

KERAN HOWE OAM
Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*

Keran Howe is a national leader in the fields of disability, family and domestic violence, violence and abuse against women, women's health and human rights. Drawing on her own lived experience and extensive policy and practice experience, Ms Howe has helped change the landscape for women with disability in this country.

Her academic training began at the University of Melbourne in 1973 with a Bachelor of Arts. Since then, she trained in social work and leadership with institutes including La Trobe University, Psychodrama Institute of Melbourne, Harvard Club of Australia and the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

In 2005 Keran Howe travelled to the USA and Canada on a Churchill Fellowship exploring health service responses to women experiencing violence, particularly pregnant women and women with disabilities. This scholarship became foundational to the Royal Women's Hospital's policy on screening for domestic violence. The Women's Individual Needs Clinic at Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital, established with her guidance is now recognised internationally for providing highly specialised services, particularly for women with intellectual disability.

Keran Howe has served on the Board of the Disability Housing Trust, established in 2006 by the Victorian Government to create innovative housing solutions for people with a disability. Her contribution as a director was instrumental in transforming the Disability Housing Trust into Housing Choices Australia, which is now one of the largest social housing providers in Australia.

In 2007 she became the founding Executive Officer of Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV), a role she held until 2018. In this capacity she advocated for reform in all areas impacting women with disability including violence and abuse, health, disability support, employment, housing, transport and the built environment. In growing the organisation, she established its reputation as one of Australia's leading advocacy organisations and laid the groundwork for the next generation of leaders and advocates, particularly through WDV's important Enabling Women's Leadership Program and mentoring program.

From 2016-18 Keran Howe served as Co-Chair of the National Disability and Carers Council, the peak advisory body to the Commonwealth Government. This position required outstanding leadership, negotiation and collaborative skills. Collaboration across the community sector involves negotiating with individuals and groups whose incentives do not always match. In this role she demonstrated her ability to win the trust and the respect of government as well as the disability community.

She has been extraordinarily successful in connecting the women's rights and family violence sector and the disability sector to ensure the needs of women with disability are front and centre of reform and change. Her partnership with the University of Melbourne researching the Victorian family violence sector's responses to women with disabilities and later the documentation of women with disabilities experiences of violence informed the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. This work ensured the needs of women with disability experiencing violence and abuse were an important focus of both the inquiry and final recommendations for reform and has had an ongoing influence of national violence prevention and response policy.

In 2020 the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) provided \$2.5 million to the University of Melbourne to investigate the feasibility of a National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP). Its vision includes a collaborative approach to disability research with people with disability at the centre and late last year the Commonwealth Government committed ongoing funding to NDRP of \$6.25 million per annum for the next two years. Keran Howe has been a contributing member of the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) Working Party and instrumental in guiding the development of the NDRP towards its vision.

Her strength, quiet determination and positive approach to problem solving and engagement has attributed to her success in achieving cultural change across business and society. There is much the University can learn from Keran Howe's journey.