

MEDIA RELEASE

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Flinders University to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and broader public health expertise

Flinders University is reshaping its public health disciplines to broaden capacity, create opportunities for early and mid-career academics, and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and employment.

Vice President and Executive Dean of the College of Medicine and Public Health, Professor Jonathan Craig says it will support an uplift in education and research focused on national and global priorities, and contribute to better public health, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Professor Craig says following consultation with staff, the College is creating a new discipline of Population Health. Importantly, it will be led by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academic.

Combining the dual elements of *Public Health* and *Social Determinants of Health* into the new discipline will deliver a more holistic approach to public health. The changes will see the work of the Southgate Institute distributed across the new Population Health discipline.

'This new, scaled-up discipline of Population Health will position Flinders to seize an opportunity to strategically grow our education and research in public health. Not only will it enable us to better pursue opportunities presented by the Medical Research Future Fund, it will also strengthen our capacity in support of our new flagship Bachelor of Public Health degree to help attract and retain students and build the public health workforce' Professor Craig says.

'Flinders acknowledges the sustained contribution to public health research and education by current staff. It's important to look to the future and create career pathways, which is why we're bringing in more early/mid-career academics, positioning the discipline to foster a new generation of growth.

Of the six positions in the new discipline of *Population Health*, two are identified positions for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academics – a Senior Lecturer in Public Health, and an Associate Professor/Professor in First Nations Health, who will also lead the new discipline.

Professor Craig says Flinders recognises that the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot be improved by goodwill alone and that there are distinct health priorities that require not just clinical and public health expertise but a unique cultural focus, and need to be Aboriginal led.

'For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, good health isn't simply being free of disease or illness. It encompasses emotional, cultural, and social wellbeing in addition to physical wellness. This is a dimension we wish to reinforce in our public health discipline, by being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, who are best placed to partner with Communities to prioritise, develop, and then deliver research knowledge back to communities.

'There's another practical aspect to employing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academics. The more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff we engage, the more it encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into study to fulfil their potential,' Professor Craig says.

The new structure reflects Flinders University's commitment to our Reconciliation Action Plan and Equal Opportunity. Existing staff will have the ability to apply for newly created positions, redeployment, or voluntary redundancy. Where operationally possible, flexible working arrangements (such as part-time work) will be maintained for staff transitioning to the new structure.

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