

...healthy and sustainable rural, regional and remote communities.

How do humans and the environment interact?

25 May 2020

“How humans and the environment interact” is the theme of the 7th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium’s virtual pre-Symposium session, which is now [fully available](#). It includes a [Q&A](#) session with the three keynote speakers, which has been launched today.

The Symposium has been reimagined due to COVID-19 and is now taking place in two parts: the virtual pre-Symposium session which features three keynotes’ video presentations, the Q&A session, nine concurrent presentations and four posters from the original program, and then – all being well – a face-to-face event in Alice Springs in May 2021.

Today sees the launch of the centrepiece of the virtual session: a Q&A facilitated by Professor John Wakerman, Professor of Remote and Rural Health Services Research, Menzies School of Health Research, featuring the three keynote speakers:

- Professor Anthony Capon, Director, Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University
- Professor Pierre Horwitz, Professor of Environmental Sciences, Edith Cowan University
- Dr Laura Weyrich, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Pennsylvania State University

National Rural Health Alliance CEO Dr Gabrielle O’Kane thanked everyone who had contributed to the Q&A session and said that climate change and COVID-19 were among the hot topics.

“You can’t talk about human health without considering the environment in which people live,” said Dr O’Kane. “That was reinforced by the three keynote speakers at our virtual pre-Symposium session.”

“Some of the themes that came up in the Q&A session included the impact on rural communities of things like vector-borne disease, biodiversity loss, and of course climate change.

“The panel also discussed how to change the conversation in Australia so that we have a greater appreciation of the link between health and the environment, and there was a keen focus on what role rural health professionals should play.

“Importantly, there was a strong call to action for rural health professionals to be a strong voice for greater environmental protection and action on climate change.

“These aren’t just academic debates. They are real issues that are posing a threat to people in rural and remote Australia right now.

“The virtual pre-Symposium session also has a key focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, including Laura Weyrich’s work on how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander microbiome reflects long-term connection to country. This focus is also reflected in a number of the presentations by our concurrent presenters.

The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.

“We are delighted to be able to host this virtual pre-Symposium session, which is freely available for everyone with an interest in rural health. We hope it will be a good preview of the 2021 face-to-face Symposium in Alice Springs.”

The Q&A can be watched [here](#) and the program for the rest of the content is [here](#).

The National Rural Health Alliance is the peak body for rural health in Australia and is organizing the Symposium along with the Australian Rural Health Education Network, the Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators and the Lowitja Institute.

Interviews can be arranged with speakers and/or the NRHA CEO.

Media enquiries: Tim Hurd 0447 427 292 | tim@ruralhealth.org.au