

The Honourable Nicola Roxon

An honorary award of a Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) was conferred upon The Honourable Nicola Roxon by the Chancellor, Ms Belinda Hutchinson AM, at a Faculty of Health Sciences graduation at 11:30am on 4 October 2019.

Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present The Honourable Nicola Roxon for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) in recognition of her contributions to government, health and public health law.

Nicola Roxon was a member of the Australian Parliament for 15 years. A lawyer who graduated with the Supreme Court Prize from the University of Melbourne in 1990, Ms Roxon was first elected in 1998 to the seat of Gellibrand in Victoria. She served as a senior cabinet Minister for six years in the first Rudd and then the Gillard governments

She was Australia's Minister for Health and Ageing for four years, one of the country's largest and most complex portfolios. She led many reforms including a national health agreement to secure public hospital funding, the creation of an independent hospital pricing authority, additional investments for elective surgery and emergency departments, preventive care, establishment of primary health care networks and regional cancer centres.

In 2011 she became Australia's first female Attorney General and held the role for two years. During her tenure over two years she oversaw all Commonwealth laws, counter terrorism measures and the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation. In 2012 she directed the establishment of the historic Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which published its final report in 2015.

Advocating for a strong legal and industrial system, protecting the dignity of workers and promoting the standing of women have all been hallmarks of her career.

Prior to entering parliament, Ms Roxon worked as an industrial lawyer, union organiser and an Associate to High Court Judge Mary Gaudron.

Perhaps her most important achievement in parliament was to lead the introduction of the world's first law requiring plain tobacco packaging as part of a new focus on prevention and a comprehensive approach to reducing smoking. This pioneering decision was fiercely opposed and unsuccessfully challenged by the global tobacco industry in the High Court of Australia in August 2012.

Subsequent challenges to the legality of the Australian law by a tobacco company in the Permanent Court of Arbitration and in the World Trade Organization by four nations also failed.

The global implications of the Australian legislation have been far-reaching. There are now 29 countries and territories moving forward with plain packaging, with 15 having adopted the measure and commitments in a further 14 and a number of others under formal consideration.

Her leadership in introducing plain packaging for all tobacco products earned her numerous national and international awards, including two from the World Health Organization. An award from the leading US tobacco advocacy organisation, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, stated "We decided to honour Nicola Roxon because she has shown truly extraordinary courage and amazing strategic ability."

Importantly too, the plain packaging measure was not introduced in isolation. Ms Roxon placed a new and much-needed focus on prevention in the Health portfolio through establishment of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency and substantial additional funding for prevention.

The University of Sydney has a long history of engagement in tobacco control and was the world's first university to implement a policy preventing staff and students from accepting grants from tobacco companies. This has been emulated by nearly all Australian universities and many others around the world.

An honorary doctorate for Ms Roxon is acknowledgement of both her historic and major contribution to tobacco control and of her appointment as Australia's first female Attorney General is a most fitting continuation of our University's role in tobacco control and of our acknowledgement of women's leadership in public health and law.

Chancellor, I present the Honourable Nicola Roxon for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) and invite you to confer the degree upon her.