



**COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY NURSING AUSTRALASIA
23RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EMERGENCY NURSES
OPENING ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART, WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2026**

Good afternoon, everyone.

It is a real privilege to welcome you to Nipaluna/Hobart for the 23rd International Conference for Emergency Nurses. Starting my career as a registered nurse, being here with you today is a real honour, so thank you.

Thank you also to John for the Welcome to Country and I too pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to Aboriginal people joining us today. Their contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

Emergency nursing is about being there when people need us most. It is about stepping forward when there is uncertainty, when time matters, when families are frightened, and when patients are in some of the hardest moments of their lives. It takes clinical expertise, sound judgement and technical skill.

But it also takes humanity. It asks us to see the person behind the emergency.

So, as we begin, I'd like you to think of a moment in your nursing career when you knew your work mattered.

Perhaps it was a resuscitation where the team made the difference. Perhaps it was caring for someone who arrived frightened and alone. Perhaps it was supporting a family through devastating news. Or perhaps it was something much quieter: holding a hand, listening, reassuring, or simply being present when someone needed another human being beside them.

Moments like these can stay with us for an entire career and indeed stay with our patients. I began my own nursing journey in 1986 at Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide, and even after all these years, I can still vividly recall moments of connection with patients and families. They remind me that while healthcare keeps changing, with new technology, new systems and growing knowledge, the purpose of nursing remains remarkably constant.

We are here for people.

Your theme this year is "Meaningful Work, Meaningful Place." Those words carry particular weight in emergency nursing, because your work cannot be separated from the people and communities you serve.

Emergency departments are where people arrive when something has gone wrong, often suddenly, unexpectedly and sometimes catastrophically. You meet people on the worst days of their lives, in environments that are unpredictable, demanding and relentlessly busy.

You make decisions quickly. You prioritise. You advocate. You comfort. You coordinate. You educate. You lead.

And, importantly, you care.

Sometimes that care is highly technical. Sometimes it is as simple as making eye contact with someone who is frightened and letting them know they are not alone. Both matter.

Emergency nursing also asks a great deal of you. Rising demand, workforce pressures, increasing complexity and changing expectations are reshaping healthcare.

So a meaningful workplace has to be more than a place where important work happens. It must be a place where the people doing that work are supported. Where experience is valued. Where new nurses are encouraged to grow. Where colleagues look after one another. Where speaking up is welcomed. And where patient safety, staff wellbeing and professional respect are understood as connected priorities.

Because meaningful work must also be sustainable work. We need experienced nurses to stay, and we need new nurses to look at emergency nursing and see a profession where they can learn, contribute and thrive. I cannot emphasise how important supporting our up-and-coming workforce is for our future.

That is why this conference is so important. For the next few days, you can step out of the urgency of the emergency department and reflect on the work itself.

You can share what is working, question what is not, and learn from research, from experience and from one another.

So I encourage you to make the most of it. Talk to the person sitting beside you. Ask how another service solves a problem you are facing. Share an idea that has worked in your department. Be generous with your experience and curious about the experience of others.

In my personal experience, some of the most valuable conversations at any conference don't happen at the podium. They happen over coffee, between sessions, when someone says, "We had the same problem. This is what we tried."

I hope this conference will also provide an opportunity to have some of the harder conversations — conversations about access and equity, rural and regional care, and the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention. We need to consider the growing complexity of emergency presentations, including mental health presentations, and how we can ensure that people receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

This includes exploring the role of Urgent Care Clinics and other models of care, as well as the opportunities presented by technology and artificial intelligence to support and strengthen human care, rather than diminish it.

These conversations are particularly important as our communities and their needs continue to change. Here in Tasmania, people aged over 65 already account for more than 20 per cent of our population. The latest ACEM report, released on Tuesday, highlighted that presentations to emergency departments by older Tasmanians increased by 19 per cent over the five years to 2023–24, compared with just 2 per cent for younger patients. These figures are more than statistics. They reflect the changing demands on our emergency departments and the need to continually adapt how we deliver care, support our workforce and respond to the needs of our communities.

And while policy, innovation and technology will all play an important role in shaping the future of emergency care, ultimately, that future will be defined by people — by emergency nurses like you.

It will be shaped by your knowledge and expertise, your courage in the face of uncertainty, your compassion for people at their most vulnerable, and your commitment to providing care when it matters most.

That is the strength of emergency nursing. And it is why the conversations we have, the connections we build, and the ideas we share at this conference are so important.

Behind every emergency nurse is a team. Behind every team is a community. And behind every patient is a person whose life, family and story matter.

Tasmania is delighted to have you here. I hope you find time to experience a little of our island, our landscapes, our food and our hospitality. But most of all, I hope you leave with something that stays with you when you go home: a new idea, a new connection, a practical solution, or simply a reminder of why you chose this profession in the first place.

To everyone who has travelled to be here, and to the organisers, speakers and volunteers behind the scenes: thank you.

To the emergency nurses in this room: thank you for the expertise, compassion and calm you bring to people when they need it most. Your work matters. The people and places you serve matter. And the difference you make matters enormously.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Tasmania and to officially open the 23rd International Conference for Emergency Nurses.