

# **Western Australian Health Translation Network**

## **Science on the Swan Conference 2019 – Opening Ceremony**

### **Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC Governor of Western Australia**

**Wednesday, 5 June 2019**

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

It gives me great pleasure to officially open the 2019 Science on the Swan Conference, the theme of which is “Neuroscience and the Senses – Healthy Ageing across the Life Course”.

As many of you will know, the Science on the Swan Conference was an early initiative of the Western Australian Health Translation Network which, like this conference, is in its fifth year of existence.

The Conference, to quote co-chair Gary Geelhoed, “offers a unique opportunity to showcase the skills and ingenuity of local researched but also to foster and inspire the next generation of medical trailblazers.”

The Western Australian Health Translation Network was established in response to the need for integrated academic centres of research and medical excellence. Since its establishment, the Network has developed an increasingly important role in the State and also nationally as part of the Australian Health Research Alliance.

The willingness of all WA Universities, six Medical Research Institutes, private and public hospitals and the Department of Health to come together to form the Western Australian Health Translation Network has been central to the growing recognition of Western Australia as a centre of excellence in health and medical research.

This year’s Science on the Swan theme, ‘Neuroscience and the Senses – Healthy Ageing across the Life Course’ is an important one.

Healthy ageing, defined “as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age,” maximises the opportunities of individuals to lead longer lives, pursue new activities, education, work and further contribute to their families and communities.

The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2020, next year, “the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than 5 years”. People across the globe are living longer with the world’s population aged 60 years and older expected to total 2 billion by 2050, an increase from 900 million in 2015.

This demographic shift can pose significant challenges for countries globally and highlights the need for adaptive health and social systems to optimise the lives of our ageing populations.

Innovative health and medical research plays a central role in combatting the challenges presented by an ageing population. For millions of people around the world suffering from life-threatening and chronic illnesses, medical research is the beginning of hope for cures and for advances that improve quality of life.

I am encouraged and inspired by the list of international, national and local speakers who are each making significant contributions to leading research into Alzheimer's, autism, genetics and retinal diseases among other conditions.

We are fortunate to live in a great country and state with one of the best health systems in the world. The many local speakers featured in this conference are an example of the innovative minds leading health and medical research in and beyond neuroscience, within Western Australia.

I recently had the privilege of visiting The Australian National Phenome Centre, which will transform how long and how well people live, not just in Australia, but around the world. The Centre will help to revolutionise the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of serious health challenges like cancer, Alzheimer's, autism, obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

Like so many other game changing initiatives, it is the product of genuine partnership. In this case, led by Murdoch University, and with world leading experts, all Western Australian universities, and industry joining together.

In fact, the world leading experts who head the Centre, such as Professor Jeremy Nicholson and Professor Elaine Holmes who join us from the United Kingdom, will help to form the hub of the International Phenome Centre Network spanning the globe.

Western Australia is also growing a global reputation for developments in medical technology, with Perth-based medical device company OncoRes Medical recently being recognised as one of three 'Entrepreneurs of the Year' in London. OncoRes, led by Dr Katherine Giles is "developing an imaging tool to improve the outcome of breast cancer surgery."

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Barry Marshall, for developing another locally grown technology – Noisy Guts. This acoustic belt provides a non-invasive way to diagnose and monitor common gut disorders which can significantly impact our quality of life. I look forward to visiting this lab soon.

The establishment of the Western Australian Node of the MedTech and Pharma Growth Centre, in Perth last year, demonstrates the growth trajectory and possibilities for our State in the areas of life sciences.

A major contributor to the excellence of Australia and Western Australia's health system has been through research and it will play an increasingly important role in ensuring excellence in health continues into the future.

We are on the cusp of great change in the way health is viewed and managed. Artificial intelligence, the use of big data, precision or personalised medicine are but a few of the exciting new developments, all being driven by medical research. Innovative medical minds, such as those in this room today, will remain central to the evolution of health and medical research.

The very way research is viewed and conducted is changing with increasing involvement of consumers and community, with success demonstrated through measuring the real positive impact on patient's lives. The importance of research to the health of the nation remains central to the State and nation.

I welcome our interstate and international guests both to this conference and to the beautiful City of Perth. I hope over the next three days you enjoy the conference and the chance to explore more of Perth and Western Australia.

For all delegates, I hope that this conference will provide the chance for you to exchange ideas, think creatively, network and collaborate. Together you can make an impact on health and medical research, policy and service delivery locally, nationally and across the globe. I wish you well for the 2019 Science on the Swan Conference, which I now officially declare open.