

STATEMENT – 29 February 2024

Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed steps down as Lowitja Institute CEO

Today Lowitja Institute announced the departure of its CEO Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed after five years leading Australia's only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health research institute.

Adjunct Professor Mohamed, a proud Narrunga Kurna woman, informed the Board of her decision earlier this year, and will be handing over the reins on Friday 8 March.

Chair Mr Selwyn Button thanked and paid tribute to Adjunct Professor Mohamed:

'On behalf of the Board and staff, I want to sincerely thank Adjunct Professor Mohamed for steering the organisation successfully through challenging times, such as the pandemic, while continuing to strive for excellence in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.'

'Adjunct Professor Mohamed has provided strong and inspiring leadership for the organisation, including being able to meet our long-held goal for becoming community controlled, and ensuring that 100 per cent of our research is now led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities,' Mr Button said.

'Self-determination, community, and a passion for justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at the heart of her work.'

After being appointed in an interim role in 2018, Adjunct Professor Mohamed said she had been incredibly proud to lead Lowitja Institute; and it was both poignant and profound that her last day in the role would involve attending the state funeral of our patron and namesake Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG, on Kurna Country in South Australia.

'Dr O'Donoghue has been such an inspiration and moral compass for me at Lowitja Institute. I could not have had a better role model, and have judged all our work by the challenge she set for us, to work fearlessly for change and improvement in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,' Adjunct Professor Mohamed said.

'To our patron, Board, members, staff and partners across the sector, I want to thank you for your support and for the amazing work you do to improve outcomes for our peoples. The work doesn't end here – I will continue to uphold the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now and into the future.'

In her many achievements, Adjunct Professor Mohamed led Lowitja Institute through the tumult of the COVID-19 pandemic and provided national and global leadership on the growing and devastating impact of climate change on Indigenous peoples, speaking both at the United Nations in New York and COP-28 in Dubai.

Under her leadership, in 2022 Lowitja Institute launched the Lowitja O'Donoghue Foundation in honour of the extraordinary legacy of the dedicated lifetime of work of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG.

In 2022, Lowitja Institute also brought together Australian health ministers for a national roundtable on Kaurna Country, Adelaide, and in the same year, was part of a partnership with the University of Newcastle that won nearly \$3 million to establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee (NAHREC).

In 2023, it launched *First Nations Health and Wellbeing – The Lowitja Journal*, to showcase high-quality research about Indigenous health and wellbeing by Indigenous researchers.

In other achievements during Adjunct Professor Mohamed's term, Lowitja Institute:

- raised the profile of the institute with hundreds of presentations, media interviews, peer-reviewed articles, events and policy briefs
- hosted two sold-out international Indigenous health and wellbeing conferences, which brought together leading global and national Indigenous voices on the social, cultural, political, and economic determinants of health
- was key in establishing the Partnership for Justice and Health, serving on the National Health Leadership Forum and the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee including leading four campaign reports
- established a partnership with the *Medical Journal of Australia*
- led the organisation in supporting the Yes campaign for last year's Voice Referendum
- advocated for Indigenous decision-making in climate and health; championed systematic reform to dismantle racism in health; and led national policy discussions in cultural determinants of health, data sovereignty and governance, Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous-led nation building
- strengthened Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led health research in our community controlled sector, and significantly grew our Members Community
- created cultural safety and allyship training and a comprehensive suite of tools and resources to build capability within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce
- developed and implemented an accredited Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Theory and Practice, as well as seven online learning courses.

Such was her leadership on a range of issues that she was announced as the 2024 Victorian Australian of the Year, particularly for her work in highlighting racism in the health system and advocating for cultural safety.

Mr Button said Lowitja Institute Board have appointed Deputy CEO Paul Stewart as interim CEO, and an executive search process for Adjunct Professor Mohamed's successor is underway with Pipeline Talent.