

## Welcome to Cairns

**Di Forsyth:** Thank you, Seith. We come across each other quite a lot these days.

I'm here on behalf of the Mayor of Cairns, Councillor Val Schier, who is unable to be here. She's in Guam. She arrives back late tonight. I'm sure Mayor Val will be interested in catching up with some of the conference during the next few days while you're here. So I'd like to welcome you all to the Cairns region for the 10th National Rural Health Conference. I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather today, the Gimuy Yidinji people.

As you may be aware—and I don't know long some of you have been here or if you've been here before—Cairns is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of the world. I'm not biased at all. The far northern region of Queensland has a lot to offer, and I hope that the delegates and your partners and friends will take advantage of what we have to offer.

When I was asked by Mayor Val to open the conference and to welcome you here today, I was very excited given my background. Before becoming a politician, and I still can't get used to the word "politician", I was the director of the Addiction Help Agency here in Cairns—a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service. I have had a many years, in fact, working in the allied health field and in partnership with Queensland Health and other non-government organisations. So it's very, very exciting to have this conference held in Cairns over the next few days.

And the work that you do I admire greatly. Coming from Melbourne originally and living in Cairns for the last 18 years, I've come to realise the need for health services in rural and remote areas. Although Cairns is a regional area, a lot of workers leave from Cairns and work out in the rural and remote areas. And Cairns becomes a hub often for training and for networking for professionals in the health field. So it's really important that we work together, that we build partnerships. And I know one of the main aims of this conference is to look at working together across government and non-government organisations to provide the very best and most effective health services we possibly can.

As a councillor I chair the Cairns Regional Council Community Safety Committee and the good news is that this year we were designated as an international safe community allied to the World Health Organisation, and that's very exciting. I can't take too much credit for making that happen, given that I was only elected last April. However, it was wonderful for me to be part of that designation ceremony. And whilst we know that not everywhere is safe and not everybody is healthy, it's a way—it's a beginning, working together with other groups and organisations to establish preventative measures, to work together for wellbeing of all people and to come up with new and innovative ways that we can make our city safe and our people healthy.

I believe it's crucial that the work you do and the conference topics that you'll be discussing over the next few days focus on partnerships that work and how we can build on the wonderful and valuable work that people are already doing. The young circus group that performed here today—how wonderful and what a brilliant way for young people to learn skills, self confidence, and feel good about themselves. One of the projects that is affiliated with our safe communities program is Cirque de School for primary school children which I am pleased to say has received ongoing funding to continue the great work to teach circus skills just like our young performers displayed earlier today.

Before closing, I would like to mention that today's workshops—held earlier today, went extremely well. I'm hoping to drop in during the conference to a couple of the keynote speeches and I will be staying

throughout today. I'm really excited to have been sitting over there next to Mr Robyn Williams who is the MC for today. I think I have to admit to being a bit of a groupie of Robyn.

So please enjoy this wonderful region whilst you're here, and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this conference that will be of particular interest not only to the people of Cairns and the region but also to me and my local government colleagues to inform how we might be able to encompass some of the learnings from the conference. So thank you very much for coming to Cairns and, on behalf of Mayor Val Schier and myself, Cr Diane Forsyth, welcome.

**Owen Allen:** Thanks, Councillor Forsyth. I'd like to note to the audience here that, something I just found out the other way, was that the Cairns City Council now has—seven out of 10 councillors, including the Mayor, are women.

Again, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land to which we're gathered and pay my respects to the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji tribe, and thanks to Seith Fourmile and the Baya(ph) Dancers.

My name is Owen Allen. I'm the conveyor of the 10th National Rural Health Conference. My home is an hour and a half up the mountain in a lovely little town called Atherton. I'd like to thank at the outset the sponsors of the conference. James Cook University, Queensland Health, National Health & Medical Research—NHMRC, sorry—stumbling over things—Beyond Blue, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, and the Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relationships.

The 10th National Rural Health Conference sounds auspicious and, really, for us, it means that the conferences have been running for 20 years. Shortly we will hear from Louise Lawler on what we have learnt over our previous nine conferences. And I know I and many of those amongst us who have had a long-term association with the conferences will be particularly interested in that analysis. From my view as a convenor and the organisation of the program, I feel that this conference will show a level of sophistication that has been a result of the last 20 years of hard work in the industry as a whole.

This will be a pacey conference. I'm sure that whatever strands you attend you will find the papers alive and challenging. We are pushing the frontiers on the hard-worn paths of indigenous health, mental health, service delivery of all kinds. But we're also raising the stakes on building resilience in rural communities and introducing new subjects like climate change and its effect on health. And I'm glad to see even architectural design in the list of papers. The arts in health stream is also stronger, with a strong endeavour to incorporate the arts as a way of analysing the health situation as well as using the arts to create strong energies in the conference as you've already seen.

You will be participating at the forefront of health policy reform at this conference with a presentation from Sabina Knight of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission who are soon to release their final report and the recommendations for policy action process that is at the heart of this conference.

I'm extremely delighted to be able to convene this conference in Cairns. As a child of the Tablelands, Cairns is the big smoke to me. And to I guess paraphrase Councillor Forsyth, even though we're 2000 kilometres from the nearest metropolitan city, actually we think we're the centre of the universe.

So, once again, welcome. Have a good time. And I'd like to call on our MC and hand over the desk to Robyn Williams.

**Robyn Williams:** Thank you, Owen, and welcome from me as well. I'm Robyn Williams. I have been doing things on radio and television since 1972, which is so far back that's when people still walked on the moon. They began in '69, which is going to be the 40th anniversary coming up in July. And I was quite touched when I walked into the exhibition hall a bit earlier when someone came up to me and said, with

great concern, something about the program I broadcast on Saturday—yesterday—about Richard Henry who was required, at the age of 100, to give a sperm sample. Now, I can understand the concern because, well, people who are 100 do remarkable things these days. Elisabeth Murdoch, Rupert's mum, has done fantastic things with any number of institutions, not least the kids' hospital in Melbourne. And Rita Levi-Montalcini actually got the Nobel Prize, one of the 12 women in history to get the Nobel Prize, for science, and she not only is the longest lived, at the age of 100, Nobel Prize winner in history, but she's also sitting in the parliament, in the senate. If you know anything about Italian politics, that is some achievement. By the way, the youngest science Nobel winner in history is an Australian.

Anyway, it wasn't a question of there being some exploitation of poor Richard Henry at the age of 100 giving that sample. I must say, don't worry, because he was, in fact, a kakapo, a parrot, the largest parrot in the world, endangered—in fact, there were only 51 of them at one stage. But now, through their various selective breeding and insight into the ways that these creatures work, there are now about 150, which is wonderful. I love these parrots, although their sex lives are just so complicated. How they got away with it for about a million years is beyond my comprehension.

I have a reasonable health record. I've had only six days off sick since 1972—five of them in 1988 for having three cardiac arrests, and one of them in 1991 for bladder cancer. I'm a terrible patient in that I never go to see doctors and I never tests done because, if you have tests done, you guys find something. And if you find something, you feel obliged to treat it. And so I'm just hoping for the best. But, somehow, given my record, I'm really, really pleased that you're kind of in the room.

On with our first speaker. We have several keynotes—four keynotes this afternoon, and the first actually comes from the south. Thirty-eight per cent of Australia is tropical, which is one of the reasons we're here. A third of this country is tropical. But the first speaker is from the south. Kim Boyer is an experienced health researcher and academic from Tasmania who has been closely involved with the National Health & Medical Research Council, including on committees relating to strategic research initiatives, palliative care, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research—come to talk to us on the demise of the Geebung Polo Club: a failure in health services planning? Welcome.