



Australian Association for
Infant Mental Health

Australian Association for Infant Mental Health

AAIMH National Chairperson's Report: Nicole Milburn

Nov 8th, 2021 AAIMH Annual General Meeting:

The 2020/21 Board:

- **Chairperson/Board Director:** Nicole Milburn (Vic).
- **Secretary:** Michelle Fryer (Qld).
- **Treasurer:** Mary Hood (SA).
- **Branch Reps/ Board Directors:** Ros Powrie (SA), Joe Coyne (Qld), Cath McPhee (Vic), Rubela Wilborn (WA), Kerry Ann Grant (NSW), Alexandra Ball (ACT). Caroline Diamond shared with Naomi Thomas (Tas).

Supported by:

- **Membership Secretary & Website Assistant:** Heather Warne
- **Website Coordinator:** Samantha Finan.
- **Project Officer:** Brendan Cook, position funded, 4 hours per week.
- **Executive Support:** Vicki Matheson, position funded, 4 hours per week.

Just when we were thinking it was over, it wasn't. 2021 has been an extraordinary year. A year when the country suffered varying levels of restrictions, from isolation from those interstate to isolation from those 2.5km away, and our Federation was sorely tested. Your work has been challenged enormously, as ongoing requirements for reduction in face-to-face work has required sustained creativity and innovation to keep doing the important work with families. This has occurred in the context of professional isolation and varying personal challenges, from remote learning to all kinds of separation from families.

The chronic stress of the last 18 months has taken a toll on the health, welfare and community services workforce in particular. We know that there are few who escape the effects of chronic stress, and the impact is seen in chronic fatigue, reduced motivation and concentration, and increased irritation. Compassion fatigue, perhaps our field's most common workplace injury, has increased. Experts predict it will take years for health and welfare to work through the effects of the pandemic upon the workforce and the families.

AAIMH members come from a diverse range of professions and disciplines, and this is the organisations' greatest strength. Infant mental health is founded in the principle that

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the earliest relationships are critical for all development, and we know that many different disciplines assist infants to thrive in their relationships. Childcare educators, maternal and child health professionals, neonatal and medical professionals, as well as the full gamut of allied health professionals all play a crucial role in helping families. The global pandemic has highlighted this as more families have faced more challenges than ever.

Our AAIMH community has a great challenge in the coming months and years to keep doing the terrific work that we do, in the context of likely more adversity and hardship.

We have heard much about self care for professionals in the last 18 months, and although this is of, of course, crucial, we as a professional membership organisation can play a critical role in caring for each other. We know just as there is no such thing as a baby, there is also no such thing as an infant mental health worker without a community of colleagues scaffolding the work.

Amongst the chronic anxiety and frustration of 2021, AAIMH has come together as a community and achieved some extraordinary things.

This year AAIMH delivered the local organisation of the WAIMH Congress in Brisbane, which had been postponed from 2020. The LOC, WAIMH Affiliates and WAIMH put together a fantastic program of live and on-demand events, which are still available for another couple of months (WAIMH2021.org). Sadly for myself and my Melbourne colleagues, the ongoing restrictions prevented us from attending in person and the absence of Melbourne people required the LOC and the conference organisers to adjust the program with only days' notice. The Congress itself was an enormous success, and testament to the hard work of the LOC under the leadership of Elisabeth Hoehn and Libby Morton who, along with Campbell Paul, WAIMH president, worked for many many hours, with the Board's heartfelt gratitude.

Similar to last year, Board members did not receive fees or funding of any kind. All time and expertise was given pro bono whilst utilizing own resources, i.e. computers & phones. Almost all of the work of AAIMH is done by volunteers, from the Board, management committees and generosity of many members. We are supported by the expertise of Nick Foster & Jack Campion, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Perth, gratefully received on a pro bono basis, and our two paid positions, the Project Officer and Executive Assistant. We are also blessed with the generosity of members who have played very active roles at different times and offer their wisdom and mentorship, particularly past Chairs Gally McKenzie, Libby Morton, and Sally Watson, and life member Annie Mullan.

In early 2021 the AAIMH Board devised and approved a new Strategic Plan to guide the organisation for the next 3 years. The Strategic Plan is available on the website.

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Our newly revised vision and mission are:

Vision

The needs of every infant and young child from before birth to age three are prioritised and addressed in a timely and responsive way to enhance their relationships and their mental health and wellbeing.

Mission

Our Mission is to work for all infants and young children from pre birth to age three to ensure their social, emotional and developmental needs are met through stable and nurturing relationships within their family, culture and communities.

We have formulated the strategic plan to provide an overarching guide for the organisation and for the state-and territory-based management committees to tailor their activities to local need and interest whilst also fulfilling the objects of the organisation under the strategic plan. As such, our four key focus areas are broad. They are to:

1. Advocate and collaborate for infants and young children through improving professional and public recognition within relevant networks.
2. Increase the capacity of those directly involved in developing or advocating for policy or services that provide support to infants and young children through provision of education, professional development, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge.
3. Educate, inform, and support professionals to implement evidence informed professional competencies and standards in infant mental health.
4. Reviewing and enhancing good governance.

Our activities over the next three years for each area, and progress achieved in 2021, are as follows.

1. Advocate and collaborate for infants and young children through improving professional and public recognition within relevant networks.

- Perform activities to celebrate International Infant Mental Health Awareness Week
- Join with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and professionals to advocate for the needs of First Nations infants and their families.
- Provide resources for caregivers and families
- Identify and link to relevant networks, including liaising with affiliated international colleagues

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- Develop a National Advocacy Agenda that includes state as well as national priorities
- Provide information to members

Progress in 2021:

- IMHAW: in 2021 we have delivered upon some activities to celebrate Infant Mental Health Week, although these were limited nationally due to the commitment to the WAIMH Congress.
- Through the AAIMH pre-congress institute at the WAIMH Congress, titled: 'Continuing Cultures; Stories that generate Social and Emotional, Spiritual and Cultural Wellbeing for Infants & Families', a very rich offering about cultural approaches to infant mental health in Australian and New Zealand First Nations people, as well as learnings from our near neighbours, including Japan, the Pacific Islands, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia was provided.
- We are in the process of establishing a Research and Advocacy committee to continue to advocate for infants and welcomed a volunteer with a background in marketing and communications who has agreed to help translate some of our position statements into language that is accessible to the general public. She will also assist the Social Media Subcommittee.
- Finally, AAIMH provided formal support to SNAICC in their efforts to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young Person's Commissioner appointed. AAIMH advocated for the role to be called Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *Infants*, Children and Young People.

2. Increase the capacity of those directly involved in developing or advocating for policy or services that provide support to infants and young children through provision of education, professional development, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Activities:

- Generate and update position statements
- Deliver a biannual National Conference
- Develop a Media/Social Media presence to disseminate scientific knowledge, position statements
- Investigate development of podcast framework and delivery
- Training opportunities: access to trainers & supervision
- Deliver a biannual Speaker Tour
- Develop mentoring opportunities for members

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- Support AAIMH members to seek out opportunities to join relevant advisory and working groups that inform policy and workforce development planning
- Support AAIMH members to contribute to feedback rounds during the development of national frameworks and strategies that impact on infancy and families; membership to be provided with submission templates they can adapt
- Provide scholarships to support attendance at professional development events.

2021 Achievement

- a. The AAIMH Board this year decided to continue the 2020 practice of offering all of the Branch Committee events to all members, wherever they may have been. This generous practice has mitigated some of the isolation and united AAIMH across the country.
- b. 12 scholarships to the WAIMH Congress were provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attend virtually or in person.

3. Educate, inform, and support professionals to implement evidence informed professional competencies and standards in infant mental health.

2021 Achievements:

In 2021 the Board has further developed the relationship with the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health to progress the implementation of the AAIMH Competency Guidelines. We are also looking forward to appointing a project implementation officer in early 2022, and please look out for expressions of interest coming out soon.

4. Reviewing and enhancing good governance

Activities:

- Annual governance training for Board and Committees
- Yearly review of governance and processes
- Register of governance issues arising during Board and Branch Committee meetings
- Growing and supporting membership diversity (e.g. through scholarships and complimentary membership for eligible practitioners)
- Develop and implement an ongoing framework to seek and incorporate member feedback
- Establish a framework to ensure community and stakeholder input

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Continuing the move from a ‘Tradition of Convention’ as its historical structure to one of Governance & Clarity, as detailed in Gally McKenzie’s Chair report last year, we have given considerable focus to governance in 2021.

2021 Achievements:

The Board Governance committee has been working on governance frameworks and policies, as well as Board structure.

- a. Each AGM marks the beginning of the term for new and continuing Board members and the first meeting after the AGM constitutes the new Board.
- b. There has been an annual calendar for Board meetings and trainings established. This includes a governance and risk workshop scheduled for each Planning day, and a bi- monthly schedule of meetings.
- c. The following standing committees are being established in 2022:
 - i. Research and advocacy
 - ii. Infant Mental Health Awareness Week
 - iii. Finance
 - iv. Governance
 - v. Education
 - vi. Social Media

Each Board member will take leadership of a standing committee. The national meeting schedule has been reduced to bi-monthly from monthly to accommodate the subcommittee schedules.

- d. Membership of the subcommittees is open to Branch Committee members and the general membership. Invitations will be put to the membership for different roles in the coming months.

5. AAIMH Membership Numbers Overall to date: 365

ACT: 15, NSW: 41, Qld: 39, SA: 57, Tas:11, Vic: 125, WA: 81

Membership numbers as at 24/10/2021

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