



Australian Association for  
Infant Mental Health

## Australian Association for Infant Mental Health

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### AAIMH National Chairperson's Report: Nicole Milburn

08/11/2024

#### 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.

#### Overview and highlights

AAIMH continues to be the professional home of those of us who are committed to, and can sit with, the fact that babies have a mind, which brings both enormous opportunity and risk of great suffering.

AAIMH provides support to professionals through professional development, networking opportunities and advocacy. These activities occur through the hard work of the committees in every state and territory and through the national board.

This year AAIMH has approved and started implementing a new strategic plan, and is reported upon below. The Board decided to keep the strategic priorities from the 2020-2023 plan as the priorities have provided a frame for branches to work within that is broad enough to tailor to local need and specific enough to provide sufficient consistency across the organisation.

Highlights of the year are the National Conference. The National Conference is the first in person national event since the 2019 conference in Adelaide, our first since the devastating effects of the pandemic. It is fair to say the event space is very different post covid to before, and the sector now competes with on-demand offerings from around the world. The full report of the national conference will be available in next year's annual report.

The 2023 national speaker's tour was cancelled in the days prior to the event starting due to urgent family commitments for the speaker, Dr. Claudia Gold. This was very

disappointing for all involved and involved a lot of hard work from the branches and national to organise and then cancel. It also represented a substantial financial loss, details of which are in the financial report provided to this meeting. With venue and associated costs having increased substantially, the potential losses due to cancellation are also substantial. The Board has been looking at options to mitigate the extent of loss under these circumstances.

Local events have continued in every branch. The Victorian branch is yet to return to in person events after moving online during Covid, and we have had some innovations in Queensland in offering pub nights in Queensland to engage members in a different, more casual format.

Organizationally, AAIMH has mirrored the schedule of WAIMH biannual conferences, running national conferences in the year that the WAIMH Congress does not occur. The schedule was altered in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic, and this year there was a mini-WAIMH Congress to then resume biannual congresses in even years. AAIMH will next year partner with the Marce Society for a national conference on 4-6<sup>th</sup> September, which will then bring AAIMH back to national conferences on odd years, with the next national conference after 2025 scheduled for 2027.

AAIMH has received the first distribution from the Ruth Lange Foundation. Ruth Lange was a very active member in South Australia and has left most of her estate to a Foundation, of which AAIMH is a major beneficiary. AAIMH and the South Australian Branch will be planning activities in 2025 for members in accordance with Ruth's wishes.

A highlight of 2024 must be the AAIMH LinkedIn page, set up and maintained by Lauren Keegan of the NSW branch. The LinkedIn page has been a great way to get information about our conference out to a wider audience, and we look forward to being creative with our communications in 2025. At the time of writing AAIMH had 1000 followers on LinkedIn!

Finally AAIMH has adopted a new photo as the face of AAIMH. This is of a beautiful baby, who's head (mind) is held by some caring hands. This symbolizes AAIMH's focus on the mind of the baby in the hands of the family, and the minds of the infant mental health community being held by AAIMH. I hope you like it.



## Report on the strategic priorities

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The Vision and Mission of AAIMH are:

In 2021 we adopted a new 3 year strategic plan to progress our mission, and in 2024 the Board decided to continue with the same strategic priorities, with a review and refresh of activities.

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

#### Activities

- 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
- Work with partner organisations to advocate for the needs of infants and their families
- Provide information to members

#### Progress in 2024

The International Infant Mental Health Awareness Week (IMHAW) subcommittee auspiced the development of a brief animation that was launched in IMHAW and is now available on our website. Several branches hosted events to celebrate IMHAW, and have embedded IMHAW into the annual calendar of events.

AAIMH awarded 2 scholarships to the National Conference from the National Board, and each branch offered support to members to attend. The National scholarships were awarded to two Aboriginal professionals working in Aboriginal organisations. Full costs were covered. The South Australian branch has awarded 3 grants to support Aboriginal clinicians.

South Australia has developed a strong relationship with an Aboriginal controlled Children's Centre in Port Augusta, and has supported 7 staff to complete the Introduction to Infant Mental Health Course run through Helen Mayo House. AAIMH has also funded a clinical supervisor to provide ongoing support team.

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The video animation is targeted towards the general community and assists in developing caregiver's awareness of the emotional and relational needs of infants.

The NSW branch has established and maintained a strong presence on LinkedIn on behalf of the whole organization. At the time of writing the AAIMH LinkedIn profile had 1000 followers. AAIMH also has a google group for members, which allows members to connect and share information on an informal basis.

We have continued to our strong connection with the NZ Infant Mental Health Association (IMHAANZ) through reciprocal free membership of the Chairs and offering membership rates to our IMHAANZ colleagues to the National Conference.

The Chair was supported to attend the mini-WAIMH Congress in Tampere in Finland and attend all relevant meetings on behalf of AAIMH.

AAIMH made a submission to development of the National Early Childhood Health Checks and the South Australian branch made a submission to the Mental Health Royal Commission.

AAIMH has been making stronger connections with Emerging Minds, and the South Australian branch has continued a strong relationship with the SA Chapter of Thrive by Five.

## **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
- Plan for a biannual Speaker Tour in 2026
- Develop mentoring opportunities for members
- Support AAIMH members to join relevant advisory and working groups that inform policy and workforce development planning

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- 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

### *Progress in 2024*

AAIMH has had a mixed experience with events in this reporting period. There have been many very successful events, including formal trainings such as CPP and an innovating pub night- "Babies, Cheers and Chat's". Some events have been cancelled due to presenter illness and poor registrations. The fiscal environment is a great challenge, as is competing with the many online offerings from international providers.

The Ann Morgan Prize for creative writing in infant mental health was not awarded this year due to the lower standard of submissions.

South Australian branch has continued to offer philanthropy grants, and provided 9 in the reporting period.

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

#### *Activities*

- Promote implementation of the competency guidelines in all states and territories through local branches.
- Update existing Position Papers and establish new ones where appropriate.

### *Progress in 2024*

The infants in refuge position statement has been published on the website.

Ashley McCormack from the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health, the governing body for the competencies, is in attendance at the National Conference to share the competency framework with the AAIMH community. The Alliance is currently reviewing the framework and the revised framework will be launched in early 2025 through a live seminar provided by Ms. McCormack. AAIMH members have been invited to contribute to the work of the Alliance via a survey.

AAIMH events are increasingly aligned to the competencies to assist members in tracking their professional development. Emerging Minds have also embarked upon aligning their education in IMH to the Competencies.

The WA branch funded and supported the development of a Business Plan to assist AAIMH in future planning for the implementation of the Competency Framework and Endorsement processes, if sufficient members are seeking Endorsement and AAIMH can establish the appropriate infrastructure.

Endorsement has continued to progress for members residing in WA, as per the license agreement with the Alliance. New applications have been suspended due to lack of resources. Currently there are 24 IMH-E®.

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## 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
- Grow and support membership diversity (e.g. through scholarships and free membership)
- Develop and implement an ongoing framework to seek and incorporate member feedback
- Establish a framework to ensure community and stakeholder input
- Establish standardised role descriptions for all roles in AAIMH

### Progress in 2024

Annual governance training and risk review is embedded into normal practice at each planning day. Governance also includes the self evaluation to monitor effectiveness of the Board.

The Board has established a new role of Deputy Chair to support succession planning. The Deputy Chair will hold the portfolio of the Competency Framework after the Leader of the Competency Guidelines steps down at the AGM.

The Board has also recruited and appointed a new Secretary, replacing Dr. Michelle Fryer, who has held the role of Secretary for 6 years.

AAIMH has transitioned to the Microsoft suite of services, which has streamlined the administrative and governance work of the Board.

Substantial progress has been made on the development of a governance manual. The governance manual comprises policies and guidelines to ensure the Board is operating in the most effective and appropriate way. Examples include policies for endorsement, sponsorship and advertising, executive recruitment, and memberships and scholarships. Roles have been developed and reviewed for Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer and are in progress for Chair, Director and branch committee roles. Clear definition of role will also assist establishing an expectation of time commitment.

Free memberships are offered with the scholarship to attend the National Conference. The scholarships offered by the National Board are awarded to Indigenous professionals working in Indigenous organisations.

### AAIMH Membership Numbers

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	ACT	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	NT	total
2024	18	49	50	102	10	143	83	12	459
2023	14	41	44	67	10	141	88	10	415
2022	15	38	46	75	10	126	107	0	412

## Organisations

**Large** 4

**Medium** 0

**Small** 1

## The 2024–2025 Board

**Chair:** Nicole Milburn (Vic).

**Deputy Chair:** Joe Coyne (Qld)

**Secretary:** Donna Rose (Qld).

**Treasurer:** Kate Griffin.

**Branch Reps/ Board Directors:** Sally Watson (SA), Suzy Lewis (Qld), Victoria Hingston (Vic), Sara Browne (WA), Jane Kohlhoff (NSW), Danielle Kurr (ACT), Victoria Carter (Tas), and Nimalee Kanakkahewa (NT).

**Membership Secretary** Heather Warne (SA)

**Website Coordinator:** Abby Chee (WA)

**Executive Support:** Margaret Turner, funded 4 hours per week

## Subcommittees:

**IMHAW:** Victoria Carter (Chair)

**Governance:** Nicole Milburn (Chair), Michelle Fryer (Secretary), Kate Griffin (Treasurer) and Joe Coyne (Qld)

**Education:** Joe Coyne (Qld) and Sally Watson (SA)

**Research and Advocacy:** Cath McPhee (Vic) and Danielle Kurr (ACT)

**Finance:** National and Branch Treasurers

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As you are all aware, AAIMH relies mostly upon volunteers. The Board, branch committees and members all make up the wonderful organization that is AAIMH, and continue the culture of support, generosity and steadfast advocacy in the service of babies and toddlers and their families. This year we farewell Cath McPhee from the Board. Cath has been the Vic Branch rep since 2020 and has provided leadership to the Research and Advocacy Committee with Danielle Kurr from ACT. We also farewelled Karen Hazel-Raine during the year, who was the inaugural president of the Northern Territory Branch and was instrumental in the establishment of the branch.

Dr. Michelle Fryer has been the Secretary of AAIMH for 6 years and steps down at this meeting. She has played a vital role in providing governance support for the organization, and her expertise and long experience with AAIMH is as much appreciated as it will be missed. We welcome a new Company Secretary, Donna Rose, who takes up the role at the end of the AGM.

In 2024 Gally McKenzie provided leadership to the organization in the implementation of the competency guidelines and steps down at this AGM. The oversight of the competency implementation project that she has brought has highlighted the importance of the role for the Board and led to the decision to embed the role into the ongoing Board processes by having the Deputy Chair carry the portfolio. Gally's knowledge of the competency framework is vast and has been of great benefit to AAIMH.

AAIMH has several key volunteer roles outside of the Board and branches. Membership Secretary, Heather Warne, is looking to step down at the AGM in 2025, after 5 years of efficient and effective service. I hope we can find someone as helpful as Heather this time next year!

I hope all members are familiar with the website, which is overseen by our website coordinator, Abby Chee. The website is the main public face of AAIMH and Abby does a terrific job in maintaining it and making it look fabulous.

Margaret Turner provides executive administration services and keeps everything organized and on track and somehow manages to bring order to what sometimes appears as chaos, without getting chaotic herself, which is an amazing feat.

I personally thank all of the people involved in the running of AAIMH. The night time meetings and dedication of all the volunteers and the involvement of you the members in AAIMH activities is what makes AAIMH such a warm and supportive culture.



Nicole Milburn  
Board Chair

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