

Welcome

Patricia Miller, Deputy of the Administrator of the Northern Territory

Good evening, everyone. My name is Pat Miller. I'm an Arrernte woman from here, Central Australia. Mparntwe is the Arrernte for Alice Springs, so I welcome you to Mparntwe. I am very pleased to be asked here to welcome everybody. There are a lot of people who have never visited us before, so I say a big welcome to you, and for those that are on a return visit, well, we welcome you back.

This conference is very, very important. It's the 8th National Conference for Rural and Remote Health. Having lived in the Centre all my life, apart from three months about 10 years ago when my husband had an aneurism, I moved to Adelaide to look after him, and I was lucky that my eldest son lives in Adelaide, so we had to cope with that for about three months, but I'm glad to say he returned, thanks to the Flying Doctor and Remote Health, that he's still with us today.

Having grown up here and seeing health go from one standard to another, years ago I lived out on a cattle station south-west of here, my grandfather owned a cattle station, and any injuries you made do with what you got. I broke my arm, so my father put it in a splint. My older brother hit my finger and smashed it when he was cracking seeds from bush tucker. My older sister, who's down the front, jammed my other finger in the car door and smashed it. So, I had two hands that weren't really right. So every time the doctors came to the school to inspect you, I used to go like that so she wouldn't see the other fingers.

And for years all the old grandmothers and aunts called me Il Jemama, and il jemama is sore finger. So for years I was known as Sore Finger and I really didn't know what was my name until I was about six, you know, things started to sink in and I went to school and, "Oh your name's Patricia, it's not Il Jemama." And even now an elderly aunt who's in town, whenever we sit close together and have a few words she says, "How you going, Il Jemama?" You know, she says that to me today, so that's a little pet name that people gave me many years ago.

But today Indigenous health is not about a broken arm or a sore finger. It's about much more chronic diseases that people have contracted, have to cope with, and I really do truly respect the health workers, the doctors, the nurses, people who work in remote health. The dedication that people have got that I've actually witnessed over the years, is unbelievable. And people who have come up here to replace somebody that's either burnt out through fatigue of working in this area, or gone on to pass on their work and knowledge to people in universities, the Aboriginal people especially really are thankful for the type of health care that we get from the people who serve in this area, and I for one am grateful for that.

So I'd really like to say welcome to Mparntwe, share your knowledge, share your experiences, and make it a fun thing because, you know, with some situations, if you don't laugh, you'd cry, really. So I think that it's going to be a good conference. I'm going to be popping in and out, as time permits, and again, welcome to Mparntwe.

I would now like to welcome Ms Rachael Maza. It's her first trip to Alice Springs, and this lady, I just met her, but I've seen her for ages and I watch her every Sunday at 1.30.