

Welcome

Owen Allen, Jenny May

Robyn Williams: Now I'd like to invite the conference convenor, Owen Allen and our chair, Jenny May, to come up to the stage and introduce themselves.

Owen Allen: Thanks, Robyn. Probably most of you heard me last night, but welcome again to the 10th National Rural Health Conference. This is going to be a great conference. And for those of you who are first-timers here, you will definitely enjoy it, and I hope you get fully into the spirit of the conference and participate in the presentations you attend.

I'd like to thank again our sponsors. James Cook University is our principal sponsor for the conference and that's really wonderful for a university to get on board like that. The Queensland Government is our chief sponsor, and the National Health and Medical Research Council is a sponsor of the conference handbook. beyondblue, of course, are continuously working their stuff and supporting conferences like this around mental health; the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, which had been a long-term supporter of rural health and the National Rural Health Alliance's work as well; and the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relationships who supplied all of the wonderful lanyards that you're hanging your conference name on.

So thanks very much all the sponsors who without we wouldn't have been able to run this conference as smoothly as you will see it being run today. Welcome again. And now I'll hand over to Jenny May, the chair of the National Rural Health Alliance to say a few words.

Jenny May: Thank you. Well, it's my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the 28 member bodies of the Alliance and to reflect very briefly on what an opportunity we have over the next few days. And I think it is a great opportunity because it's a time in the political—I guess in the health sector where we have lots of opportunities. As we see these strategic reviews coming to their fruitions, the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, the Primary Care Strategy, the Preventative Care Strategy, and we start to see some actions coming out of the Maternity Services Review and many others, I think we have a huge opportunity as some of these strategic reviews come to fruition over the next 12 months of enacting change and evaluating the proposals and the information that comes out in terms of our grassroots understanding of the sector.

With that opportunity also comes quite a big job, I think, of managing change, and I think Joshua alluded to that yesterday. And also we've got some threats on the horizon. Obviously, the financial downturn is a threat. We've got climate change to deal with. And we've got some changing population dynamics also in rural areas. But I think Joshua very briefly gave us some tools yesterday to think about. I really like the concept of appreciative inquiry to think about looking at the strengths of the sector, because there are so many strengths in our sector. We have a proud history of innovation. We have a proud history of doing what needs to be done, often with very limited resources.

But I think Joshua also reminded us that there is a big difference between strategy and failure, and that's leadership. So I'm encouraging you to think through the next few days and consider how you can be a leader in your workplace, in your profession, and in yourself. And here's a real opportunity to get some good input to make that happen, so please enjoy.