



women & infants
research foundation

Media Release

Preterm birth pioneer named as Senior Western Australian of the Year

Friday, 8 November 2019

In recognition of a life dedicated to saving and improving the lives of women, infants and families, WIRF'S Chief Scientific Director, Professor John Newnham, has been named as the 2020 Senior Western Australian of the Year.

Professor Newnham was recognised along with other category winners as part of the 2020 Australian of the Year Awards held at Government House last night. He will join other state and territory recipients for the national awards ceremony at the National Arboretum in Canberra on 25 January 2020.

A Professor of Obstetrics, Professor Newnham has been instrumental in making Western Australia an international hotspot for research and clinical excellence in pregnancy and life before birth. In 1989, he founded and led the pioneering Raine Study; the world's first and most enduring pregnancy-focused lifetime cohort project.

In 2014, he developed the state-wide program for preventing preterm birth, The Whole Nine Months; a pioneering initiative which resulted in an 8% reduction in premature births across WA. In 2018, he would build and expand on the success of the WA initiative by founding the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance – the world's first ever national program of its kind.

Chair of the WIRF Board, Rowena Smith, said John had devoted his life to medicine and research for the advancement of all women, mothers and their babies.

“John epitomises the characteristics of a medical practitioner at their best: intelligent, innovative, compassionate and honourable,” she said.

“His ability to inspire others is amazing and his contributions to the field of obstetrics and preterm birth prevention have gone onto positively impact communities on a global scale.”

The win in the prestigious national awards comes on the back of Professor Newnham being honoured with the Australian Medical Association's (AMA) preeminent award in June 2019.

Professor Newnham was awarded the AMA WA's prestigious Hippocrates Award in recognition of his long term and long-lasting contributions to health and medicine in Western Australia.

AMA (WA) President Dr Omar Khorshid said Professor Newnham's successful work in reducing pre-term births was now acknowledged around the world.

“His determination to continue his research in WA has set a benchmark for many others,” Dr Khorshid said.

“John has always believed that life begins before birth, not after, and he has inspired many others to concentrate on finding further ways of lowering the rate of pre-term birth, which is the single major killer of children up to five years of age and a major cause of lifelong disability.”

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Background: The Women & Infants Research Foundation is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health of women and infants. We focus our research and programs across three principal areas: the prevention of preterm birth, gynaecological cancers, and women's mental health. This research and programs have directly contributed to a number of improved clinical practices and health outcomes.