

MR WAKERMAN: Thank you very much for that generous welcome, Matilda. I don't know if I'm an elder yet, but when I look in the mirror at my receding hairline, I know I'm getting older.

I'd like to welcome you all on behalf of the National Rural Health Alliance. The Alliance is the peak body for rural health in Australia. We are made up of 27 national organisations that have a passionate interest in rural and remote health. Those 27 organisations are a very disparate group. They include professional organisations, nursing organisations, doctors and allied health. They include consumer groups, such as the Country Women's Association of Australia, the Health Consumers of Rural Remote Australia. It also consists of indigenous organisations like the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association. So we're a very eclectic group. It also includes some academic groups and I represent the Australian Rural Health Education Network on the Alliance.

We meet once a year face-to-face, there are so many of us we can only afford to meet once a year face-to-face. We spend a week together, each year we have this public seminar, during that week when we have our annual face-to-face meeting. We choose important and often difficult issues to discuss and raise at these seminars. In previous years we've talked about remote health, a subject close to my heart, nutrition in remote areas, maternity services in rural areas and this year, we're going to be talking about the wellbeing of refugees in rural and remote Australia, "listening with compassion and responding with respect."

We've got a fantastic line-up of people to speak to you and speak with you, and to have a discussion with you this afternoon. I am really very, very pleased with the number of people that have come this afternoon, and people from all over. So welcome particularly to those of you from the Northern Territory, that have travelled a long way to be here and others from other states, from Victoria and elsewhere. So we really appreciate that, and I think we've struck the right topic in terms of the level of interest that this has generated.

The way we'll organise this is we're going to have people coming and speaking, and I'll ask the speakers to try and stick to about 15 minutes, so that we've got five minutes or so where we're able to get questions and comments from the audience. There will be a panel session at the end, so there will be an opportunity at the end to have a discussion as well. We wish to audio-tape the proceedings, and they will be available on the Alliance website after this seminar. So what we will be doing is - we've got some roving mikes, so when we do come to the question and comments session, if you could just stand-up and we'll get the mike to you.