



EVALUATION OF THE 2009 GP & PHC RESEARCH CONFERENCE

This year's conference brought together 460 delegates consisting of researchers, decision makers, policy makers, practitioners and consumers to listen, share, discuss, network and socialise. With four plenary sessions, six workshops and symposia, four breakfast meetings, 144 papers and over 80 poster presenters, ideas and information flowed in abundance.

About the delegates

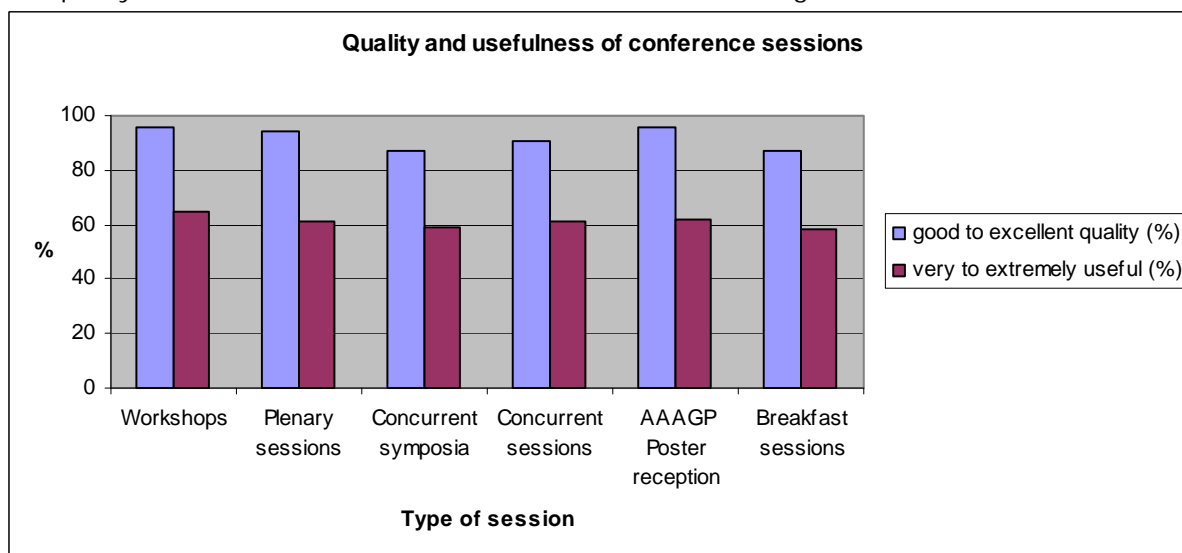
Delegates came from diverse fields and organisations. Over 30% were funded through PHCRED with another 33% coming from universities. Federal and state government delegates comprised 9% and Divisions delegates represented 6%. As the conference was held in Melbourne it not surprising that Victoria contributed the greatest percentage of delegates (34%), followed by NSW (18%) and Queensland (15%). Women comprised 73% of the registrations. Almost a third of the delegates registered as 'Dr' (either MD or PhD), and 14% as 'Associate Professor / Professor', suggesting that the conference is a good conduit to researchers ranging from leaders to emerging researchers in the PHC sector.

What they said

The conference evaluation was done entirely on-line in keeping with our green policy. The response rate was 40% (168/423; 37 could not be contacted via email).

Most respondents (89%) indicated that the conference increased their knowledge and understanding of the scope and nature of current research, evaluation and development to a great to moderate extent. Most (90%) also indicated that the conference plenary sessions addressed the conference theme *Driving Change* to a great to moderate extent.

The quality and usefulness of the conference is described in the figure below.



What delegates found most useful at the...

Workshops

- “Looking at the evaluation forms and trying them out in small groups.
- The variety and strength of professional expertise among the other workshop participants - I really learnt a lot from them, and from their interactions with each other. It was excellent being able to participate, as a change from sitting and listening. This helped with networking as well as learning.
- The exchange of a broad range of perspectives, knowledge and experience. Excellent facilitator.
- The conversation around the need for more diversity in PHC research, and a move away from the current strong reliance on clinical data/ statistics/ RCTs to evaluate health outcomes.
- Understanding what Government are actually looking for from the research community.
- Having an international leader in narrative and storytelling was so beneficial to learning more about this topic and research methodology.
- Being given the confidence to try again after I have had a paper rejected.”

Plenary sessions

- “Extremely interesting about global health.
- Inspiring to see good leadership and organisation in research which then affects practice.
- Great to see the bigger picture and understand the policy issues with regard to primary health care.
- Learning that the hurdles are often the same regardless of the 'style' of health setting.
- Useful challenging presentations with good discussion following.
- Understanding the complexities of research use in policy making.
- Great panel and excellent facilitator who kept the audience engaged in spite of it being the last session!”

Concurrent Symposia

- “Overview of BEACH changes - very well presented and sufficient time for discussion.
- Directly relevant to my work and an impressive and important piece of research.
- I would like to apply an adaptation of this model to solving knowledge/practice gaps in my own government health service setting.
- Fantastic to have a team of researchers discussing their projects with lots of time for questions.
- To hear about research currently being conducted and the approaches taken, which helps identify the gaps in current research.”

Concurrent paper sessions

- “Diverse well presented papers, practical ideas as well as theoretical concepts and exploration of methodologies in challenging situations.
- Refreshing to hear a health economist acknowledge that numbers do not tell all the story when it comes to an economic evaluation as there are some things money cannot buy.
- Reassurance that my experience in research - and work/life balance - is shared by others.
- Really interesting presentations and quite a robust discussion - thoroughly enjoyed it.
- Sparked a thought about how to collect data in one of my current research projects, using a method used by one of the presenters.
- The joy and passion of the researchers who presented.”

AAAGP poster reception

- “Changed my impression about the level of explanatory detail required on posters.
- Great after how much effort we put into posters that there was a formal time to look.
- Provided a dedicated opportunity to view the posters and an opportunity to speak with poster presenters and network with delegates. It was very useful having posters grouped together by topic.”

Breakfast sessions

- “It was very informal which helped the discussion.
- I was interested in the topic and the round table discussion facilitated the sharing of some interesting observations.
- It was disappointing that only about half of the delegates that had registered, actually turned up. Probably breakfast sessions are not a good idea the morning following the conference dinner. Too few people in the session meant that discussion was limited.”

Networking at the conference

Most delegates (89%) indicated that the conference was a good to excellent forum for networking with 87% indicating that networking at the conference was important to them to a great to moderate extent.

Networking was primarily used for socializing (24%), discussing content of presentations and posters (24%), obtaining valuable input for work (21%), and discussing general primary health care issues (17%).

Conference activities that were particularly helpful for networking

- “Breaks and social events offered opportunity to catch up with people; it was stimulating to attend sessions and then discuss the ideas with others; venue was large enough to allow people to circulate without feeling too crowded, but still to find people.
- The Welcome Reception on Tuesday as it gave me the opportunity to meet new people and develop key contacts.
- Poster reception - authors of posters were very willing and enthusiastic about talking about their research.
- The sit-down lunch, because I met interesting people at the buffet and at the tables and had time to chat both light-hearted, engaging, and then at whatever depth in discussion of our conference perspectives.
- The general milieu and friendliness of the conference helps networking to flow more easily. I thought there was a very friendly atmosphere.”

Further ways to facilitate networking

- “A session aimed at early career researchers would be fantastic.
- Workshop on how to network.”

General comments about the conference

- “Fantastic conference and a very productive experience.
- Excellent promotion, organisation like clockwork only more responsive, website a marvelous repository with papers uploaded very quickly, lots of good food to suit range of appetites, did not have to queue too long, good to have proper coffee machine right there. Venue lovely - very central, pleasant to be in, plenty of space to escape from crowd to phone people if needed, exhibition booths good variety, in good positions.
- Particularly love that you can view the abstracts of the papers prior to arriving at the conference.
- The eco conference bag was a great idea and I carry it with me and have already used it twice at the supermarket! Also I liked that the participants decided what information they wanted to take, as it avoided a lot of paper waste.
- Having the pocket guide to the conference schedule with name tags was a good idea and very helpful.
- Well organised. Prompt dealing with problems. Thanks for making it less stressful.
- It was one of the best conferences I’ve attended. I can’t remember the last time I attended so much of a conference program, or when I last heard the closing session of a conference! Congratulations.”

What was most liked about the conference

- “The whole atmosphere again was positive, encouraging, welcoming, friendly, great sense of belonging. Good number of people - not too few or too many.
- Concurrent paper sessions - made it easy to find out about lots of different sorts of research happening without having to sit through long presentations. Having 4-5 presentations in each session created variety and good discussion opportunities.
- Feedback on the abstract submission process was a first for me - very transparent and informative.
- The workshop. I thought it was great to have this as the first session because it encouraged people to talk to each other early on in the conference - a good 'ice breaker'.
- The wide range of different papers, topics and perspectives even though it was all held together by the primary care theme.
- Facilitators kept to time which is an important aspect of facilitating a conference. The presentations were short which meant only key points were covered and not too much content causing overload of information. Poster presentations were well set up.
- Meeting up with other researchers from across the country whose company I enjoy and whose collaboration I value but whom I rarely see in person.”

Ways to improve future conferences

- “Maintain the engagement of policy makers.
- Invite delegates from our region, to follow up Tikki Pang's call to action; if necessary seek AusAid sponsorship for some primary health care people from our region, maybe seeking support from Mark Butler who does some work with AusAid as Parliamentary Secretary for Health. Consider inviting or sponsoring delegates/consumers/managers relevant to future key note speakers.
- Anything you can do to increase reports of findings (including progress) and less on planned activities or projects that have not yet happened, or have collected no data so far.
- Suggest an 'outside the box' session where research outside the mainstream of PHC research is entertainingly presented.
- A career pathway/journey presentation by seasoned researchers, but also a talk on possible future pathways for early researchers.
- Leadership came up a lot in this conference and I think it will be an issue that we'll all come up against as we move through this time of significant change in the health care systems. Not only will we need research leadership but also community leadership to support/facilitate the consumers/community voice in the implementation of these changes.
- Dancing Dancing Dancing. There is no better way to network at the dinner.
- Theme next year could relate to implementation of reforms, possibly to research about and/or by the multiple disciplines which deliver primary health care, or the expanding primary health care workforce.”