

MEDIA RELEASE – 4 February 2024

Honouring the legacy of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG

Lowitja Institute's Board, management and team express their deepest sadness at the passing of the organisation's patron, namesake and founding chair Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG, who died peacefully on 4 February 2024, aged 91, with her immediate family around her.

Following the heartfelt statement issued by Dr O'Donoghue's family, Lowitja Institute acknowledged in its own statement the legacy its patron leaves behind in advocating for, and improving, the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A proud Yankunytjatjara woman, Dr O'Donoghue connected with many people across Australia and beyond. Lowitja Institute's patron Pat Anderson AO described her as an outstanding leader and visionary whose story is one of great courage, integrity and determination.

'Lowitja was a national treasure,' Ms Anderson said. 'She lived a remarkable life and made an enormous contribution to public life in pursuit of justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous people across the globe.'

'Courageous and fearless in leading change, Lowitja was continually striving for better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She will remain in my heart as a true friend and an inspiration to Australians for years to come.'

Ms Anderson said she was immensely proud to have worked alongside Dr O'Donoghue for many years in establishing and growing the Lowitja Institute.

Among many achievements, Dr O'Donoghue was the founding chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and played a key role in drafting the Native Title legislation that arose from the High Court's historic Mabo decision. Named 1984 Australian of the Year, Dr O'Donoghue was the first Aboriginal person to address the United Nations General Assembly and the first Aboriginal woman to be appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

Lowitja Institute CEO Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed said Dr O'Donoghue had been an inspiration to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout her life, defying the barriers placed before her, first as a nurse and then in state, national and international affairs.

'Dr O'Donoghue broke new ground continuously, she brought strength, intelligence and tenacity to critical policy issues over decades, from land rights through to health equity. The Lowitja Institute has been honoured to benefit from her name, leadership and guidance over the past 14 years.'

Adjunct Professor Mohamed expressed the deep sympathies of Lowitja Institute's Board, management and staff to Dr O'Donoghue's family.

'Her love for her family and community is a legacy that will live on.'

Lowitja Institute Chair Selwyn Button also honours the legacy of Dr O'Donoghue: 'This is a difficult time for Dr O'Donoghue's family, close friends and colleagues.'

'We walk in the footsteps of giants such as Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, and we will continue to honour her memory and values of courage and integrity through our work to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and researchers in health research. She leaves us an amazing legacy.'

Read the [O'Donoghue Family Statement](#) and [Lowitja Institute Statement](#) honouring Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue's outstanding work at www.lowitja.org.au/lowitja-foundation

The Lowitja O'Donoghue Foundation was established in 2022 to mark Dr O'Donoghue's 90th birthday. In lieu of flowers, we ask people and organisations to please consider a donation to the Foundation in memory of Dr O'Donoghue.

www.lowitja.org.au/lowitja-foundation/donate

Protocols and permissions granted by Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue's Family

Please formally address Lowitja O'Donoghue as Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG.

Please do not use the name Lois O'Donoghue in any manner of reference.

Please only use the images provided and use appropriate credits. For detailed photo descriptions, please reach out to communications@lowitja.org.au

For more information or for an interview, please contact Lowitja Institute Communications team: Jo Cackett 0474 727 506 or email communications@lowitja.org.au

ABOUT LOWITJA INSTITUTE

Lowitja Institute is Australia's only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health research institute, named in honour of its patron, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG. It is working for the health and wellbeing of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by facilitating high-impact quality research, tools, resources and knowledge exchange, and supporting a new generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

Established in January 2010, the Lowitja Institute operates on key principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, a broader understanding of health that incorporates wellbeing, and the need for the work to have a clear and positive impact.

The history of the Lowitja Institute dates back to 1997 when the first Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health was established. Since then, the Institute and the CRC organisations have led a substantial reform agenda in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research by working with communities, researchers and policymakers, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people setting the agenda and driving the outcomes.