



# Australasian Association of Bioethics & Health Law

## AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION OF BIOETHICS & HEALTH LAW

### Conference Guidelines

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## 1. Background

The Australasian Association of Bioethics and Health Law (AABHL) aims to provide a community for those who are interested in bioethics and health law in the Australasian region. It has always seen conferences as one prime way to foster this community and its interests. The AABHL relies upon its members and their institutions to host and run the conference for it. These guidelines reflect the symbiosis inherent in this arrangement. They set out the expectations that the AABHL has regarding the nature, content and running of AABHL conferences. These guidelines have also been developed to provide information and direction to the organisers and potential organisers of the AABHL Conference. They are intended to promote consistency and transparency of process.

These guidelines can be updated annually by the executive, following each Conference to reflect the evolving needs of the Association and learning from conference reports, with more comprehensive reviews every three years. The structure and organisation of the AABHL Conference is regularly reviewed, and the views of members and attendees are sought through surveys run by the conference organisers at the completion of each Conference. Additional resources, including conference reports by local organising committees of previous Conferences, are available on the AABHL website.

## 2. Hosting a conference: process for expression of interest

AABHL aims to hold a conference annually. Volunteers willing to host an AABHL conference are encouraged to nominate well in advance, and at least two years prior to the intended conference. AABHL Executive Committee may issue a call for Expressions of Interest for hosting the annual conference. However, expressions of interest in hosting a conference can be made to the AABHL Executive Committee at any time by providing a proposal including as much of the following information as is available:

- Proposed location;
- Preferred year/dates;
- Institutional support available;
- Local organising committee (LOC) members;
- Any potential sponsorship or collaborative opportunities, aligned conferences, or other information relevant to the attractiveness and viability of your proposal;
- Nomination for one person from the LOC as the main point of contact; and
- A planning timeline of 12-18 months to prepare for hosting an AABHL conference.

Expressions of interest will be considered at the next occurring AABHL Committee meeting, (held approximately every 3 months). The AABHL Committee will consider any applications that have been received and accept the bid, reject it or seek further information.

The Committee will decide based on the following criteria:

- Location (Australia and New Zealand, or another regionally relevant location, noting the need to balance rotation through a range of locations with affordability to participants in terms of travel costs)
- Timing
- Organising capacity
- Financial capacity (including support from the home institution)
- Potential venue options
- Potential to attract speakers and attendees e.g. link to other events, keynote speakers

If more than one bid is received, the Committee will discuss the expressions of interest and vote on the options.

### 3. Structure of the Local Organising Committee

The LOC will include:

- The convenor, or two co-convenors, of the Conference as Chair. This person(s) should serve a 2-year term, with the Chair continuing as a member of the next LOC, to pass on their experience, and conserve corporate memory. It is likely that they will participate in the following year's meetings by teleconference.
- Nomination of two co-convenors is encouraged to more effectively manage the workload and foster diversity in the chair roles
- The LOC may choose to have one nominee from each AABHL Stream. This is a 1-year term, but they should be available to pass on relevant information to the next Stream representative of the LOC.
- Additional local members as desired.

The LOC is to report to the AABHL Committee, with the convenor(s) attending the regular AABHL committee meetings in the year of the conference.

### 4. LOC terms of reference

AABHL strongly encourages the use of a professional conference organiser (PCO). The LOC may wish to consult with AABHL and previous LOCs about prospective PCOs. The LOC will have overall responsibility for the following matters, supported by the PCO:

- Have regular meetings and keep minutes of meetings;
- Keep AABHL informed of progress;
- Select the appropriate dates and venues for the Conference and social functions;
- Oversee the budget and finances, in liaison with the PCO;
- Obtain sponsorship and exhibitors;
- Select and invite international and/or national speakers for plenary sessions;
- Select abstracts for oral presentations and rapid-fire or poster sessions if included;
- Select speaker for the Kirby Oration;
- Select person to officially open the meeting
- Prepare and edit the abstract book, in liaison with the PCO;

- Organise the conference program;
- Be responsible for all other local issues involved with the running of the Conference;
- Ensure contemporaneous records of total numbers and classifications of delegate registrations are maintained and made available to AABHL throughout the lead up to the Conference and following its conclusion;
- Ensure statements of income and expenditure are provided to AABHL within 90 days of the end of the Conference, together with return of any profit;
- Undertake a survey of attendees (noting that past experience indicates doing this a few days after the conference by email seems to result in the best response rate) regarding their impressions of the conference, whether their expectations were met, and general evaluation of the conference, with facility for delegates to make anonymous comments and suggestions;
- Prepare a Conference Report, to be presented to the AABHL Committee and lodged with the Secretary for uploading to the AABHL website (Members only resources) within 90 days of the end of the Conference. The Report should provide an analysis of the evaluation completed by delegates, describe the LOC's experiences of convening the conference, and specifically make relevant comments and suggestions that will be of assistance to future LOCs that can be incorporated into revisions of this document.

## 5. AABHL Committee involvement

The AABHL Committee will undertake:

- Organisation of awards and selection of award recipients including the essay prizes;
- Advertising and selection of student, early career researcher, carer and other bursaries;
- Providing advice and assistance to the LOC as required, especially in reviewing of abstracts;
- Allocation of funding for Streams (if available).

## 6. Initial planning of the Conference

### 6.1 Location of the meeting

In selecting a location, the AABHL Committee will have regard to the Australasian nature of the association, and aim to maximise the accessibility of the Conference across the region. Australian and New Zealand locations should alternate wherever possible, and other countries (including, but not limited to, Singapore) should be given the opportunity to host as feasible.

#### Previous and Planned Conferences

Year	Location	Year	Location
2025	Christchurch, NZ	2016	Melbourne, VIC

2024	Sydney, NSW	2015	Wellington, NZ
2023	Brisbane, QLD	2014	Perth, WA
2022	Hobart, TAS	2013	Sydney, NSW
2021	Melbourne (online)	2012	Auckland, NZ
2020	[No conference, COVID]	2011	Gold Coast, QLD
2019	Dunedin, NZ	2010	Adelaide, SA
2018	Townsville, QLD	2009	ABA/ANZIHLE Queenstown, NZ
2017	[No conference]		

## 6.2 Timing of the Conference

AABHL Conferences are usually held in non-teaching weeks for Australian and New Zealand universities; typically in July, September or November. We also strongly encourage consideration of schedules for those in other parts of Australasia as part of continuing efforts to diversify AABHL's conferences and membership.

The LOC should discuss the proposed dates with the AABHL Committee and Stream Leaders to ensure suitability of dates that will optimize participation of the membership and interested attendees.

## 6.3 Adjoining conferences

AABHL will take appropriate opportunities to host joint or back-to-back conferences of interest to AABHL members. Negotiations need to be as early as practicable. The convenor(s) of the relevant Conference will undertake this task, in consultation with the AABHL Executive.

## 6.4 Streams

AABHL runs a number of streams, which are subgroups of the membership with particular interests. The LOC are strongly encouraged to contact Stream Leaders and to seek to arrange for the streams to take part in the conference. This may include social or informal stream events, more formal stream led workshops whether as part of the conference programme or not, and possibly pre or post conference events.

The AABHL committee can facilitate contact with stream leaders.

The Streams are strongly encouraged to hold stream events either as part of the main conference or adjacent to it. Stream representation on the LOC is encouraged so they can have input into the Conference programme and be involved in the organisation of sessions that cross discipline borders in the main body of the AABHL Conference.

The LOC may wish to hold a specific Stream day scheduled on the day prior to the main Conference. Funding to cover the additional room hire, catering, speaker travel etc may come from one or more of the following sources:

- Charging an additional registration fee for Stream day;
- Sponsorship arranged by the Stream;

- Funding provided by AABHL.

Streams seeking funding from AABHL must submit a proposal to the AABHL Committee six months before the Conference. The Committee should announce what funds will be available ahead of this deadline, to inform requests appropriately.

## 6.5 Venue

In selecting the venue, consideration should be given to:

- Ease of access for national and international delegates to/from airports and other forms of transport;
- Ease of access to a variety of nearby suitable accommodation at a diverse range of price points;
- Suitable conference facilities (typical attendance varies, but ranges from 150-250);
- Rooms suitable for main and concurrent sessions, registration, set up and speaker preparation area, capability for hybrid (face-to-face and virtual) sessions, recording ability, cloakroom (suitcases on first and last days of the meeting and overcoats), trade displays, food and beverage areas and smaller rooms for various meetings (including the AABHL AGM);
- Facilities for Powerpoint presentations, including computers and projection facilities;
- Making a concerted effort to offer a virtual attendance option;
- Adequate wifi for delegates in meeting rooms and public areas;
- Appropriate access for those with mobility issues, in accordance with AABHL's policy on diversity and inclusion;
- Facilities for those with caring responsibilities, such as a parenting room;
- Environmental and sustainability considerations, particularly reducing waste in relation to conference activities wherever possible (eg [using recyclable materials](#), [accurately projecting catering to reduce food waste](#) etc).

## 7. Financial arrangements

### 7.1 Financial aims

The aim of AABHL Conferences, from a financial perspective, is to break even (or even aim to make a modest profit). As a secondary aim, conferences should be affordable to the membership and represent good value, noting that affordability can also be addressed through bursaries and travel grants.

Any profits, as a general rule, are to be returned to AABHL, and used to subsidise future bursaries, travel grants and seed funding for future conferences. However, if an institution supporting the LOC requires a profit sharing agreement, this is to be agreed at an early stage in the conference planning.

The LOC is responsible for working with professional conference organisers to budget appropriately and to monitor progress closely to avoid a loss. The LOC should also ensure that all appropriate insurances are taken out by the professional conference organiser. If

a loss appears likely, the LOC should notify AABHL as soon as possible so that a plan to avoid it can be jointly developed. AABHL does not have the financial reserves to indemnify the LOC against financial mismanagement.

As the budget for AABHL Conferences is usually relatively small, consideration should be given to using university or other government facilities, where appropriate, as AABHL has often been able to negotiate free use of conference facilities in exchange for acknowledgement of sponsorship from the hosting institution.

## 7.2 Seeding money

AABHL will provide seed funding to the LOC, at its discretion and depending on available funds. It is expected that the seed funds will be returned to AABHL after the conference.

## 7.3 Student awards

AABHL is able to offer to cover the costs of the student awards and also some bursaries and other support depending on the organisation's financial position. See also 10.3.

## 7.4 Registration fees

Registration fees should be sufficient, in addition to other income from sponsorship, trade displays, etc to cover estimated costs, while also remaining affordable to the general membership. The LOC sets registration rates which are then approved by the AABHL Executive. AABHL requires that there be different rates for members and non-members, as well as reduced rates for students, retirees, and independent scholars. A reduced rate for online registrations is at the discretion of the LOC, noting that a balance needs to be found between facilitating equitable access to the Conference and not undervaluing the Conference content. Setting an early bird deadline with a lower registration rate has proven useful in the past to allow for program planning and confirmation of attendance.

It is useful to have potential new members directed to the AABHL website to become members prior to registration. A membership list can be provided on a regular basis by the Secretary to check membership status. Deadlines and policies for reimbursements due to cancellations are at the discretion of the LOC.

# 8. Conference theme

Having a theme for the Conference may be desirable but is not essential. A theme can be used to provide a focus for sessions and presentations, but needs to be sufficiently broad to allow scope for a wide range of bioethics and health law topics to be included, in order to encourage participation from AABHL members and others working in bioethics and health law. Adherence to the conference theme ought not determine the acceptance of an abstract.

# 9. Publicity

The LOC has primary responsibility for publicising the Conference, including the call for papers, and for preparing a conference website. They may enlist the help of the PCO to maximize distribution. AABHL commits to distributing conference-related publicity to its



membership. The website should be approved by the AABHL Executive before being launched and will be linked to from the AABHL website.

## 10. Conference program

AABHL Conferences typically run over 2.5-3 days. Precise timing is negotiable, depending on the location of the Conference and ease of arrival, among other issues.

The following aspects of the program are mandatory for any AABHL Conference:

- An appropriate Welcome to Country or similar and a welcome address by a relevant dignitary at the Conference opening;
- A welcome reception to provide time for delegates to renew acquaintances and to network;
- Plenary sessions highlighting important issues likely to be of interest to all attendees;
- Scheduled AABHL Committee meeting (two hours in total) with catering funded by the Conference;
- Scheduled AABHL Annual General Meeting (1.5 hours in total) with provision of refreshments funded by the Conference to encourage member attendance – this meeting has typically been held after presentations in the late afternoon of the second to last day of the conference, but not on the day of the dinner;
- A conference dinner or similar, to encourage networking – this should be included in the registration fee at a price point accessible to students. Ease of access for delegates to the dinner venue is imperative; transport may need to be provided. There is no expectation that entertainment must be provided at the dinner. Beverages including alcohol and higher quality non-alcoholic beverages should be included in the catering package, as having bar service has proven unwieldy in the past;
- Provision for time/space for workshops to be convened by AABHL Streams – if outside of the main program, it may be necessary to charge a small amount for attendance at these activities to cover catering or venue hire which should not come out of the general conference budget.
- A presentation slot for winners of the student essay prizes to present abridged versions of their winning essays, and for the award of the prizes. The format and timing of the presentation of the awards should be discussed with the Executive before the programme is finalised, and can occur during the Conference or at the dinner.

### 10.1 Student essay awards

The two student essay prizes which are offered at each conference are the John McPhee prize in health law and the Max Charlesworth prize in bioethics. The student essay awards are open to any current full- or part-time university student who does not already have a doctoral degree; they need not be members of AABHL at the time of application. The essay awards require a separate application which is distinct from application for presentation at the Conference.

The awards are funded by AABHL and should be accompanied by a registration waiver if the recipient is able to attend.

The LOC must check with the AABHL Executive regarding any specific updates relating to these awards prior to advertising them and are responsible for advertising these prizes widely.

The LOC may decide to utilise a variety of additional means to encourage students to submit abstracts for presentation; for example, by offering a 'best student presentation prize' which might be provided by sponsorship or from the Conference budget. Students ought to be able to opt-in or opt-out of being considered for such prizes.

## 10.2 Abstract review

Scoring of abstracts is to be undertaken by members of the LOC and the AABHL Committee, using the rubric in Appendix A.

Given the small size of the Australasian bioethics and health law community, low level conflicts are to be expected. Reviewers may review abstracts submitted by colleagues and collaborators if they have no involvement in the research being presented. However, LOC and AABHL committee members should not review abstracts where:

- They have any involvement with the research under review;
- They have a financial or close personal relationship or interest; or
- They have a previous or pending dispute with the authors.

Reviewers should use their discretion in determining if they have a significant conflict of interest. If they are uncertain, they should contact the chair of the LOC for advice.

## 10.3 Bursaries

AABHL has, when funds permitted, provided some support for student, ECR and carer travel upon application. Capacity to cover such expenses will differ from year to year. The AABHL Committee will run this process when funds are available. The LOC is encouraged to seek out sponsorship for student, ECR and carer travel whenever possible, and the AABHL Committee can assist with mechanisms for award where needed.

## 10.4 Sponsorship

All sponsorship must be in accordance with AABHL's policy on sponsorship. Sponsorship is highly desirable, but all potential sponsors must have the approval of the Executive prior to any agreement with sponsors or inclusion of a sponsor's name in any of the publicity. Approved sponsors can negotiate what benefits they will get with the LOC and the PCO, in accordance with the sponsorship policy.

## 10.5 Media

The LOC should endeavour to attract media coverage of the Conference through the media office of the hosting institution in the first instance. Social media engagement and live-tweeting (or equivalent) of conference sessions is encouraged. The LOC should establish and promote the use of a hashtag for the meeting. Provisions must be made for AABHL social media accounts to share conference-related content and a person or team should be appointed to do this by the Executive, in consultation with the LOC.

## 10.6 Follow-up

Where possible, recordings of sessions should be made and permission from speakers sought to facilitate access by delegates post-Conference.