

enHealth Address

Associate Professor Sophie Dwyer, Chair, enHealth

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country, the Yirrganydji Nation, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I would also like to welcome all attendees and participants here at today's conference.

I am very pleased to be here as the Chair of the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth)

You might be wondering what enHealth is, and what does this national committee of environmental health directors from across the country have to do with me and my work on the ground. The theme of this year's conference, *Connecting environmental health through partnerships - a grassroots approach*, is an excellent way in which to consider this question.

Starting with your work in the community, enHealth recognises that improvements in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will come from your work on the ground addressing environmental health risks. I am sure you will acknowledge that you need partners in this journey.

The state health agencies, through public health units and state environmental health branches, are there to support your work. As state directors of environmental health programs, enHealth members recognise their role in providing you with this support. In Queensland, I would like to acknowledge the support of Dr Jeannette Young, the Chief Health Officer of Queensland and Deputy Director-General of the Prevention Division. The advocacy of Dr Jeannette Young at the highest levels around the country is critical to ensuring support of the environmental health worker (EHW) programs continues.

But your partners are not limited to departments of health alone. Environmental health needs to work with partners from other agencies, such as environmental, agricultural, water resources, and education departments. I particularly wish to acknowledge the support of Dr Beth Woods, Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, with whom we work on animal management. Not only has she made the time to come and speak to us, but her department has also contributed to the Queensland Government sponsorship of this conference.

Environmental health directors in state health agencies also need support and collaboration, which enHealth provides as a national effort.

enHealth is a standing committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. enHealth provides environmental health policy advice, implementation of the National Environmental Health Strategy, consultation with key stakeholders, and the development and coordination of research, information and practical resources.

enHealth is committed to addressing inequalities in health status due to environmental factors, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Environmental health plays an important role in closing the gap in health status for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Good environmental health conditions are an essential

requirement for maintaining and improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

enHealth aims to:

1. Enhance environmental conditions, by providing advice on management of environmental risks relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives.
2. Provide intelligence on environmental health conditions in communities by developing national reports based on data generated by jurisdictions.
3. Improve networking and professional development of the Aboriginal and environmental health workforce through initiatives such as this conference, publications, and by sponsorship of the Indigenous Environmental Health Practitioners (IEHPs) portal and Yarning Place HealthInfoNet.

The Indigenous Environmental Health Practitioners' (IEHPs) portal on the Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet web resource provides IEHPs with access to the evidence base required to carry out their role. HealthInfoNet is contracted to update and maintain the IEHPs portal for three financial years (2015-2018). It's a plain language portal, so is easily accessible by everyone, which is particularly important for IEHPs who may speak English as a second or third language. It's also a yarning place that allows IEHPs to network with other workers.

The portal and yarning place are an important part of Indigenous environmental health infrastructure and they support IEHPs in their work to close the gap.

enHealth regularly reviews and updates publications to ensure the most up-to-date and scientifically accurate advice is provided. The latest publication to be updated was the Health Impact Assessment Guidelines. These remain the only nationally endorsed guidelines for assessing environmental determinants of health.

enHealth has been developing emergency management publications for environmental health professionals. A monograph on disaster management for environmental health professionals assists with disasters with a local impact. This monograph fills a knowledge gap and improves the skill base of environmental health practitioners involved in counter-disaster planning and responses to non-catastrophic disasters.

enHealth, through its subcommittee WGATSIEH, sees this conference as an important way of also supporting and strengthening your on-the-ground work by facilitating a sharing of ideas.

This year we welcome a new partner, Environmental Health Australia, as the professional organisation of environmental health practitioners.

I would also like to thank all the conference sponsors, without whose support this conference would not have been possible, the organisers, the local organising committee and Queensland Health for their work in putting this conference together today.

Glossary

enHealth	Environmental Health Standing Committee
EHW	environmental health worker
IEHP	Indigenous environmental health practitioner
WGATSIEH	Working Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health