Acclaimed nursing leader Professor Roianne West called for the nursing profession to lead improvements in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians by committing to making it a national priority, at the annual prestigious ACN (Australian College of Nursing) Oration at Elder Hall, The University of Adelaide, South Australia on Sunday night.

Professor West who is the Professor of First Peoples Health at Griffith University, said that whilst Indigenous Australians experience appalling health, she feels there is enormous hope; for there is much that nurses can do together with Indigenous Australians to advance their health outcomes.

“There is much to talk about regarding the role of Indigenous knowledge. There is unexplored potential that exists for two-way learning, where new and more sophisticated ways of working together are made possible.

“The First Australian’s have maintained a continuous connection to each other, culture and country...in the process, we have acquired deep knowledge, understanding and experience that only comes from such a sustained relationship...this achievement is worthy of acknowledgement.

For Professor West there are similarities to the challenges facing Indigenous Australians and the Nursing profession.

“In my culture, the challenge we face...is to figure out who we are, where we come from, and where we are going with the Indigenous knowledge that we inherit. In accepting the challenge, our obligation is to pass on an enriched legacy to those who follow.

“To the nursing profession, our challenge, like that of the first Australians, is to understand who we are as a profession, where we have come from and where we are going with the legacy handed to us from a long line of nursing leaders on whose shoulders we now stand,” said Professor West.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, CEO of ACN was moved by the power of Professor West’s words and vision for all nurses.

“Hearing about the long tradition of Indigenous Nurses, dating back to the early 1900s and that many of our Indigenous nurses served in the great Wars is a timely reminder of the contribution made.

“Professor West spoke about the need for nurse leadership to work to strategically build the cultural capability and cultural safety education and competence of the nursing profession, which I believe would benefit us all,” said Adjunct Professor Thoms.

Professor West concluded her stirring address by stating her vision for Australia’s first people; “I want to see our kids educated, healthy and with the opportunity to grow up, get jobs and to be engaged in a meaningful way.
“The nursing profession has a unique opportunity to seize the promise of better health and wellbeing and along with respect for two-way learning, new and more sophisticated ways of working together, to make real that point where ‘the rubber meets the road’ in providing better health and wellbeing for the Nation’s First People.”

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Interviews with Debra Thoms and Roianne West are available, please contact Diana Abeleven on 02 9212 7867 or diana@zadroagency.com.au for more information.
Professor Roianne West