



PRESS RELEASE

Conference to tackle real issues

The ageing workforce, drug use, low fertility rates, and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes are some of the issues confronting Australia today and into the future.

These are some of the issues that will be discussed at the Australian Population Association 14th Biennial Conference when it is held for the first time in the Northern Territory in June.

More than 100 population experts from Australia and around the globe will gather in Alice Springs to share new research and discuss potential policy solutions to some of Australia's biggest demographic challenges, and to explain some of the most interesting trends.

Professor Ross Guest, of Griffith University, will discuss the economic burden of Australia's ageing population.

He said the best way to respond is by increasing the labour force participation of older workers. He is critical of government policies designed to address population ageing because they do little to improve labour force participation.

"Changes to superannuation may in fact encourage earlier retirement by allowing all workers over 60 to receive superannuation income tax free. Similarly, running budget surpluses by keeping taxes higher than they otherwise would be tends to discourage workforce participation," he said.

During the Alice Springs conference, he will discuss reports that show government spending per person would need to increase by about five per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the 40 years from 2007 to 2047 to accommodate the care needs of the ageing population.

Some projections suggest living standards could fall 15 per cent in the next 40 years. Professor Guest, however, painted the scenario with much more optimism.

"In order for ageing to actually reduce living standards below their current level we would require an extreme, sustained and unprecedented drop in labour productivity growth to 0.35 percent per annum. This can be regarded as almost hypothetical," he said.

There were a number of reasons why Australia should cope well with an ageing population, particularly with the increased rate of women participating in the workforce. He said that thanks to higher levels of education, women were now more likely to participate longer than in past decades.

Professor Guest also will talk about the effectiveness of the baby bonus and immigration policy as responses to the ageing population.

Additional speakers will share new research about trends in Australian birth rates, why women return to work after childbirth, legal and illegal drug use, the increase of type 2 diabetes, and Indigenous life expectancy.

The conference is sponsored by the Northern Territory Government, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Bureau of Statistics, the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, with in-kind support from the School for Social and Policy Research at Charles Darwin University.

The Conference will be held at the Alice Springs Convention Centre from 30 June to 3 July 2008. Conference details are available at www.nt.gov.au/ntt/apa2008/.

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Australian Population Association

14th Biennial Conference

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About the conference

The 14th biennial conference of the Australian Population Association (<http://www.apa.org.au/>) will be held in Alice Springs from Monday 30th June to Thursday 3rd July 2008 at the Alice Springs Convention Centre.

The conference will share international perspectives on contemporary population issues. The keynote speaker program features highly respected international population experts, and a comprehensive program of concurrent sessions based on the conference themes of:

- Indigenous demography
- Policy responses to demographic change; and
- The demography of Australia's northern neighbours

For full details, including the conference program, go to www.nt.gov.au/ntt/apa2008/