

## **Council of the ACT Branch of the ESA Nomination for Distinguished Public Policy Fellow Award 2023**

The ESA Distinguished Public Policy Fellow Award honours a distinguished Australian economist for their contribution to the application of economics to public policy. At the Australian Conference of Economists Dinner in Brisbane on July 11, 2023, President Catherine de Fontenay was pleased to announce the winner of the Distinguished Fellow Public Policy Award for 2023. The award was to Professor Meredith Edwards. Professor Edwards started her academic career at the University of Malaya before returning to Australia and roles at the Australian National University. She completed a PhD in 1983 and what is now the University of Canberra. Professor Edwards moved into public service in 1983 and was seconded to the Office for the Status of Women. Over the following fourteen years, Professor Edwards took on roles at the Department of Education; the Department of Social Security; the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services; and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (which included a role as deputy secretary).

During her time in the public sector, Professor Edwards influenced many aspects of our daily lives that we now take for granted, including AUSTUDY, child support, HECS and long-term unemployment. For example, while working at the Department of Social Security in the 1980s, Professor Edwards designed Australia's system of child support payments. This system was a world first, utilising the taxation system to assess, collect and enforce payments from non-custodial parents. Unlike other systems worldwide, this new Australian approach raised the economic welfare of single-parent households, many of which were headed by women with less earning capacity than men and faced barriers to their participation in the workforce. The concept of making payments contingent on income laid a foundation for Professor Edwards' work with Bruce Chapman on the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS).

Professor Edwards served on the Wran Committee on Higher Education Funding (1988-1989), which recommended the scheme to the Minister. Professor Edwards worked in the Commonwealth Public Service until 1997. Since then, she has dedicated much of her work to bridging the gap between research and policy. Professor Edwards was appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Canberra in August 1997, and in 1999 she became Director of the National Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra, a position she held until 2004. Professor Edwards has published numerous articles and presented many papers on policy development and analysis, particularly in economics and tax in the family, child support, housing, poverty, women in government, and governance. Her book *Social Policy, Public Policy: From Problem to Practice*, is based on case studies from her time working with the Commonwealth Public Service. She has also been active with the Economics Society of Australia over her career, including as President of the ACT Branch of the ESA (1994-1996) and, more recently, with the Women in Economics Network, mentoring the next generation of economists. In addition, Professor Edwards has been a member and spokesperson for the Women's Electoral Lobby, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council, and a member of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration. She is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, a Fellow of ANZSOG, a Fellow of the Institute for Public Administration Australia and a member of the Hall of Fame, College of Business and Economics, ANU. Professor Edwards was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) in 1992.