# Report to Area E Committee

**AA National Combined Services Forum**
**Canberra | 2–4 October 2026**

Thank you to the Area E Committee for the privilege of attending the AA National Combined Services Forum in Canberra from 2–4 October 2026, together with Aaron, our Area E PI/PA Coordinator. I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend, learn from members involved in service across Australia, and bring ideas and experience back to Area E.

## Friday – Fellowship and PI/PA Across Australia

The Forum began with registration and a rolling display showcasing PI/PA activities from around Australia. Friday evening included a Young People's AA meeting hosted by young members in Canberra, with a lead share on "Acceptance is the Answer". It was a great meeting with a lovely mix of younger members and members attending the Forum, and a warm way to begin a weekend centred on connection and service.

## Saturday – Carrying the Message and Our Service Structure

Anne from the NCSF Committee welcomed everyone, followed by a video from World Service Delegates Judy W and Andy P, who were unable to attend because they were at the World Service Meeting in Portugal. They shared their experience of service over many years, including their service as AA Board members. Garry, Eastern Region Trustee, then spoke as Chair of the Forum.

### Keynote – Carrying the Message: What Is That Message?

Derek R, Area F Eastern Region Delegate, gave an engaging and inspiring keynote. One of my main takeaways was the importance of sharing our experience of the mental obsession and the physical reaction to alcohol in a way the still-suffering alcoholic can identify with. The spiritual part of our recovery can then unfold through our experience rather than becoming something we feel we have to explain first.

### History of Our Service Structure

I attended this session with Andrew T, Chair of the General Service Board, and Cheryn P, General Service Board Secretary. It was really informative to revisit key dates in AA history, the development of the Traditions and Concepts, and the General Service Conference.

I particularly enjoyed learning about AA "Coming of Age" in 1955, when responsibility for AA's future was formally placed in the hands of the Fellowship and its groups through the General Service structure. We then moved into the history of AA in Australia, including the development of our own service structure and the first Australian General Service Conference in 1970. It was fascinating to hear about the founding members and key people whose service helped establish and shape AA in Australia.

### Exploring Topics for Conference

I attended this session with Ed, National YPAA Coordinator, and found it very useful in understanding how a Conference Topic moves from an idea through the service structure. The current submission form asks what Conference is being asked to do, what issue the proposal addresses, the supporting background, how it benefits the Fellowship or still-suffering alcoholic, likely costs, and the level of group conscience already undertaken.

A valuable reminder was that a topic should first be discussed and endorsed through the appropriate group and Area processes. Topics are then reviewed by the Conference Steering Committee against the Conference criteria. A topic may not proceed if, for example, it has been submitted too recently, does not align with the Traditions, sits outside Conference's scope, can already be dealt with through group or service autonomy, or is already the subject of an Advisory Action and working group. Where possible, an author may be contacted to amend a topic so it can meet the criteria.

### PI/PA – Where We've Come From, Where We're Headed

Tim, National PI/PA Coordinator, shared his hope and vision for greater consistency in how AA is presented publicly across Australia. I was inspired by the idea of recognisable AA branding and resources so that, wherever people are in Australia, AA is visible and identifiable.

We also discussed being careful in how we refer to independent research such as the Cochrane Review: making people aware of the research without overstating what it says or using it to make promotional claims about AA. Another strong message was to be proactive at group and Area level and collaborate on practical initiatives such as libraries, banners and other ways of making AA visible and accessible.

### Traditions and PI/PA

This session with Shane, North Eastern Region Area A Delegate, was a great practical look at how all Twelve Traditions guide PI/PA. We make AA visible without promoting it, cooperate without affiliating, inform without giving opinions, and keep our primary purpose at the centre.

Traditions One and Two were especially relevant: we do not "go rogue" or act as individuals on behalf of AA. Unity comes first and decisions are guided by group conscience, consultation and communication. Tradition Seven is equally important. We are self-supporting and need to pay our own way, including things such as room hire, rather than accepting outside contributions. Good PI/PA therefore requires unity, consultation, collaboration, responsibility and respect for the members' contributions entrusted to us.

## How We Deal with the Gaps – Combined Services Panel

This panel brought together Char Now, Virtual Area, Remote Communities, PI/PA, Corrections, YPAA and Board experience to look at how our services can work together rather than in isolation.

One of the strongest messages for me was that service is not simply the responsibility of our National Coordinators or people holding formal positions. They cannot do it alone. National service can provide resources, connections and direction, but members, groups and Areas are needed to turn those ideas into action locally.

Another important point was to sponsor members into service. Just as we support members through the Steps, we can invite someone along, explain what we are doing, give them a small role, let them experience service and help them build confidence. Rather than simply saying we need more volunteers, we can actively help people discover that they have something to contribute.

For me, filling the gaps comes back to communication, collaboration and participation. Every member can ask: "What can I do at my group or Area level to support this?"

## Dinner – AA Archives

At dinner we were treated to a wonderful presentation on AA Archives from Cheryn P and Andrew T. They introduced "Archie", a clever and entertaining AI-generated video that brought Archives to life and gave us a glimpse of the historical material that has been collected and preserved.

What really stood out was Cheryn and Andrew's genuine enthusiasm and passion for Archives – it was infectious. They spoke about collecting, preserving, storing and cataloguing our history while always being mindful of anonymity and confidentiality. It reminded me that Archives is not simply about old documents and memorabilia; it is about preserving our story – the people, milestones, service and experiences that have shaped AA – for the generations who come after us.

## Sunday – PI/PA, Trust and Cooperation

### PI/PA Across the General Service Levels – Who Does What?

I attended this session with Lauren, Area H Delegate, and Erin, Area H PI/PA Coordinator, who shared Area H's experience with two public awareness billboards - the first at a Penrith intersection and their latest at Emu Plains train station.

The Emu Plains billboard carries the simple message "You Are Not Alone", together with a QR code, AA website details and the AA Helpline number, giving people several easy ways to find AA and reach out for help.

Using their "Tale of Two Banners" as a practical example, Lauren and Erin explored the power of "we": working together, being willing to experiment and try something new, and accepting that an initiative might work or might not.

Trust, however, comes with responsibility and accountability. We are dealing with members' 7th Tradition money, so we need to be prudent, undertake due diligence and be able to explain why we spent money and what we hoped to achieve.

An important part of that accountability is thinking about how we can measure reach and outcomes. We may not be able to prove that a billboard directly brought someone into AA, but the QR code gives us a practical way of tracking engagement and seeing whether people are responding to it. This helps us learn from what we try and make better-informed decisions about future PI/PA initiatives and the use of members' 7th Tradition contributions.

Another point that resonated was not allowing outside organisations or salespeople to pressure us into quick decisions. AA can sometimes move slowly because we have processes - consultation, group conscience and due diligence.

One thought from Erin that stayed with me was the power of trust - sometimes we act in trust, do the work responsibly, remain accountable and allow the results to unfold.

### Working Together – Carrying the Message Through Cooperation in Service

Derek R spoke about sharing ideas, experiences and initiatives across Areas rather than each Area working in isolation or continually reinventing the wheel.

I particularly loved hearing from the Area C Delegate about the situation involving their Central Service Office in Newcastle. He had previously contacted me in my role as Chair of the Area E & NSCSO Merger Committee and asked if we could share the information and documents we had developed through our merger proposal

process. It was lovely to hear that he had found our documents invaluable in helping them approach their own situation.

Our circumstances and solutions will not necessarily be the same, but this was such a practical example of cooperation in service. The experience gained in one Area can help another Area find its own way forward, and we can equally learn from what others have tried, what worked and what they learned. Sharing our experience strengthens service as a whole.

## What I Can Bring Back to Area E

The Forum gave me some clear ideas and actions that I can bring back to Area E:

- **Strengthen Young People in AA:** After speaking with Ed from YPAA, I have already reached out to the Chair of NEWYPAA about the possibility of Area E hosting NEWYPAA 2027, which they are taking to their committee. I would also like us to explore starting a Young People's meeting in Area E.
- **Sponsor members into service:** One of my strongest takeaways was the importance of sponsoring members into service from the beginning. If we introduce service as part of recovery early on, we can help members see that they have something valuable to contribute and encourage greater participation.
- **Strengthen our groups:** Encourage fewer standalone meetings and more connected groups, where appropriate, so more groups have a GSR, are part of the wider service structure and, importantly, have a voice. Service starts at the group.
- **Support PI/PA:** Aaron already had a strong vision for PI/PA before the Forum, including postcards that could be mailed or emailed to professionals and developing a list of local GPs. The Forum gave him further inspiration from hearing about other initiatives being successfully used in different Areas.

**We don't need to reinvent the wheel.** We can learn from what is working in other Areas, take that inspiration and build on **Aaron's vision and the great ideas we already have**, working together to shape them in a way that suits Area E and helps us carry the message more effectively.

## Overall Reflection

Overall, it was a wonderful weekend filled with connection, information, ideas and inspiration, but most importantly everything was in the spirit of our code – love and service.

I came away with an even greater appreciation that the service we do today is not just for us. We have inherited something incredibly precious, and with that comes a responsibility to care for it, participate in it and pass it on.

*"We simply say that we have arrived at the time when adult responsibilities had to be faced and dealt with as best we can."*

We are custodians of AA today, but it does not belong to us. Through unity, communication, collaboration and service, we can help keep AA strong and available so that when someone reaches out for help, the hand of AA is there.

**Ultimately, this is why we do service.** We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us — members who gave their time, experience and service so that AA was here when we needed it. Now it is our responsibility to keep it strong and pass it on: **for the alcoholic who still suffers, for those who haven't found us yet, and for those yet to come.**

For me, the weekend was a beautiful reminder that service really is love in action.

With gratitude,
Chelly
Area E