

UJ to host its first ever SAMRC Extramural Research Unit

The University of Johannesburg will host the newly established South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) Extramural Research Unit, known as the Pan African Centre for Epidemics Research Unit (Pacer).



Prof Refilwe Phaswana-Mafuya

This is all thanks to UJ's Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor Refilwe Phaswana-Mafuya, who has been awarded a SAMRC Extramural Research Unit for her outstanding scientific stature as a researcher.

The SAMRC/UJ Pan African Centre for Epidemics Research will have its primary focus on conducting epidemiological and public health studies with specific focus on heterogeneities in disease risk, differential impacts of pandemics (both direct and indirect impacts) and addressing competing health risks and tailored interventions.

It will also be an opportunity to carry out cutting-edge Pan African and global research on epidemics of HIV and AIDS and Covid-19 among marginalised populations in diverse low-resource settings in South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and globally.

This is the first ever SAMRC Extramural Research Unit hosted by the University of Johannesburg. Phaswana-Mafuya will serve as the Director of the Unit.

In congratulating Phaswana-Mafuya for the award, SAMRC vice president: extramural research & internal, Portfolio Liesl Zühlke, said: “We trust you will continue to provide excellent leadership for the new Unit to achieve exceptional research performance and output.”

Commenting on the appointment, Phaswana-Mafuya said it would fulfil her broader vision to change, transform and impact lives in these pandemic times, as shared in her recently published book, *Vision Never Dies*.

“I am humbled to pioneer the establishment of the first ever SAMRC/UJ Extramural Unit. Specifically, my vision is to see more women scientists. I see more public health innovations, improved health outcomes, improved quality of life, and huge social development.”

The current studies include:

- Launching an effectiveness implementation trial of a package of HIV/PMTCT/SRH prevention and treatment interventions for mitigating the impacts of Covid-19 and sustaining health service utilisation among female sex workers in South Africa
- Harnessing Big Heterogeneous Data to evaluate the potential impact of HIV responses among key populations in generalised epidemic settings in Sub-Saharan Africa

Phaswana-Mafuya is already working on Pacer plans, grant applications and hosting international collaborators.

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