

Health and research boost for East Timor Heart Fund board

31 May 2017

The board of East Timor Hearts Fund has significantly expanded its skills base in key areas including public health and research following the election of four new directors.

The additions to the board, following a rigorous skills audit, recruitment and selection process, are part of East Timor Hearts Fund's continued expansion into research, education and prevention projects that aim to tackle the root causes of poor heart health in Timor-Leste.

"While we will continue to provide life-saving heart surgery in Australia for those who need it, our focus will increasingly be on earlier intervention and tackling some of the systemic issues behind the high rate of rheumatic and other heart disease in Timor-Leste," board chair Ingrid Svendsen said.

"These new board appointments, combined with the strengths of longer-serving directors, give us a diverse and high-skill board that is well-equipped to oversee the implementation of our very ambitious strategic plan."

East Timor Hearts Fund's annual general meeting last night (30 May 2017) elected new directors:

- Dr Brett Sutton, a public health expert who is Victoria's Deputy Chief Health Officer, who has previously worked on public health projects in Timor-Leste and as a volunteer with Médecins Sans Frontières.
- Julianne Scenna, who leads The Social Economy Group, a social impact consultancy, and has a background in international and community development and cross-sector partnerships.
- Nick Oats, who manages a Victorian Government international program and has had significant involvement in projects in Timor-Leste.
- Dr Vijaya Joshi, a research partnerships manager at Menzies School of Health Research, who has lived and worked in Timor-Leste and has considerable expertise working on rheumatic heart disease projects.

"Last year we funded and partnered to screen 1500 Timorese school children, as part of a landmark prevalence study, which identified some of the highest rates of rheumatic heart disease in the world," Ingrid said.

"Rheumatic heart disease is preventable and it is treatable in its early stages. So we are now partnering to roll out a range of preventative and public health projects, including funding an outreach health worker to deliver a penicillin program targeting those with early symptoms.

"Our board is now better placed than ever to provide governance oversight to manage risk and effectively deliver these more complex projects and service delivery areas."

Ingrid noted that the East Timor Hearts Fund board now had greater gender diversity than most Australian corporate boards and many in the not for profit sector.

"At a time when many corporate boards still have little or no female representation, it is very pleasing to now have a board that is 60 per cent women," Ingrid said.

Other board members are Andrew Cochrane, Bill Appleby, Nicki Patten (company secretary), Sarah Danne and Sophie Clarkson.

Ingrid paid tribute to the outstanding service of retiring directors Philip Fitzpatrick and Ana Saldanha, a foundation board member who will remain with the organisation as volunteer patient support coordinator.

The board is currently filling one final position, and is advertising for a finance-qualified director, with applications closing on 12 June.

More information about the board is at www.easttimorheartsfund.org.au/about-us/the-team/