

Champion Change: An Opportunity to Support Workforce Capacity Building in First Nations Genomic Healthcare

We are seeking philanthropic support for a bursary to enable an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student to successfully complete the **Master of Genetic Counselling at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS)**. This investment will build Indigenous leadership in genomics while advancing health equity and self-determination for First Nations communities.

Your support will leverage an existing \$40,000 from the National Health and Medical Research Council funded **GeneEQUAL program of research**, which covers half the study fees for a successful candidate. [GeneEQUAL](#) is a world-leading inclusive research program operating under Indigenous governance principles, and the successful candidate will complete a project within the First Nations Stream led by experienced CQ University researcher, Greg Pratt, supporting yarning circles with First Nations people with intellectual disability, their clinicians and healthcare workers to make First Nations genetic healthcare more inclusive, person-centered and respectful.

The Critical Need

This bursary addresses urgent gaps in Australia's healthcare system that align directly with the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability and National Agreement on Closing the Gap. First Nations Australians are significantly underrepresented in genomic healthcare—a field rapidly transforming modern medicine. Currently, fewer than 1% of genetic counsellors in Australia identify as Indigenous, yet genetic counselling often involves deeply personal conversations about family, inheritance, and reproductive choices where cultural safety and trust are essential.

First Nations people with intellectual disability face compounded health inequities, experiencing worse healthcare outcomes than both the non-Indigenous population and Indigenous people without disability. Compared with the general population, people with intellectual disability are likely to experience more than twice the rate of avoidable deaths, twice the rate of emergency department and hospital admissions, substantially higher rates of physical and mental health conditions, and significantly lower rates of preventive healthcare. For First Nations people with intellectual disability, these disparities are even more pronounced.

The National Roadmap emphasizes the need for better models of care and improved health professional capacity—exactly what this bursary will deliver through *culturally safe genetic counselling services*.

Indigenous Governance

This bursary operates within a framework that privileges Indigenous leadership and sovereignty in genomics research and healthcare. All research activities will be conducted under Indigenous governance structures, ensuring First Nations communities maintain control over their data and that research aligns with community values and priorities.

The successful candidate will be mentored within culturally safe frameworks that honour Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of learning, while building capacity for Indigenous-led genomic healthcare that serves community needs and priorities.



About the [UTS Master of Genetic Counselling Program](#)

The Master of Genetic Counselling at The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) is a two-year graduate entry program that prepares culturally safe, competent genetic counsellors for diverse healthcare settings. The program uniquely combines evidence-based practice with client-centered care through an innovative blended learning approach.

The curriculum covers medical genetics, genomics in practice, advanced counselling techniques, research methods, and professional ethics. Students complete extensive clinical placements totalling 11 weeks across four progressively advanced practicum experiences, supported by expert supervision from experienced genetic counsellors.

The program's flexible delivery model features weekly online classes combined with week-long on-campus intensives each session, allowing students to maintain vital connections with their families and communities—essential for Indigenous student success and wellbeing. The Graduate School of Health at UTS maintains partnerships with over 400 industry and clinical organizations, ensuring graduates are prepared for roles across public and private healthcare systems, research institutions, and policy organisations.

About the [GeneEQUAL Program of Research](#)

GeneEQUAL is an inclusive research team, including co-researchers with lived experience of intellectual disability. Our national 5-year project funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council aims to ensure genetic healthcare is inclusive, person-centered and respectful for people with intellectual disabilities of all support needs and inclusive of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

It is essential that GeneEQUAL operates as culturally safe and appropriate. Greg Pratt, a Chief Investigator on the project and descendant of the Quandamooka people of Moreton Bay, leads community engagement and mentors Aboriginal researchers on the team. Our research meets the requirements of the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020) and has received ethical approval from the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee.

Investment Levels

Bronze level: \$6,800

- UTS student services fees (\$200 per semester, totalling \$800)
- Four one-week on-campus learning blocks requiring travel and accommodation for students living outside Sydney (\$6,000)

Silver level: \$16,800

- UTS Student services fees (\$800)
- Four one-week on-campus learning blocks requiring travel and accommodation for students living outside Sydney (\$6,000)
- Travel and accommodation costs for clinical placements in areas away from the student's home (placements are 1 week, 2 week and then two 4-week blocks) with estimated costs of \$10,000 depending on where the student lives and access to genetic services for clinical placement activity

Gold level: \$59,827

- All above components
- UTS tuition fees for one year (\$43,027)

Note: GeneEQUAL funding covers the remaining year of tuition fees, \$40,000 making your investment highly leveraged.



Why This Matters Now

Genomic medicine is transforming healthcare, but without Indigenous representation, it risks deepening existing health inequities. This bursary represents more than supporting one student—it's an investment in Indigenous health self-determination and the future of equitable healthcare in Australia.

By supporting this bursary, your organization will help build a more inclusive, culturally safe healthcare system while demonstrating leadership in ethical genomics research and Indigenous capacity building. This investment aligns with both the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, representing a powerful opportunity to create lasting impact that honours Indigenous sovereignty while advancing health equity for all Australians.

Expected Impact and Outcomes

This investment will deliver measurable outcomes for Indigenous health equity:

Immediate Impact:

- One qualified Indigenous genetic counsellor entering the workforce
- Enhanced cultural safety in genetic services for Indigenous communities
- Strengthened research capacity in Indigenous genomics

Long-term Benefits:

- Model for sustainable Indigenous leadership in genomics
- Improved health outcomes for Indigenous people accessing genetic services
- Contribution to closing health gaps through culturally appropriate care
- Foundation for expanding Indigenous representation across genomic healthcare

Community Benefit: The graduate will be uniquely positioned to provide culturally safe genetic counselling, conduct community-led research, and mentor future Indigenous professionals—creating ripple effects that benefit Indigenous communities nationwide. This aligns with the National Roadmap's vision of a healthcare system where people with intellectual disability are valued, respected, and have access to high-quality, comprehensive care that supports them to achieve the best possible health outcomes.

Addressing National Priorities: This investment directly contributes to the National Roadmap's goal of developing better models of healthcare and supporting health professionals to deliver quality care for people with intellectual disability, with particular focus on First Nations communities who face additional barriers to accessing appropriate health services.

