

CASE STUDY



- Event:** Rural Medicine Australia Conference
- Date:** 24-27 October, 2018
- Attendance:** 775 delegates
- Organiser:** Australian College of Remote and Rural Medicine and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia

Event overview

The annual Rural Medicine Australia (RMA) Conference was held in Darwin from 24 to 27 October 2018.

RMA is the peak national event for rural and remote doctors in Australia and internationally. It regularly attracts more than 500 delegates.

In Darwin, the packed program included professional development workshops, policy discussions, presentations from medical researchers, a trade show, political forums, and networking opportunities.

The event aims for 450 conference delegates each year.

‘Our final count was 775 attendees’, said Michelle Cuzens, the event organiser. ‘It was a big number in Darwin—one of our biggest.’

Michelle said the common misconceptions about distance and cost for a Darwin business event were a non-issue.

‘We definitely thought about that: Darwin was one of those places we weren’t sure if everyone was going to make the trip’, she said.

‘But many of our delegates told us they’d never been to Darwin, and in our post-event survey, it was a massive stand out that Darwin is a ‘destination city’. It turned out to be a must-visit, and

for our delegates, both the cost and the distance wasn't an issue.'

Michelle said the Darwin Convention Centre and its location made the event special.

'The centre's waterfront location is what we loved the most', she said.

'Having that whole waterfront precinct was incredible; our delegates said it felt welcoming and inviting. There was a real buzz the whole time. Many attendees said it was the best RMA ever.'

Conference Objectives

The aim of the annual conference is to educate rural health professionals—junior doctors, students, educators, academics and medical practitioners who are passionate about generalist medicine in rural and remote communities.

This year's themes included Indigenous health, women in health, tropical medicine, innovation in remote settings, and research in policy and practice.

'A big thing for us this year was around innovation in remote medicine and our policy updates', Michelle said.

'Delegates also had in-depth discussion around Indigenous health in terms of skin disease, family health and women's health. They were all big topics this year.'

Conference Format

The event opened with welcome reception, followed by three days of keynote presentations, concurrent sessions and professional development workshops.

A future generalists' function on the Thursday night was an opportunity for students to meet, mingle, and network with fellow students, and the president's breakfast covered current and topical health matters.

'The overall conference format worked very well', Michelle said.

'This was the first time we had dedicated streams for each of the conference themes, and, in addition, our student and registrar streams, which our delegates received positively', she said. 'The venue layout worked well for us to deliver all our streams accordingly.'

The major conference dinner on the Friday night included the annual excellence awards.

'Everyone thought the dinner was fantastic', Michelle said.

'We anticipated 300 guests and exceeded a of total 430, so the room was full—it looked and felt beautiful. We were able to create a positive and elegant vibe for the prestigious night.'

Darwin Convention Centre

The client said the experience at the Darwin Convention Centre was a positive one.

'The staff were all friendly and lovely—no request was too big or too small for them', Michelle said.

Having hotels within walking distance and exclusive use of the centre with no other conferences running were also stand outs. 'Our delegates felt at home and loved the fact that we had ownership of the venue', she said.

'When we've run the event in hotels, you can be a bit segregated and your trade area limited to a foyer space or smaller ballroom somewhere.

'Or in a big city, you start to lose delegates who want to go off to a restaurant on the other side of the city.

'Having everything in one location in Darwin this year just made RMA that little bit more special.'

A legacy from the Darwin event is the client's perspective on conference branding.

'Darwin showed us there's so much branding opportunity during our conference', she said.

'Having the entrance feature and window decals at the Darwin Convention Centre was something we hadn't done before, but it worked so well that we'll now look to do that for future conferences to maximise our presence.'

Darwin and the NT

Michelle said that like many delegates, she hadn't been to the NT or Darwin before and didn't know what to expect.

'It was most definitely a welcoming experience', she said.

'Darwin is a capital city, but it's smaller, which made it special. And the culture there is different and the pace is relaxed—we recognised that immediately and tried to embrace it by bringing the NT into RMA and not just the RMA Conference into the NT.

'We had a lot of people say it was the best RMA they'd attended. The precinct around the Darwin Convention Centre and exclusive use of the venue all built into a certain buzz around the event this year that has been missing previously.

'I think a lot of that has to do with that whole waterfront precinct and the culture that was brought into RMA this year just from being in Darwin and the NT and embracing the area to its full potential.'