

Professor Fiona Juliet Stanley AC

Professor Fiona Stanley, widely recognised for the strength and clarity of her promotion of maternal and child health, is Australia's most respected paediatric epidemiologist. Her highly public profile is built upon her pioneering approach to public health research, which is at once deeply collaborative, broadly inclusive and resolutely incisive.

After graduating in medicine from the UWA, her thinking about clinical paediatrics challenged by the failure of a series of hospital admissions to avert the death of a child, Fiona Stanley embarked upon maternal and child health epidemiology and public health training with a determination to prevent such deaths by discovering their underlying cause.

As founding director of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Western Australia, Fiona Stanley created a multi-disciplinary team to tackle major issues in child health. This team played a critical role in the international collaboration that discovered the link between folate deficiencies and neural tube defects and instigated the world's first public health campaign promoting the need for folate in pregnancy. The Institute's particular strength has been to pursue, identify and analyse the multiplicity of complex pathways that lead to disease and, under her guidance, has forged a leading reputation in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

The author of over 300 published papers and book chapters, Fiona Stanley has given equally as many presentations, both nationally and internationally, on the socio-economic determinants of child health. Her tireless efforts to improve children's lives and prospects and the advances made towards these ends by the Telethon Institute under her direction have been widely acclaimed.

A key driver of the researcher, practitioner and policy maker partnership that is the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), Fiona Stanley has worked to realise a vision of bringing together like-minded organisations to work on new ways to improve the health and lives of young people.

Professional commendation of Fiona Stanley's achievements has come from medical colleges in Australia and overseas, from the Australian Academy of Science, the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, the Royal Institution of Australia and the Australian Medical Association. Broad community appreciation of her work is demonstrated by her appointments as a Companion in the Order of Australia, as an Australian Living Treasure and as Australian of the Year.

Comprehensive expertise such as Fiona Stanley's is much sought by community leadership organisations. In addition to her patronage of societies supporting women, families and children she is a UNICEF Australia Ambassador for Early Childhood Development and sits on the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council. She has previously been a member of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council, the Federal Government's Australian Social Inclusion Board and the Western Australian Government's Indigenous Implementation Board.

Fiona Stanley's signal strengths have been in establishing evidence for the social determinants of disease and developmental risks and in promoting early intervention as the strongest path to prevention. At her 2003 Kenneth Myer Lecture she drew attention to 'modernity's paradox', whereby increased wealth and opportunity are matched by increased social differences and problems for children and youth. Her call for fundamental cultural change to improve children's futures remains pertinent: 'We need to place social and environmental sustainability and population health ahead of economic growth as a national goal, and develop social policies that enhance equity, social stability and trust. Our response must extend beyond the conventional frameworks for social and economic policy.'

Retiring from 21 years leading Western Australia's largest research organisation, Fiona Stanley's research and informed advocacy will continue. This outstanding Australian continues to play an extraordinary role in advancing early childhood health and development.