

Jodie Hunter

From: all-staff-bounces@staff.unimelb.edu.au on behalf of Vice-Chancellor [vc@unimelb.edu.au]
Sent: Tuesday, 17 November 2009 10:33 AM
To: All staff
Subject: 96710 17-11-2009 Glyn Davis to All Staff - Our apology to Forgotten Australians

Colleagues and students,

The University of Melbourne strongly supports the Prime Minister's apology to the "Forgotten Australians", and associated government measures to redress wrongs suffered by many people who were in institutional care early in their lives.

This recognition of injustice is long overdue.

It is also appropriate the University - a community that aspires to serve the public good in every field of knowledge including medical research - take this occasion to express its deep regret for the part played by researchers linked to its community in vaccination research trials conducted after World War II using children in orphanages as 'subjects.'

As the Senate inquiry into the Forgotten Australians recorded in 2004, in the years after this War children were repeatedly struck down by outbreaks of polio, influenza, whooping cough and other diseases. Many died or were left disabled. In response, medical research institutions including the University of Melbourne worked urgently to develop vaccines.

The report states: "These vaccines needed trialling and children in orphanages were used as the 'subjects' for a range of speculated reasons, including that they were often the most susceptible to disease as an epidemic could sweep through an orphanage."

The University of Melbourne Council and the University community join with other Australians in saying a heartfelt 'sorry' to those children whose personal rights were infringed by these experiments, and to all the Forgotten Australians for the suffering their institutionalisation has caused.

The University of Melbourne is committed to the highest and most explicit ethical standards for medical research involving human subjects. We seek to ensure all research stringently conforms to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, published by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Amongst other essential principles involving due processes of consent, the Statement makes clear that before including a child or young person in research, researchers must establish that there is no reason to believe that such participation is contrary to that child's or young person's best interest.

The "Forgotten Australians" are a large population. As many as half a million Australian children may have been placed in institutions and foster care throughout the last century. Some in the University's own community, staff and students, may be among this group. If you are in this situation, the University's Wellbeing Services are available to help you, now or at any time in the future.

Glyn Davis
Vice-Chancellor