



Australian Academy
of Health and
Medical Sciences

Media release

HIV and COVID researcher Professor Sharon Lewin named 2022 Outstanding Female Researcher

Under embargo until 05:00 6 September 2022

An infectious disease physician and virologist who has been at the forefront of the global search for a cure for HIV and led research on the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 has been awarded the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences Outstanding Female Researcher Medal.

[Professor Sharon Lewin AO FAHMS](#) is Director of The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity and President of the International AIDS Society. She is also a Professor of Medicine at the University of Melbourne and an NHMRC Practitioner Fellow.

She was recognised by AAHMS for her body of research and global leadership in the search for a cure to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as well as her contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Professor Lewin's research on HIV has transformed our understanding of how HIV can persist on antiviral treatment and helped pioneer strategies to reverse and ultimately eliminate HIV.

"I started my research career in HIV in the early 1990s when there were no treatments available and HIV was a terrible death sentence," she said. "As much as I loved frontline medicine, I really wanted to make a contribution globally to HIV through research and clinical practice."

Professor Lewin was one of the first researchers worldwide to demonstrate that HIV can 'hide' at low levels in HIV-infected people, referred to as 'HIV latency', even while on effective antiviral therapy. Her research and work on lab models of HIV latency are now used in the development of drugs to treat HIV.

As part of her role as Director of the Doherty Institute, Professor Lewin leads a team of 25 scientists and clinicians working on virology, treatments and early-stage clinical trials related to finding a cure for HIV.

"We have fantastic treatments for HIV, people have a normal life expectancy, but treatment is lifelong and as soon as you stop treatment, the virus comes rapidly back," she said.

"In 10 years' time, I hope that every person living with HIV has access to treatment and that there will be a proportion of people who will have access to a cure that will allow them to stop treatment."

Professor Lewin was also recognised for her recent leadership in Australia's response to COVID-19, where she applied her deep knowledge of virology, immunology and public health to provide advice to the Victorian and federal governments, and to communicate to the public.

She said she was honoured to receive the award.

"I am greatly honoured to have received this award and thank AAHMS for their recognition of my team's work on HIV. I acknowledge all the wonderful students, research assistants,

registrars, post-docs, collaborators and mentors I have had the great privilege to work with over the years,” she said.

“I am indebted to people living with HIV, who have been so generous with their time in participating in our studies. Research is all about ideas, but it’s the people that make successful research possible—and also very enjoyable.”

The Academy’s Outstanding Female Researcher Medal is awarded annually to a leading woman researcher in Australia who has made ground-breaking contributions in the fields of health and medical sciences.

Consideration is given to those whose career has been interrupted or constrained by reasons such as illness, childbearing and caring responsibilities.

The Outstanding Female Researcher Medal has been made possible by a generous donation from The Gandevia Foundation, for which the Academy is most grateful. The award will be conferred at the Academy’s annual meeting in October.

Nominations for the 2023 medal will open later this year. [Learn more on the AAHMS website.](#)

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High-res image of medallist and full citation for award available on request. [View the video.](#)

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