

Citation - Ms Melva Kennedy
23 April 2026, 2.30pm

Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Melva Kennedy to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

A proud Wiradjuri woman, Melva was born on Country in 1942 at Cowra, New South Wales. Late 1970 with her six children, Melva moved to Sydney to further her family's future, beginning a landmark career in Aboriginal health at the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) Redfern.

By the mid-1980s, Melva emerged as a pioneering leader in Aboriginal health and child protection at AMS Redfern. She was appointed as the first Aboriginal child sexual assault counsellor with NSW Health and later served as NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) first Aboriginal Statewide Child Protection Educator.

Recognising the profound barriers Aboriginal families faced in mainstream services, she became a tireless advocate for culturally safe appropriate support service. As the sole Aboriginal participant in early training programs, Melva led the vital work of developing cultural appropriate education materials to acknowledge the impacts of colonisation, racism, and the Stolen Generations.

For twenty-five years, Melva delivered child protection education across the state. In 1999, she was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study Indigenous child abuse programs in Canada, bringing this international expertise back to benefit NSW communities. She furthered her own academic journey by completing a Bachelor of Aboriginal Health at Batchelor College in the Northern Territory.

A visionary educator, Melva secured funding to produce two seminal films: '*Big Shame*' and '*Who's the Loser*'. These works, which remain integral to Australian education today, earned multiple national and international accolades, including a National Child Abuse Prevention Award and an International Film & Video Festival Silver Screen Award.

Beyond the classroom and the clinic, Melva shaped state-level policy through her work with the NSW Child Death Review Team and the NSW Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce. In 2006, she co-authored the transformative report, '*Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future*', providing a blueprint for service reform that continues to resonate today.

Melva's work has demonstrated leadership, courage and commitment. At a time when child sexual assault was rarely discussed, she built trust with Aboriginal communities to deliver workshop discussing sensitive and painful issues. With strong family support, Melva persisted because she believes children are precious and that their safety shapes their future.

Her leadership inspired other Aboriginal women, helped establish and strengthen networks, and guided and educated non-Aboriginal child protection workers in providing culturally safe service.

Pro-Chancellor, in recognition of her lifelong dedication to the safety of Aboriginal children and her extraordinary contributions to Aboriginal health, education, and policy, I present Melva Kennedy for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.