

## FNU Elevates Pacific Health Research to a University-Wide Platform

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*The Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR) team with the FNU Senior Leadership Team and Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba.*

After seven years of operating under the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), the Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR) has officially transitioned to the Fiji National University's Research Office.

The move reflects the University's vision to strengthen research leadership and expand research excellence across all disciplines.

It positions FIPHR at the centre of FNU's research ecosystem and marks the beginning of a broader strategy to establish and strengthen research institutes across the University's five Colleges.

The University also announced the appointment of FIPHR founding Director, Dr Donald Wilson, as Acting Executive Director Research and Innovation (Acting EDRI), effective 1 June 2026; a role with cross-cutting responsibility for research across all five FNU Colleges.



*Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) TVET Dr Isimeli Tagicakiverata, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences Associate Dean Research Dr Aruna Devi, PVC Corporate Services Professor Nii-K Plange, FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Paul Ade Iji, Acting Executive Director Research and Innovation (Acting EDRI) Dr Donald Wilson and Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR) Interim Director Ms Avelina Rokoduru*

Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba highlighted the importance of the research arm of the University.

“FIPHR is one of the great success stories of FNU. What began as a research arm within a single College has matured into a Pacific-leading institute whose work is felt in our communities, in our health policy, and in our partnerships across the region,” said the Professor Nabobo-Baba.

“By welcoming FIPHR into the Research Office, the University is committing to extend that success across all five Colleges and to build a research culture worthy of our role as Fiji’s national university.”

Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, Professor Paul Ade Iji, said the transition was the first phase of a broader research expansion at FNU.

“FIPHR comes across to the Research Office intact from its staff, its projects, its partnerships, and its operating model all remain in place,” Professor Iji said.

“What changes is the platform underneath it. From here, FIPHR sits at the centre of a University-wide research effort, and the model it has built community embedded, externally funded, partnership-driven becomes the template for research institutes we now intend to develop in our other Colleges over the coming years.”

Dr Wilson said the transition had been deliberately structured to ensure no disruption to current projects, donor agreements, or research partnerships.

“Every active project continues as before. Every sub-contract, every Memorandum of Understanding, every reporting line that our donor partners have signed remains in force,” Dr Wilson said.

“I remain the principal investigator on my existing grants, and our research centres continue their day-to-day work without interruption. What changes is that FIPHR now has the institutional backing of the University’s Research Office, and our colleagues across FNU now have a clearer pathway into health and inter-disciplinary research.”



*Standing from left: Acting Executive Director Research and Innovation (Acting EDRI) Dr Donald Wilson, Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR) Interim Director Ms Avelina Rokoduru, Sitting from left, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Paul Ade Iji and FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba.*

### **New Appointments and Reporting Structure**

Effective 1 June 2026, the following appointments take effect:

- **Dr Donald Wilson** — Acting Executive Director Research and Innovation, FNU
- **Ms Avelina Rokoduru** — Interim Director, Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research
- **Dr Etivina Lovo** — incoming Chair, Human Health Research Ethics Committee (HHREC)
- **Dr Aruna Devi** — Associate Dean Research, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Under the new reporting structure, FIPHR project staff report to the Interim Director, who in turn reports to the Acting EDRI and through to the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation. HHREC continues to operate as the ethics committee of record for all CMNHS and FIPHR research, including research conducted by CMNHS academic staff and higher degree by research (HDR) students.

The Acting Dean of CMNHS, Dr Amelia Turagabeci, welcomed the transition and confirmed that the functional links between FIPHR and the College including ethics review, research training, and collaborative project opportunities would continue under the new arrangements.

Established within CMNHS in 2019, FIPHR has grown over seven years into one of the Pacific's most active community-embedded health research institutes. The Institute now houses sixty-two staff across four research centres and the Human Health Research Ethics Committee (HHREC).

Between 2018 and 2022 alone, FIPHR signed more than thirty externally funded research projects with a combined value exceeding FJD 13.8 million, in partnership with universities and institutes across Australia, New Zealand, the wider Pacific, Asia, Europe and North America.

### **About the Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR)**

Established within the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences at Fiji National University in 2019, FIPHR conducts research in most health fields but is particularly strong in community-embedded applied health research addressing

Pacific health priorities. The Institute's research centres cover non-communicable diseases and food systems (C-POND), communicable diseases (CDRC), sexual and reproductive health (PacS-RHRC), and planetary health (PPHRC). FIPHR also hosts the Human Health Research Ethics Committee (HHREC), which serves as the ethics review body for all health research within FNU. From 1 June 2026, FIPHR reports to the FNU Research Office.