The need
Poor hygiene and unsanitary living conditions in remote Australian Aboriginal communities have contributed to children experiencing a higher rate of common infectious diseases than non-Aboriginal, urban communities (McDonald et al, 2008). Additionally, Australia is positioned next to southeast Asia, where one billion people lack access to ‘improved sanitation facilities’ (toilets) (WHO and UNICEF, 2014).

Half of the population in the Pacific Island countries have access to such facilities (WHO ROWP, 2008). Poverty in this region is a central concern, where death and disadvantage occur in part through lacking access to clean, safe water – which is a key intervention for primary health prevention (Cameron et al., 2011). The United Nations seeks to address this limitation to development in one of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to be introduced in 2015, i.e. to ‘ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all’ (UNDSD, 2015).

Opportunity for social improvement in the Asia-Pacific
There is currently no single Australian university that is known to provide whole-of-university expertise on aspects of water, sanitation and health (WaSH) to address this situation.

Much of the current WaSH project in Australian universities does not emphasise the social issues of community management, governance and behaviour change. Furthermore, many WaSH projects are criticised for lacking robust evaluation criteria in the project design or baseline pre-data against which to evaluate and enable evidence-based decision-making (Cameron et al., 2011).

To respond to this gap, The University of Queensland will become known nationally as the lead university in water, sanitation and health research and application through its transdisciplinary, pan-university research in the School of Public Health, Chemical Engineering, Agriculture and Food Science, Institute for Social Science Research, Advanced Water Management Centre, Civil Engineering, and Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, and through the capacity building activities provided by the UQ-funded International Water Centre. This Centre builds capacity through training, education, institutional capability development partnerships, and managing applied research.

Benefits for all stakeholders
The UQ-led initiative on Water for Equality and Well-being will provide public and environmental health improvement through effective implementation of WaSH using Australian research expertise working in collaboration with Indonesian on-ground and local partners. Research outcomes will include enhancement of WaSH implementation in rural communities in Asia, the Pacific and remote Australia through examination of current best practices. This work will directly strengthen intercountry ties through development contribution, and build capacity of in-country WaSH staff through skill-building workshops and short courses, in collaboration with the UQ-sponsored International Water Centre.
Global Change Institute
social contribution

The Water for Equality and Well-being Initiative is a genuinely multidisciplinary approach to respond to a significant global problem.

This initiative will be hosted by the UQ Global Change Institute which was established to catalyse expertise across the university to deliver high-impact, ‘game changing’ research that provides solutions to global change challenges facing the world.

Within GCI, the Sustainable Water Program seeks to address the complexities of the global water challenge through innovation, education and engagement. The Professorial Chair will be based in a relevant faculty and supported by GCI staff and structure.

Proposed partners

The Water for Equality and Well-being Initiative will focus on indigenous Australian communities in Queensland, and in the Asia Pacific on Indonesia, the Philippines and India. UQ researchers already have existing memoranda of understanding and active working relationships with government, non-government, research and philanthropic partners in these countries. This includes Australia (World Vision; CARE Australia; Oxfam; WaterAid; CRC for Water Sensitive Cities), Indonesia (BAPPENAS (State Ministry of National Development Planning); University of Malang), Philippines (Asian Development Bank; Manila Water; University of Southern Philippines) and India (Ministry of Science and Technology; PRADAN).

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Activity themes

Within this initiative on Water for Equality and Well-being, specific themes guide the development of projects and activities:

- Population health
- Environmental health
- Finance
- Community Development
- Governance
- Technology
- Systems thinking
- Evaluation
- WaSH capacity-building
- Translation of research to application