



Australian Association for  
Infant Mental Health

## Australian Association for Infant Mental Health

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### AAIMH National Chairperson's Report: Nicole Milburn 05/09/2025

#### 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.

#### Note:

This report covers the 10 months from the 2024 AGM, which was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November at the National Conference in Sydney. The 2025 AGM is held in September 2025 to take advantage of the opportunity for an in person meeting at the joint conference between AAIMH and the Marce Society

#### Overview and highlights

2025 has seen AAIMH expand the work from 2024, furthering advocacy for infants and their families, strengthening sector capacity through education and rolling out evidence-based competencies nationwide. As an organisation run entirely by volunteers, AAIMH is a strong professional community that provides a home for the many disciplines who work to help babies and toddlers have the very best start in life with their families.

The highlights for this period must be the 2 national conferences, which has been an enormous effort. AAIMH's usual calendar is to have a national conference every 2 years in different parts of Australia, interspersed with a national speaker's tour. Our national conference is scheduled in the year that the WAIMH Congress doesn't occur. Like many things, Covid interrupted the scheduling of both organisations. In 2024 WAIMH ran a mini congress to resume normal scheduling on even years. In 2025, AAIMH partnered with the International Marce Society to present the conference during which this meeting is scheduled. Having conferences in 2 consecutive years then allows AAIMH to resume the

biannual schedule, and the next national conference is scheduled for 2027 (venue to be determined).

The National conferences are important opportunities for relationship building and collaboration across the country. They have always seeded friendships and collegial support and are one of the things that makes AAIMH the welcoming and supportive organisation it is today.

Members have also come together in various ways through the many branch events that are presented on page 11.

We have communicated with a wider range of professionals through LinkedIn than ever before, details of which are below.

There has been much work during this reporting period on the Competency Guidelines for Relationally Sensitive Practice in Infant Mental Health and the Endorsement process.

And finally, the Board has been working through the first major revision of the Constitution since AAIMH amalgamated across the nation in 2017 to form a not-for-profit company registered under the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC). Changes have been brought to make the Constitution more fit for purpose for the national organisation. More details below.

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## 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 2025

We now have a library of resources to use for International Infant Mental Health Awareness Week (IMHAW) that can be used more broadly. The event appears to be increasingly fixed in people's calendars, and branches are hosting annual events to mark the week. For example, South Australia has an annual breakfast to mark IMHAW.

The flagship National event was the Nurturing Beginnings Forum run in partnership with SNAICC, Berry Street and The Centre for Excellence in Child Welfare, at which people came together in person and online to hear a range of presentations about the needs of infants and very young children. There was a focus on workforce development and working with First Nations families, understanding both the impact of colonization and the strength of the collectivist approach to family and kin.

We have continued 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. New South Wales branch partnered with IMHAANZ in the online event *Regulate to Relate: Relate to Regulate* in early August.

We have continued to collaborate with partners, including SNAICC, Emerging Minds, and the Australian Maternal Mental Health Alliance. We particularly welcomed Brad

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Morgan, CEO of Emerging Minds, and Jane O'Rourke from Mind In Mind, UK, to our conference in Sydney.

AAIMH's LinkedIn presence has grown to 1641 followers, providing an avenue of connection to the wider infant and general mental health community that was beyond the website and events. We have retired the Google Group and encourage members to communicate via LinkedIn.

Branches have collaborated with local partners. For example:

- Queensland: Developed partnerships with early childhood educators, Mother–Baby Units, and sector services to promote IMH awareness
- South Australia: Maintained engagement in intersectoral coalitions (e.g., Thrive to Five), advisory forums, Expo stalls, and advocacy groups; forged new collaborations with Aboriginal agencies, court systems, and autism/education organizations.
- NSW: maintained visibility with sector partners and grew the network through the conference.
- Victoria: delivered regular seminars and educational communication; continued profile-raising via the Ann Morgan Prize for creative writing.
- Tasmania: developed IMH advocacy education for pediatricians with Emerging Minds; worked closely with Child Safety Services and local health teams; explored a joint NT webinar series and contributed to statewide preventative health policy.
- Northern Territory: sustained branch activity as a visible advocate within local networks and supported member participation nationally.
- ACT: Ongoing development of advocacy activities to enhance recognition of infant mental health in the public and professional spheres.
- WA: Continued to work closely with key stakeholders and developed a particularly supportive relationship with Ngala.

## 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

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- Develop mentoring opportunities for members
- Support AAIMH members 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

### *Progress in 2025*

There has been a multitude of events through the last 10 months, listed in the Appendix.

In addition, the National Conference in Sydney in November 2024 was an enormous success drawing 228 delegates, with high levels of satisfaction and engagement and offering substantial sector networking and upskilling opportunities.

#### Other Major Branch Events & Initiatives

- VIC: Hosted “Sound Beginnings: Musicking within PIMH” seminar, creative writing competitions, and writers’ workshops.
- NSW: Launched a monthly seminar series (free for members) and monthly e-newsletter; planned an online seminar (with IMHANZ) on regulation.
- SA: Offered MBT Practitioner Training, Maternal Looking Guide workshops, and awards through philanthropy grants; delivered mentoring and member welcome events. Supported ongoing training in Circle of Security and Child–Parent Psychotherapy, with attention to outreach and systems work.
- TAS: Ran planning days to support branch growth, new member welcome packs, quarterly newsletters, and ambassador resources; prepared co-hosted webinars and IMH Awareness activities with QLD and VIC.
- NT & ACT: Planned and delivered webinars and education events, facilitated inter-branch knowledge exchange, and staged multidisciplinary discussions in feeding and IMH.

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### 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 2025

##### Competencies:

The Competency Guidelines for Relationally Sensitive Practice in Infant Mental Health were officially launched at the 2024 National Conference by Ashley McCormack, the then CEO of the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health, the governing body for the competencies.

When I wrote the last the last annual report, the Alliance was in the process of reviewing the framework, to have been launched early in 2025. At the time of writing the updated guidelines have not yet been released, having suffered unforeseen delays.

AAIMH will review the new framework and adjust it to suit Australian conditions and then share with the membership.

In the meantime, AAIMH has been aligning events to the existing competencies to assist members in tracking their professional development.

##### Endorsement

Endorsement was paused in 2023 due to lack of resources and exhaustion of funding avenues. In 2024 and 2025 the Board reviewed the Endorsement process to determine the viability of scaling to the whole organisation, continuing to offer endorsement to those members residing in WA or to cease offering Endorsement altogether.

A review of the outcomes of the project in WA and the information from the Business Plan that was sourced by AAIMH, found the following:

- There is wide-spread awareness of the *AAIMH Competency Guidelines for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health®* throughout WA and nationally.
- The project achieved substantial buy in from organizations in WA.
- 21 people have achieved Endorsement.
- The project made a loss of almost \$26,000 through the eight-year period from 2016.

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- Endorsement in WA required a substantial investment of resources and relied heavily on volunteer coordination.
- Scaling to a national level would require significant resources, including infrastructure, staff and funding.
- Scaling to a national level would require changes in the governance of AAIMH.

As a result of the review the Board decided to cease offering Endorsement directly and to transition the Endorsement process to the Alliance. This means that Endorsement will be available to all members of AAIMH directly through the Alliance.

AAIMH is very grateful to the members of the Endorsement Committee and the WA branch who have championed the Endorsement project over the last decade. AAIMH now has very reliable information upon which to base any future decisions.

#### *Position statements*

The Board has commissioned a Position Statement regarding infants with a disability that we anticipate will be available late in 2026.

A schedule of review of existing position statements has been prepared.

The Board decided to integrate the Infants in Overnight Care after Separation into the Continuity of Relationship Position Statement as a more up to date reflection of the AAIMH position. We anticipate this will be available in 2026.

## **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 2025*

There has been much work happening on a governance front in AAIMH:

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- The Constitution has had its first major review since its inception in 2017. The review found that the Constitution largely met the needs of the organisation. Minor changes put to this meeting are essentially to clarify some anomalies, update in terms of language and practice (e.g. remove references to fax), align with privacy principles and clarify leadership.
- Annual governance training and risk review is embedded into normal practice at each planning day.
- The Board welcomed Donna Rose into the Secretary role at the last AGM, replacing Dr. Michelle Fryer, who held the role of Secretary for 6 years. Unfortunately, Donna has been unable to continue in the role and Sarah Edwards was appointed Secretary after a recruitment process. The Board is very grateful to Donna for taking on the role and for helping Sarah settle in.
- This year marks the end of Heather Warne's tenure as Membership Secretary. Heather took over the role in 2018 and has been very responsive, steady and reliable, which, as we have worked through major changes in recent years with the migration to Microsoft, has been of enormous value. Membership processes are the responsibility of the Secretary according to the Constitution and previously have been delegated to the Membership Secretary. With Heather stepping down we re-integrate the membership role into the Secretary role for Sarah to manage.
- Further progress has been made on the development of the governance manual. We anticipate the governance manual will be largely complete by the next AGM, providing the organisation with a suite of policies and procedures that assist transitions between personal and ensure transparency in practice.
- The admin officer has worked closely with the Board, branches and the important roles in AAIMH of membership secretary, website coordinator and social media officer to coordinate many aspects of the work. These include ensuring events are posted on the website, and all have access to the information they need. This coordination has strengthened the governance of AAIMH by ensuring accountability, streamlining processes and providing services to members.

Branches activities strengthening the governance of the branches has included:

VIC: Oversaw a careful handover and documentation with outgoing executive; scheduled regular meetings for robust governance.

NSW: Maintained regular online meetings; operational handover to the Marce/AAIMH Conference committee as required.

QLD: Coordinated committee meeting schedules, developed a state risk matrix, and enhanced communication for feedback and shared decision-making.

SA: Sustained monthly governance meetings and regular working groups committed to transparency, outreach, and organizational process.

TAS: Conducted planning days with specific governance reviews; contributed actively to national projects.

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WA, NT & ACT: Continued regular committee meetings, improved operational knowledge, supported transitions in officer roles, and furthered governance process reviews.

### AAIMH Membership Numbers

	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 2025-2026 Board

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

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

**Secretary:** Sarah Edwards (Qld).

**Treasurer:** Kate Griffin.

**Branch Reps/ Board Directors:** Cathy Moar (SA), Sue Wilson (Qld), Victoria Hingston (Vic), Karen Griffen (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), Sarah Edwards (Secretary), Kate Griffin (Treasurer) and Joe Coyne (Qld)

**Education:** vacant (SA)

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**Research and Advocacy:** Victoria Hingston (Vic) and Danielle Kurr (ACT)

**Finance:** National and Branch Treasurers

Retiring at this AGM are Sally Watson and Sara Stephens. Sara came onto the board in 2021 and has represented WA with aplomb. She has been very accommodating and flexible regarding the time zone difficulties, particularly in Summer Time. Sara has navigated the complexities of the Competencies and Endorsement and been very patient as we work through the transition.

Sally has been on the Board for 3 years for this stint, returning for another go after having been President during the amalgamation years. Sally has brought her great energy and enthusiasm to the Board and experience with running events. She holds much corporate history of AAIMH and her work in establishing events has been a major part of AAIMH's success over the last decade.

AAIMH is very appreciative of all the members who voluntarily contribute their time and expertise to the organisation. This year we had members Vicky Mansfield, Chris Barnes, Anagha Jayakar and Carly Thompson organise the Nurturing Beginnings forum, which was a resounding success and a credit to the committee.

Abby Chee has continued ensuring the website is up to date and organised, and works closely with Margaret Turner, our very patient executive admin, being our only paid position. We are very grateful to Abby and Margaret, for their assistance as well as their persistence!

I would again like to thank everyone who has been involved with AAIMH in the last 10 months. People's willingness to give up their time for the betterment of infant mental health is humbling, and being part of AAIMH is a great privilege.

Nicole Milburn  
Board Chair

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## 2025 AAIMH Events

### February 2025

1. Understanding and Responding to Relational Trauma in Child-Parent Psychotherapy
  - Presenter: Dr Chandra Ghosh Ippen (Co-developer of Child-Parent Psychotherapy, USA)
  - Organiser: AAIMH WA Branch

### May 2025

2. Practitioner Training: Mentalisation Based Treatment (MBT) – Practitioner Level
  - Presenter: Prof Anthony Bateman (University College London / Anna Freud Centre)
  - Organiser: AAIMH SA Branch
3. Parental Insightfulness and its Importance for Healthy Development
  - Presenter: Prof David Oppenheim (University of Haifa, Israel)
  - Organiser: AAIMH SA Branch

### June 2025

4. A Baby and Someone: Family and Systemic IMH for Medically Unwell Infants
  - Presenter: Dr Beate Harrison (Infant & Child Psychiatrist, Perth Children's Hospital)
  - Organiser: AAIMH WA Branch
5. Nurturing Beginnings Forum
  - Organisers: Berry Street, AAIMH, SNAICC, Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare
6. Infant Mental Health Awareness Week – Public Forum: “Who is Holding the Baby?”
  - Organisers: Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA) & AAIMH SA Branch
7. Ann Morgan Prize Writers' Workshop
  - Date: Saturday 14 June 2025 (9:30 – 11:30 AM online)
  - Presenter: Joanna Murray-Smith (celebrated playwright and Ann Morgan Prize judge)
  - Organiser: AAIMH Vic
  - Focus: Supporting AAIMH members interested in writing for the Ann Morgan Prize.
8. Infants and the Law: Legal & Mental Health Perspectives in Children's Court
  - Presenters: Fleur Ward (Law), Dr Nicole Milburn (Clinical Psychologist), Dr Michelle Fryer (Psychiatrist)

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- Organiser: AAIMH QLD Branch

## July 2025

9. AAIMH NSW Monthly Evening Seminar

- Presenter: Chris Barnes

- Topic: Caring for Families and Ourselves – Perinatal Mental Health & Clinician Wellness

- Organiser: AAIMH NSW Branch

10. NT Webinar – Infancy as the Ground from which the Self Grows

- Presenter: Joe Coyne (Developmental Psychologist, Circle of Security International)

- Organiser: AAIMH NT Branch

## August 2025

11. Half-Day Online Symposium – Regulate to Relate, Relate to Regulate

- Organisers: AAIMH (NSW) & IMHAANZ (NZ)

- Speakers: Alayne Mikahere-Hall, Judy Hunter, Dr Alice Dwyer, Sarah Haskell & Beth Fulton

12. AAIMH WA General Meeting & Seminar 3 – Ethics in Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

- Presenter: Dr Isaak Lim (Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, Monash University PhD candidate)

- Organiser: AAIMH WA Branch

13. Ann Morgan Prize for Creative Writing – Prize Announcement

- Submissions due: 25 July 2025

- Winner announced: Saturday 16 August 2025 (AAIMH VIC)

14. Maternal Looking Guide Training (Session 1)

- Presenter: Dr Patricia O'Rourke (Child Psychotherapist, Psychodramatist, University of Adelaide)

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