

Professor Fiona Juliet Stanley AC

The degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa) was conferred upon Professor Fiona Juliet Stanley at the Medicine ceremony held at 11.30am on 15 April 2005.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Professor Fiona Stanley AC for the admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa)

Professor Stanley is one of the most honoured of living Australians. In 1996 she was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and appointed a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia, Australia's highest civil honour. In 2002 she was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science. She was the Australian of the Year in 2003. In 2004 she was voted an Australian National Living Treasure by the National Trust. In the same year she was nominated Humanitarian of the Year in the Variety Humanitarian Heart Awards and the National Entrepreneur of the Year Leading a Social, Community or Not-for-Profit Enterprise.

Perhaps more than any other Australian of her generation, Professor Stanley is distinguished for her use of science in the service of humanity.

Born in Sydney, she moved to Perth in 1956. Her father, Neville Fenton Stanley, had been appointed foundation Professor of Microbiology in Western Australia's new School of Medicine. She studied medicine, practised in Perth for two years, and then went to the UK and USA to train in epidemiology (the science of describing and explaining the occurrence of disease in populations), biostatistics and public health.

On return to Perth, Professor Stanley was for two years Senior Medical Officer in Child Health in the State Public Health Department and for 10 years Deputy then Acting Director of the NHMRC Research Unit in Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the University of WA. She was appointed in 1990 as founding Director of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Professor in the School of Paediatrics and Child Health of The University of WA, positions that she still holds.

The Telethon Institute was established to address complex problems of children and youth, to elucidate causal pathways and to inform prevention. Professor Stanley's research with Professor Carol Bower on folate and the prevention of neural tube defects exemplifies this approach. The Institute has grown from 90 to 400 people working in basic, clinical and population science. It is nationally recognised for its research in Aboriginal child development, health and wellbeing, and its mentoring of Aboriginal researchers. There are currently over 20 Aboriginal researchers in the Institute.

Professor Stanley led the development of perinatal epidemiology in Australia from the late 1970's. She first built, or built on, sound information systems: a State Cerebral Palsy and Birth Defects Register and a database of linked birth, perinatal death and midwives. She and her research team have made major contributions to understanding of the causes and prevention of birth defects and major neurological disorders of childhood, particularly the cerebral palsies; the causes and lifelong consequences of low birth weight; and the patterns of maternal and child health in Australia.

Through more than 10 years membership of the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, Professor Stanley has championed health and medical research and the importance of children and youth for Australia's future. Flowing from this work, she has established and leads the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth - a national, interdisciplinary collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners intent on building a better future for Australia's children and young people. She and the Alliance are driven by a belief, in the words of her favourite quotation from Nelson Mandela, that: 'There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children'.

Chancellor, I present Fiona Juliet Stanley for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.