

PROFESSOR ELIZABETH BLACKBURN

Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*

Professor Elizabeth Blackburn AC FRS FAA FRSN is a globally recognised leader in molecular biology and Nobel Laureate whose pioneering contributions have significantly influenced both academic discourse and real-world applications. A graduate of the University of Melbourne, Blackburn's groundbreaking research has transformed understanding of cellular biology and advanced medical science worldwide.

Blackburn's discovery of the molecular nature of telomeres, and her co-discovery of telomerase, solved the long-standing molecular biology conundrum known as the "chromosomal end problem", for which she was awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. This research has led to crucial insights into aging, cancer, and genetic disorders. In addition to the Nobel Prize, her contributions have earned her numerous other prestigious accolades, including the Gairdner Foundation International Award (1998), the Australia Prize (1998), the Lasker Award (2006), election to the Royal Society of London (1992) and to the National Academy of Sciences USA (1993), and appointment to the Legion of Honour of France (2025) further underscoring her pre-eminence in the field.

Blackburn is a Companion of the Order of Australia (2010) for "eminent service to science as a leader in biomedical research, particularly through the discovery of telomerase and its role in the development of cancer and ageing of cells and through contributions as an international adviser in bioethics."

Beyond her research, Blackburn has held influential leadership roles, serving as President of the American Society for Cell Biology (1998), of the American Association for Cancer Research (2010), and of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies (2016–2018), and on various advisory boards, including the National Institutes of Health. Her involvement in national bioethics discussion reflects her commitment to scientific integrity and ethical leadership.

In addition to her academic and policy achievements, Blackburn is a respected public intellectual. She was named in the Time 100 Most Influential People of 2007, has been featured in leading media outlets such as The Guardian, BBC, and The New York Times and has delivered influential talks at TED and the World Economic Forum. She co-authored the New York Times bestseller *The Telomere Effect: A Revolutionary Approach to Living Younger, Healthier, Longer*, bridging cutting-edge research with practical applications in health and aging. Her ability to communicate complex ideas to diverse audiences has helped bridge the gap between scientific research and public understanding.

Blackburn's engagement with public forums has played a crucial role in shaping global discourse on aging, health, and genetics. Through her participation in media platforms and public discourse, she has made scientific issues more accessible, influencing both policymakers and the broader public. Her advocacy has inspired action at various levels, from healthcare initiatives to ethical debates on genetic research, furthering efforts to create sustainable and equitable medical advancements.

Blackburn's engagement with the University of Melbourne is both substantive and enduring. She is an alumna of the University, having completed her Master of Science before pursuing her PhD abroad. Her academic foundation was built at Melbourne, and her success as a Nobel Laureate reflects the University's strength in fostering world-class researchers. She has returned to the University several times, including to open the Elizabeth Blackburn Science centre at University High School, a partnership with the University. Moreover, her research and advocacy have significantly influenced disciplines represented at the University, including the sciences, genetics, and medical research.

Elizabeth Blackburn's extraordinary achievements, intellectual leadership, and connection to the University make her an outstanding recipient for an honorary Doctorate. Her exceptional contributions align with the University's mission and benefit its research agenda, fulfilling the highest criteria for recognition. As a scientist whose insights have transformed global understanding of genetics and aging, her work continues to leave a profound and lasting impact on the world. Furthermore, her direct contributions to the University enhance its international standing, reinforcing Melbourne's commitment to excellence in research and public engagement. By bestowing this honour, the University celebrates a distinguished scholar whose legacy aligns seamlessly with its mission and values, ensuring a lasting influence on future generations.