

Speech – Lowitja O’Donoghue
Opening of Congress Lowitja 2014

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and to thank you Aunty Di for your welcome to country.

It’s over 4 years since I spoke at Parliament House in Canberra and we launched the Institute in my name.

For those of you that were there, you may remember me talking about the fact that when I was first approached about the idea of an Institute to be founded in my name, I’m afraid I wasn’t very gracious at all – I did not really feel worthy of the honour. It had also occurred to me that having an Institute named after me would mean that half of the country would think that I was dead!

At that time I also said that it was important to me that the Institute reflects my values and my priorities. As I stand here to officially open Congress Lowitja 2014, I thought I should reflect on whether they have met my expectations.

I stressed the need for them to employ courageous people – and as I consider the Chair Pat Anderson, the Board and staff - in fact all those associated through their partnerships – I believe they have met that goal.

The beneficiaries of the work the Institute does, is first and foremost in the minds of everyone, and apparent in all the research activities. They don’t do research where the findings sit on a shelf. They ensure it makes a difference on the ground to our people. And, our people have a strong and leading voice. So I’ll give them a tick for this.

At the time I asked was the Institute willing to do an internal audit of effectiveness that asks basic questions like – How did we do? And how can we tell? I’m delighted that they have rigorously looked at themselves – reviewing and amending their Constitution, their strategy and the way they operate – and have committed to continually question and improve how they do business.

The work of the Institute must be done...and be seen to be done. And I saw this in action earlier this month, when I joined Pat and the Institute team at Parliament House in Canberra for the launch of the “futures” project. There was quite a media pack – importantly many MP’s and Senators from all sides of the house were there. It was clear to me that that the Institute has gained government support without compromising its values or intentions.

So finally, my report card – the Lowitja Institute gets a big tick. I might even suggest I’ll give it an ‘A’. Of course, it does need to ensure it gets to ‘A plus’ – so it can achieve its vision of “equity in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”.

I am proud to have my name on this Institute, and am delighted to officially open Congress Lowitja 2014.