, we are the guardians and stewards of the solutions for many of the complex issues and mega trends that affect us.

Above all, in everything we do these next three days, we honour our ancestors, accept our responsibility to them and the next generations, while being true to ourselves in the present, and investing in our future.

We celebrate our knowledges, our resilience, our families and communities, our friendships and networks, our thriving, and roll up our sleeves to build the future for our grandchildren and their children. Thank you