

UQ wins 100 percent of prestigious health fellowships

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University of Queensland researchers have won both of the [National Health and Medical Research Council's](#) (NHMRC) 2008 Australia Fellowships, worth a total of \$8 million.

The Australia Fellowships, valued at \$4 million each over five years, are the most prestigious NHMRC research awards, being reserved for the nation's most outstanding researchers in the health and medical fields.

Only two are being awarded nationally for 2008 and the recipients, Dr Matthew Cooper and [Professor Wendy Hoy](#), will respectively target hospital-acquired infections and chronic diseases among Indigenous Australians.

“To be rewarded with one fellowship would be a significant achievement; to secure two is a great honour that speaks volumes for the quality of UQ and its researchers,” said UQ Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), [Professor David Siddle](#).

Dr Cooper will leave a senior private research position in the United Kingdom in order to pursue his Fellowship at UQ's [Institute for Molecular Bioscience](#) (IMB). He will establish a research program into novel antibiotics and antifungals that combat drug-resistant pathogens, especially those that cause hospital-acquired infections.

“Resistant bacterial and fungal infections place an enormous strain on Australia's public health care infrastructure with extended hospital stays and a large number of deaths,” Dr Cooper said.

“Better antifungals and antibiotics will improve the quality of life of Australians who are hospitalised and often acquire resistant infections and require extended periods of chemotherapy.”

Dr Cooper will also pursue a development that could aid research involving bacterial biofilms (cells that adhere irreversibly to a surface). This could potentially lead to earlier cancer diagnoses and better prevention of bacterial biofilms on medical implants, and could advance the search for novel anti-cancer therapeutics.

IMB Director, [Professor Brandon Wainwright](#) thanked the NHMRC for enabling this talented medical scientists return to Australia. “Dr Cooper not only performs excellent research, but also takes steps to ensure his work is commercialised so that it can be translated into clinical outcomes for patients,” he said.

Professor Hoy, from the Centre for Chronic Disease in the UQ School of Medicine, will use her Australia Fellowship to continue her precedent-setting research into chronic disease, especially in high risk populations – in this case focusing on Indigenous Australian health.

She is conducting an expanded multidisciplinary research program targeting the prevention and management of chronic diseases in the Aboriginal population, focusing on hypertension, kidney disease, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. A goal is to better inform the design of health services to more adequately deal with chronic disease.

“Chronic disease is now the major cause of sickness and death in Westernised populations and it accounts for about two thirds of hospitalisations, even in Queensland,” Professor Hoy said.

“In developing populations in patients who are undergoing lifestyle transition, disease rates are very much higher. In studying why, and what can be done about it, we have the opportunity not only to reduce their burden of suffering, their premature death and their expenses related to healthcare, but also to understand themes of disease causation and possibilities for prevention that will apply to the general population.”

During almost two decades Professor Hoy has studied a range of high-risk populations in nations and regions including USA and West Africa, as well as Australia.

Professor Hoy said she was extremely honoured by the peer recognition of an Australia Fellowship. She thanked the communities and populations she has worked with, “in the Australian environment most especially the Aboriginal people, who have so warmly and cordially participated in all the fieldwork we've done over the years”.

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