

Chancellor Dr Ian Gould, Vice-Chancellor Peter Høj, members of the University, distinguished guests, graduates and your proud families and friends.

I acknowledge the Kuarna people on whose lands we meet today and pay my respects to your elders, past and present, and to your youth who will be your future Elders, custodians of your stories, language and culture. I am a firm believer that we must support, develop, love, nurture and cherish our young, irrespective of their ethnicity, to develop their confidence and resilience as the challenges they will face as they enter midlife will be much more challenging than what we face today.

I also acknowledge graduates here today, both old and young, as you too are leaders, be it in your own home or in the community generally.

Some of you may be the first of your family to graduate with a university degree and I know how proud you and your family must be, congratulations and well done.

I am honoured to be addressing today's graduation ceremony as an alumnus of the University although when I graduated in 1978 we were then known as the South Australian Institute of Technology. In considering what to talk about this afternoon I knew one thing for sure; you didn't want another lecture. So what I will do is briefly discuss a major reform campaign themed around *collaboration, partnership, respect and passion*. Now don't get too excited because the passion I am referring too is the passion to excel and the passion to create a *just* and *fair* society for all.

The studies you have just completed as a helping professional demonstrates your interest in a *just* and *fair* society **for all** and your challenge will be to carry this passion into the workplace and into your daily life. I did and you can too and when times get tough, just remember the good time you had at university and how many of those you assist to live fulfilling lives, will appreciate your intervention.

Collaboration, partnership and respect are fundamental to success irrespective of whether you are in a classroom, on a hospital floor, behind a drafting table, in an office or lobbying for reform.

As graduates, many of you will be entering for the first time, *the world of full-time work*. It will be daunting, challenging, disappointing and hopefully rewarding.

You will be driven to test what you have learnt and for some it will be directly relevant, but for others, what you have learnt will be alien to what confronts you. This is normal and my recommendation is to hang in there and make it work. Remember, you are not alone and your contemporaries and lecturers, many of whom you have just spend half a decade with, are there to support you.

In the spirit of *collaboration, partnership and respect* let me share a good news story with you.

The story is about a people-centered movement that has driven reform of the Indigenous health system and influenced broader health system reform. And while this is about Indigenous Australians, it is relevant to all population groups and will become more relevant in the decades to come.

In 2005 as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner I reported to the federal Parliament that it was unacceptable that in a country as rich as Australia, the health outcomes of Indigenous Australians were similar to those of people living in rural Bangladesh. It was unacceptable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were dying on average, 17 years earlier than the rest of the population. I advocated that a fresh look at health provision through the lens of human rights was needed. The report spawned the Close the Gap campaign that I have led with colleagues since 2006.

The Close the Gap campaign for Indigenous Health Equality is a collaboration between over 40 of the major Indigenous and non Indigenous health peak bodies and human rights groups grounded by a people movement - people like you and me.

Together we have worked with the federal and all mainland governments and oppositions and signed a *Statement of Intent* that effectively commits parties to work in a bipartisan and collaborative way to the year 2030 to address the unacceptable poor health outcomes of Indigenous peoples.

And remember that when we talk about health, we must talk about the social determinants of health. Namely, all of those disciplines you have studied;

- Mental health and wellbeing,
- education,
- employment,
- safe and secure housing, and
- the built environment.

The Close the Gap campaign has been responsible for major injections of new moneys into the Indigenous health sector, the adoption by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) of the target to achieve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy equality within a generation and helping to place Indigenous disadvantage on the national agenda.

This year the Close the Gap people movement has celebrated its 5th anniversary and on the 24th of March we celebrated National Close the Gap day where over 880 community-initiated events took place across Australia.

Graduates, I mention the Close The Gap Campaign because each and everyone of you has the potential in the coming years to make a difference to the lives of fellow citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity or social or economic background.

The key messages I would like to leave with you are that as individuals, or collectively, *you can make a difference*; be it on major reforms or in the

workplace. *Its about passion and its about collaboration, partnership and respect.* Its about taking a human rights based approach to the work you do and to know that you are not alone - there are support mechanisms out there - so use them.

In closing I ask you to not forget your days at university, cherish the memories and remember that you are now an alumnus of a well-respected university. A university that will call on your support; because you are family.

Graduates, all the best - maintain the passion and dare to dream.