

## 2026 ACCA Annual Conference – Speaker Line-Up

We are excited to announce the speaker line-up for the 2026 ACCA Annual Conference.

This year's theme focuses on creating connections and understanding your customer, with a strong and consistent thread throughout the program centred on community engagement, customer connection, and strengthening your team.

We have brought together an outstanding group of speakers from a diverse range of fields, alongside showcasing the innovative work our members are doing to enhance community connections and elevate the customer experience.

### Pre-Conference Workshops

The event will also feature optional training courses and workshops on **Tuesday, 1 September**, prior to the main conference. Details are outlined below. Please note these workshops are available at an additional cost and places are limited.

### Featured Speakers

#### **Winitha Bonney OAM**

*Risk-Ready Leadership: Closing the Implementation Gap in High-Scrutiny Environments*

Winitha will explore how leaders can role-model behaviours that enable high-performing teams under pressure while navigating complex and highly scrutinised environments. This session will examine how to balance deep compassion with commercial realities, strengthen team capability, and translate strategy into practical action that delivers measurable outcomes, reduces risk, and enhances both reputation and performance.

→ Includes keynote session and in-depth workshop.

#### **Christopher Zinn**

*Journalist, speaker and consumer advocate*

#### **Our Final Purchase: The Ultimate Consumer Issue – Disruption, Denial, and Decisions Around Death**

Most consumer issues concern cost, transparency, and availability. However, “deathcare” is unlike any other market, regardless of whether you are an end user, provider, or regulator. Often described as an “emotionally restrained purchase,” this session draws on Christopher’s extensive experience across complex markets such as financial advice and private health insurance, as well as his time on the board of a cemeteries and crematoria regulator. He will explore how we can support more informed decision-making around death.



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### **Natalie Waters**

*Human behavioural profiler & leadership coach*

Natalie will introduce practical frameworks for understanding behavioural patterns, communication styles, and decision-making triggers. This session will help you better connect with customers and colleagues - improving communication, reducing friction, and building stronger, more effective relationships across your organisation.

### **Andrew Hoyne**

*Placemaking and marketing expert*

Andrew will explore the evolving role of cemeteries within the global “place economy,” highlighting how these spaces contribute to community identity, liveability, and connection. He will share international examples and practical insights into how thoughtful placemaking can transform perceptions and strengthen community value.

### **Lisa Herbert – Bottom Drawer Book**

Lisa will demonstrate how cemetery and crematoria operators can design meaningful and memorable visitor experiences. From open days to self-guided tours, this session will explore how place-based storytelling can create emotional connections, strengthen community engagement, and turn visitors into long-term advocates.

## **Additional Speakers & Industry Experts**

### **Dr Kate Ariotti – University of Queensland**

Dr Ariotti will explore how Australia’s approach to commemorating its war dead has evolved, alongside powerful insights into the lived experiences of Australian prisoners of war during WWII and how they cared for their deceased in extreme conditions.

### **Dr Georgina Robertson – University of Melbourne**

A leading academic in alternative body disposition, Dr Robertson will provide insight into emerging methods such as alkaline hydrolysis, exploring both the scientific foundations and the broader social, environmental, and regulatory considerations shaping their adoption.

### **Dr Hannah Gould – University of Melbourne**

Renowned death studies academic and author of *How to Die in the 21st Century*, Dr Gould brings a contemporary and thought-provoking perspective on death literacy, modern dying practices, and society’s evolving relationship with death.

### **Dr Kristy Wright**

*Forensic Biologist & Squadron Leader, Royal Australian Air Force*

Dr Wright will share compelling insights from her career across major crime investigations, disaster victim identification, and military recovery operations - highlighting the science, complexity, and human impact of identifying and returning the deceased to their families.



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### **Wayne Middleton – Reliance Risk**

#### *Business Continuity Management Workshop*

This interactive session will explore how cemetery and crematoria operations can prepare for and respond to disruption. From natural disasters to operational and reputational crises. Participants will gain practical tools and undertake a hands-on Business Impact Analysis tailored to the sector.

### **Karl Nesbitt – XYST**

#### *Development of a Cemetery Strategy*

This presentation highlights the importance of proactive strategic planning to ensure long-term sustainability and relevance. It will cover key considerations including capacity forecasting, heritage protection, diverse interment options, and balancing environmental and land-use pressures. Case examples will demonstrate how strategic planning reduces risk, enhances service delivery, and strengthens cemeteries as meaningful community spaces.

### **Asha Dooley – National President, Funerals Australia (FA)**

#### *Strengthening the Handover to Improve Family Experience*

This practical workshop focuses on improving collaboration between funeral directors and cemetery/crematoria teams. It will address common pressure points, identify opportunities for smoother coordination, and provide actionable approaches to delivering a more seamless and supportive experience for families.

## **Australian Death Studies Society 2026 Annual Lecture**

### **Distinguished Professor Ben White**

#### *Death, Choice and Evolution: The Experience of Voluntary Assisted Dying in Australia*

Professor Ben White will provide a comprehensive and thought-provoking exploration of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) in Australia. Drawing on his extensive research and policy involvement, this session will examine implementation across states, key challenges, and future directions. It will also explore the lived experiences of patients, families, and health professionals, and consider the broader ethical, legal, and societal implications.

## **Breakout Sessions**

This year's breakout sessions will showcase the outstanding work of ACCA members in building community connections and reshaping how society views cemeteries.

Featuring contributions from:

Townsville City Council (QLD), Centennial Park (SA), Metropolitan Memorial Parks (NSW), Metropolitan Cemeteries Board (WA), and Boroondara Cemetery Trust (VIC).

These sessions will provide practical tools and confidence to implement similar initiatives within your organisation.



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## Industry Updates

We will also share updates on key ACCA initiatives and partner associations, including:

- New training opportunities and initiatives
- Grief literacy in schools project update
- Cremation emissions standards project update
- Funerals Australia (FA)
- NFDA
- International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria

Alongside broader industry updates and insights from valued suppliers and sponsors.

## Special Pre-Conference Workshops \*Additional costs apply

Tuesday, 1 September

9:30am – 3:30pm

Royal Pines, Benowa

### Course 1: XYST – Asset Management for Cemeteries and Their Facilities

This course is designed to help organisations move towards industry best practice. It builds on IPWEA asset management frameworks for parks and community facilities and applies them to cemetery operations.

### Course 2: RAV – Psychological Wellbeing & Supporting Grieving Clients

This immersive full-day workshop strengthens staff wellbeing and capability in emotionally demanding roles.

**Morning Session:** Psychological Wellbeing in the Workplace

**Afternoon Session:** Supporting Grieving Clients

Participants will gain practical strategies, explore evidence-based approaches, and develop skills in empathetic communication, active listening, and maintaining personal wellbeing while supporting others.

Cost: \$625 per course (limited places available)

For more information, please contact: [admin@accaweb.com.au](mailto:admin@accaweb.com.au)



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This year's conference promises to deliver meaningful insights, practical strategies, and inspiring perspectives to help you strengthen connections with your community and customers.

More speakers and the full program will be announced soon.

## **Trade Show**

This year will feature our largest trade show yet, with representatives from industry sponsors and supporters. This is an excellent opportunity to explore the latest products and services in the cemetery and crematoria sector—from plaques and memorialisation to software, equipment, and support services.

## **Networking Events**

*Full Registration tickets are inclusive of the Welcome Drinks and the Gala Dinner.*

### **Welcome Drinks - Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September | 5:00pm - 7:00pm**

The Welcome Drinks event offers an excellent opportunity for attendees to register, collect their name badges, and engage in networking or reconnecting with old friends whilst visiting our suppliers' trade booths.

### **Gala Dinner - Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September | 6:00pm - 11:00pm**

40<sup>th</sup> year celebration | Proudly sponsored by Platinum Sponsor [Arrow Bronze](#).

This milestone will recognise the history, achievements and people who have helped shape our organisation and the cemeteries and crematoria sector over the past four decades.

The evening will bring together members and industry colleagues for a memorable night of connection, reflection and celebration. We encourage members and guests to be part of this important occasion as we acknowledge our shared journey and look ahead to the future of our sector. Pre dinner drinks will commence at 6:00pm with the official gala dinner to begin at 7:00pm.

The conference is anticipated to conclude by lunchtime on Friday, September 4, 2026, providing delegates with ample time to organize their travel arrangements home.



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