



17TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH 2021

BRISBANE CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE (BCEC)

The 17th World Congress of the World Association for Infant Mental Health and its success remain highly relevant as the impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of infants and young children and their families from the Covid-19 Pandemic and the war in Europe continue to emerge.

Dr Elisabeth Hoehn, Congress Co-Chair

"We are confident that with the hybrid format we have strengthened the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMH) membership."

WAIMH 2021 Co-Chairs

"The feedback we have received from those who attended in-person and virtually has been unequivocally positive."

WAIMH PCO Event Manager, Emma Chalmers, ICMS Australasia

EVENT SNAPSHOT

- 1,139 attendees from 61 countries including 303 in person
- 15 original concurrent streams reworked into two - a virtual attendee and in-person attendee
- Complex hybrid program delivered over four days
- Innovative cultural space customised for WAIMH 2021

OUR CITY, YOUR CANVAS.

BACKGROUND

The World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) International Congress takes place every three years with the aim of promoting the mental wellbeing and healthy development of infants throughout the world.

Under the expert guidance of Bid Chair and Local Organising Committee Co-Chair, Dr. Elisabeth Hoehn in collaboration with the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMH), Brisbane was selected as the host city for the Congress back in 2019, and was originally scheduled as a fully face to face event with 15 concurrent meetings at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC) in June 2020.

Amid a changing and unpredictable pandemic, with the lead-up to the Congress bridging two lockdowns, organisers faced tough and courageous decisions, describing their journey as 'an extraordinary roller coaster ride,' in their bid to connect the international infant mental health community with Australia at WAIMH 2021.

Due to COVID-19, new dates were announced for June 2021. Congress Co-Chairs Dr Hoehn, Medical Director, Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health; and infant mental health professional, Libby Morton stated "We were very keen to host the event because it was an opportunity for us to bring the international infant mental health community to Australia and particularly to Queensland. We are passionate about progressing the practice of infant mental health in Australia.

"It was the constant need to adapt and be responsive to an unpredictable situation which ultimately led us to transition to a hybrid event."

CHOOSING A HYBRID FORMAT

The advantages of choosing a hybrid format allowed Australian delegates to gather together, network and share knowledge while also allowing sponsors and exhibitors to participate in-person and have the opportunity to engage face-to-face.

Organisers were conscious of the need to provide value for money for interstate and international attendees watching virtually, ensuring they had the option to take part in the live sessions of the five-day congress, which was also recorded and made available on demand for six months post event.

One of the positives of going virtual, according to organisers, was the opportunities it provided to those delegates from developing countries who previously had been prohibited from attending because of cost issues.



OUR CITY, YOUR CANVAS.



WAIMH PCO Event Manager, Emma Chalmers from ICMS Australasia: “We feel the event was very successful in the hybrid format. The feedback we have received from those who attended in-person and virtually has been unequivocally positive.”

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

A strong, reliable and easy to navigate virtual platform, with customer time-zones for each attendee profile, was required in order to manage the virtual and hybrid elements. Different delivery methods in the hybrid format required a variation in technical requirements.

ICMSA and BCEC managed and provided both the technology and connectivity to the streaming platform. This included the integration of two-way live Q&A sessions and on-time display of all pre-recorded content which ensured delegates and presenters at the BCEC and online, shared exactly the same conference experience.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The development of a cultural space in the WAIMH portal was a way of ensuring virtual attendees had the opportunity to experience and understand the rich culture of Australia, particularly that of its Indigenous Peoples. A local Indigenous artist was commissioned to create the logo of WAIMH 2021, with additional elements including Acknowledgement of Country, didgeridoo performances and traditional Indigenous dance shown through a series of videos.

The WAIMH online platform was branded with Indigenous, Brisbane and Queensland imagery giving virtual delegates a destination experience.

TEAM WORK PREVAILS

Following a five-year journey from bid process to event delivery, BCEC’s management, event planning and operational teams were dedicated to the success of WAIMH 2021.

“The willingness of BCEC to meet us halfway in making this Conference happen meant that we could have a hybrid meeting that brought Australian and international delegates together in such an inspiring way.”
Organising Committee Co-Chair Dr Elisabeth Hoehn.

Echoing those thoughts, Co-Chair Libby Morton praised the Centre’s flexibility in accommodating the switch from a fully face-to-face event to a hybrid format. “BCEC stretched their flexibility as far as they possibly could.”

In summing up, ICMS Australasia PCO Emma Chalmers said they aimed to ensure there was not a sense of two different conferences but rather that WAIMH 2021 was inclusive of those participating virtually or in-person.