



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

16 July 2024

UCT academic awarded the Virchow Prize 2024 for pioneering contributions to global health

Professor Lucy Gilson, head of the University of Cape Town's (UCT) [Health Policy and Systems Division](#), has been co-awarded the prestigious [Virchow Prize 2024](#). This recognition, under the high patronage of the President of the German Bundestag, comes with a total award of €500,000 and honours Gilson's holistic and systems-based approach to safeguarding human and planetary health.

The Virchow Prize is a major international award that recognises and celebrates outstanding achievements towards "health for all" that are closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Professor Gilson's work focuses on human well-being and sustainability, promoting a more resilient, healthier, safe, and just world. Her efforts align with the Virchow Prize's values of human rights, solidarity, and equity in attaining the UN 2030 SDGs.

In addition to her role at UCT, Professor Gilson serves as Professor of Health Policy and Systems at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom. Her research drives transformative change towards more sustainable, resilient, and just health system governance. She advocates for people-centered health systems, translating strategy into tangible improvements through innovative and consistent approaches. Her work has significantly advanced universal health coverage and equitable access to quality healthcare.

"The Virchow Prize for global health is a very prestigious award. It is the only award of its kind in global health, and this will be only the third year it has been awarded. I am therefore very honoured to become a Virchow laureate, as a co-awardee with Professor Johan Rockström. I see the award as recognition of all of those who, like myself, work in the field of health policy and systems research (HPSR), an area within the broader terrain of public health," said Gilson.

In HPSR, Gilson and her colleagues apply multi- and inter-disciplinary perspectives to understand and support systemic action to address complex health and well-being challenges. Health systems comprise all the institutions, organisations, and resources dedicated to promoting, sustaining, or restoring health. These systems not only support the delivery of health care and public health interventions, but also catalyse inter-sectoral action to address the wider social determinants of health.

"My work focuses on understanding the political, economic, and other forces influencing health policy change, health systems, and their impacts. It offers critical insights on

strengthening health systems to promote health equity and wider social value, as specifically envisaged in SDG 3. This research combines conceptual development, secondary synthesis research, and rigorous empirical inquiry into health systems' functioning, particularly concerning governance factors impacting health equity. My research is also integrally linked to capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities. These activities draw on research insights, offer pathways for research impact, and have themselves been a focus of some of my research," she added.

Gilson said the award also recognises UCT's [School of Public Health](#) as a research-intensive department, leading critically relevant work to understand health and well-being challenges and support action to address them. The school is recognised nationally and on the continent as a premier research institution and has been a continental leader in health policy and systems research. The school's work in South Africa and in collaboration with many African partners is critical in bringing African-led research into global health debates.

"Looking to the future, I aim to continue combining research, capacity strengthening, and policy engagement activities in supporting purposeful health system strengthening towards health equity. It is particularly important to support the next generation of researchers and health system practitioners who will lead this area of work to address future challenges," concluded Gilson.

Professor Gilson's advocacy for a holistic and systemic approach to health has influenced global policy and provides a science-based framework for tackling diverse health challenges globally. Her work demonstrates that significant progress can be achieved through interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research towards the common goal of "Health for All."

The Virchow Prize 2024 award ceremony will be held on Saturday, 12 October at 17:00 CET at Berlin City Hall and will be live-streamed.

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Velisile Bukula

Head: Media Liaison
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: 021 650 2149
Cell: 071 642 3495
Email: velisile.bukula@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za