**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** AWE0425

# Spitzer, Fleur

**Occupation** Feminist, Philanthropist, Women's rights activist

## Summary

In 1996, as part of the Queen’s Birthday Honours, Fleur Spitzer was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to women. She was recognised in particular for services to the ageing through the work of the Alma Unit, Australia’s first multidisciplinary research and teaching unit focussing on the health and well-being of women aged 65 years and over. Established in 1993 at the University of Melbourne with an endowment from Spitzer, the Unit moved to Victoria University before closing in 2005.

## Details

Fleur Spitzer was one of three siblings born to a Polish father and an Australian mother of English descent. Her maternal grandparents arrived in Australia in 1889 – her grandmother regularly met ships docking at Station Pier to offer temporary board free of charge to those with nowhere to go. Spitzer’s father emigrated from Poland as a nineteen-year-old in 1922. Her husband, Vic, emigrated from Hungary with his parents in 1939 and became an entrepreneur, establishing a series of private hospitals. Relatives of Spitzer’s father joined the family in Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, and Spitzer became increasingly aware of the impact of racial discrimination. In later years, this awareness would feed into her philanthropic endeavours on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers.

As a woman, Spitzer was equally alert to the impact of sexual discrimination. Her involvement in the women’s movement from 1973 was highly formative. By 1990, the year of her mother’s death, she had developed an interest in myths and stereotypes around women and ageing. Armed with an inheritance from her mother, she established the Alma Unit for Women and Ageing at the University of Melbourne. The Unit later moved to Victoria University, but folded in its twelfth year. Similar work has since been taken up by Monash University.

Prior to the establishment of the Alma Unit, Spitzer worked as a volunteer with Court Network Victoria, offering personal information and support to people attending the various courts. She became president of the Network’s committee of management. In later years she served as vice president of the Australian Association of Philanthropy (now Philanthropy Australia). Spitzer found a mentor in Jill Reichstein, and continues to channel a significant proportion of her philanthropic funding through the Reichstein Foundation. Spitzer heads the Melbourne Community Foundation’s Ageing Well Theme Fund, is a member of Philanthropy Australia and the Arts Victoria Centre, and an associate supporter of the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA). Her interests still include the well-being of older women as well as indigenous Australians and asylum seekers. In 2003 she offered seed funding for a pilot project, Access to Justice in the Modern Campaspe Region, which resulted in the establishment of a community legal centre with the support of the Buckland Foundation, the Ian Potter Foundation and the State government of Victoria.

## Events

**2004 - 2004**
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

## Published resources

**Thesis**
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

**Site Exhibition**
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

**Author Details**
Barbara Lemon

**Created** 16 January 2003
**Last modified** 15 July 2020