

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE23090843

Fitzharris, Meegan

(1972 -)

Born 1 January, 1972, Wellington New Zealand

Occupation Parliamentarian, Public servant

Summary

Meegan Fitzharris was first elected to the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2014 and served until July 2019 in a range of ministerial roles including Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport, Minister for City Services, and Minister for Higher Education, Research and Training.

Meegan Fitzharris was inscribed on the ACT Women's Honour Roll in 2012.

Details

Meegan Fitzharris was born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1972. Her father was a policeman and the family moved around, including living in Singapore for some years. She moved from New Zealand to Australia in 1998 after completing a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Otago (1993–96) and a Master of Arts in International Relations at the University of Auckland (1996–99). While studying she also worked as a university tutor and undertook internships with Oxfam in Auckland, and at the United Nations in New York, in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and Division for the Advancement of Women. After arriving in Australia, she worked with the NSW Police, in a role related to security planning for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. She then moved to Canberra, initially working in the Australian government National Office for the Information Economy, and later became a senior policy officer with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) developing and coordinating policy advice on significant national law enforcement issues for the AFP Commissioner and Minister. She was described by an AFP colleague as a brilliant policy writer. From 2005 to 2007 she worked for the federal Attorney-General's Department, again in a senior policy role, addressing national security and counter-terrorism issues across government. Between 2007 and 2012 she became a mother to three children (two daughters and a son) with her husband Pierre Huetter, combining motherhood with work as a consultant, providing training in policy development and effective communication.

In 2012 she became a senior advisor to Andrew Barr, who was then Deputy Chief Minister in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Legislative Assembly, with portfolio responsibilities including Treasury, Community Services and Housing. She later became his Chief of Staff, and was in this role when he became Chief Minister for the ACT in 2014. In addition to paid employment roles, she has been an active volunteer across various community, education and sporting organisations. Fitzharris was a Labor party candidate in the 2012 ACT election, but did not win a seat. When Katy Gallagher resigned as ACT Chief Minister in 2014 to stand for the Australian Senate, a countback of the 2012 votes resulted in Fitzharris being elected as the member for Molonglo, taking up a seat in the ACT Assembly in January 2015. She was re-elected to the Assembly in October 2016 as the member for Yerrabi. During her relatively short political career she held a number of key ministerial positions, including Assistant Minister for Health, and later Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport, Minister for City Services, and Minister for Higher Education, Research and Training. Development of the first stage of Canberra light rail was a major initiative within her transport portfolio responsibilities, with construction commencing in 2016 and opening to passengers in 2019. As Health Minister she commissioned a major review into staffing issues, after complaints of bullying and harassment and a poor workplace culture in ACT Health. She also chaired the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council. In June 2019 Fitzharris announced her intention to resign from her ministerial roles, and step away from politics. She left the Assembly in July 2019, stating that her main reason for leaving politics was for her family and noting that her children would be in high school through the next term of government. In an interview at the time she said, 'I hope that other working mums and dads — indeed people of all ages and backgrounds — consider running for public office. It is an important role; and it is more than a job. It is deeply important to our community that good people of all political persuasions put their hand up to represent their community, join the contest of ideas and take responsibility for decision making.'

After leaving politics Meegan Fitzharris became a Senior Fellow in Health Policy and Leadership in the College of Health and Medicine at The Australian National University (2019–2021), as well as working again as a consultant. She chaired a planning group established by the Queensland government to investigate opportunities to build on reforms and innovations initiated through the state's COVID pandemic response. The group's report *Unleashing the Potential: An open and equitable health system* was released in August 2020. She became a board member of Dementia Australia in 2021. In early 2020, she was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer which was successfully treated. She lived in New Zealand from late 2022 until May 2023, undertaking further study. She has since returned to Canberra and is pursuing new career opportunities.

Published resources

Fitzharris, Meegan: Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory website, <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/ninth-assembly-members/yerrabi/fitzharris-meegan>

Author Details

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Created 11 July 2023

Last modified