

# Annual Report **2010-11**

## **Funding Bodies 2010-11**

### **ACT Department of Health**

### **ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services**

- Disability ACT
- ACT Office for Women
- ACT Office for Ageing

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## Women's Centre for Health Matters celebrates 20 years!

On Thursday May 5, the Women's Centre for Health Matters celebrated its 20th birthday! The celebration was held at the Legislative Assembly and featured an exhibition of memorabilia from the Centre's past, and a range of speakers who each offered their thoughts on the Centre's evolution and spoke to the future of health and health care for women in the ACT.

Following some congratulatory words from the ACT Minister for Women, Joy Burch, Sue Andrews, a WCHM founding member, formally launched the WCHM history booklet and took a few moments to reflect on the Centre's history. Guests were reminded that the Canberra Women's Health Centre (now the Women's Centre for Health Matters), was born out of the very first National Women's Health Policy in 1989, and that that it had been officially opened on 23 April 1991 in the green space opposite the Centre in the middle of Colbee Court by the women of Canberra.



*Sue Andrews launches the WCHM history booklet*

Dorothy Broom, who spoke at the opening of the Centre in 1991, then took the opportunity to reflect on the past twenty years and comment on the changing, much more mainstream, approach of community based women's health organisations in pushing for change.



*Dorothy Broom, Branka Trajkovski and Alison Osmand (WCHM Chair)*

Four speakers then shared their thoughts about the future of health care in the ACT, particularly for the groups of

women at risk of disadvantage with whom WCHM works.

Darlene Cox from the Health Care Consumers Association of the ACT took the opportunity to comment on the debate surrounding the inclusion of gender as a social determinant of health in the new Primary Health Care Strategy;

Christina Ryan from Advocacy for Inclusion raised the ongoing issues for women with disabilities, which are not being addressed by mainstream disability policies and programs, including ensuring the rights of women with disabilities to have children and the elimination of violence against women with disabilities;



*Christina Ryan*

Branka Trajkovski from Toora Women's Inc. discussed the challenges that remain for women who have experienced violence and welcomed initiatives in the ACT Budget, particularly the funding for programs to achieve behavioural change in offenders; and

Padma Menon, a WCHM Board member and Director of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, spoke of the challenging but essential step of engaging women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to ensure that they are partners in designing and directing the supports and services they receive by working with communities - not for them

- and accepting that empowerment looks different in different contexts.

To close the formalities Alison Osmand, WCHM's Board Chair, thanked the speakers and formally launched four companion reports to WCHM's *It goes with the Territory! ACT Women's views about Health and Wellbeing Information* which present the views of young women, older women, women who are mental health carers and women with disabilities.

The speakers were followed by a performance by the a cappella choir, the Cyrenes, who have a special connection to WCHM's past from 1999 when they approached WCHM to support and auspice their application for an ACT Government Healthpact Grant to assist the staging of their original production *On the Soles of Her Feet*. The Cyrenes are a women's community choir with an interest in social justice and a passion for singing songs by, for and about women and their experiences. They celebrated their own 20th Anniversary in 2009.



*The Cyrenes*

The Choir sang four songs, raising the spirits and energy of the crowd before they had the opportunity to taste the WCHM 20th birthday cupcakes and peruse the exhibition.



*The Birthday Cupcakes*

The birthday was a great success with over 120 attendees, but more than that, it was an opportunity for women and men working in community, health, education and government to reflect on the history of women's health in the ACT and to look to the future: the challenges, the priorities, and the opportunities. WCHM was also able to hear from our partners on the work they think is yet to be done.

### **Women's Centre for Health Matters Life Memberships awarded**

The Board also approved the awarding of WCHM Life Memberships for two women in recognition of the outstanding service and support they had given to the Women's Centre for Health Matters over its 20 year history. They both have given their time, effort, expertise and commitment in a voluntary capacity and in doing so have enhanced the reputation of WCHM, and contributed significantly to the establishment, operation and the continued future of the organisation. They have also made significant contributions at the national and ACT level in relation to women's health policy and practice.

On 13 September 2011 at WCHM's Annual General Meeting, Dorothy Broom and Sue Andrews will be formally presented with their inaugural WCHM Life Membership and Certificates.

### **Introducing Dorothy Broom**

Dorothy is an expert in women's health and women's health centres. She is the author of "Damned If We Do: Contradictions in Women's Health Care", a political history of Australia's feminist community health centres in 1991, and is a long-time advocate of the Women's Centre for Health Matters.

Following the release of the first National Women's Health Policy and the allocation of funding to the states and territories, Dorothy took a lead role in the ACT consultations which were held to discuss and prioritise women's health needs in the ACT and to recommend to the ACT Government that the Women's Centre for Health Matters be established. She spoke at the opening of the Centre in 1991 about the "revolutionary" nature of WCHM, as the first feminist health service to be funded by the National Women's Health Policy. Dorothy also played a pivotal role in the successful defence of the sex discrimination complaint brought against the Centre. She wrote and spoke publicly about the case and was called upon on the Commonwealth's behalf as an expert witness to give evidence at the hearings.

Dorothy has spent 30 years teaching and researching gender and various aspects of the sociology of health and is currently Professor at the National Centre for Epidemiology & Population Health at the Australian National University. Despite her busy schedule she continues to engage with the Centre. Dorothy generously donates her time and is frequently called upon to speak at significant events where she often congratulates WCHM on its work while simultaneously reminding us to question its relevance in relation to the women's health movement and its original goals. In recent years she has spoken at WCHM's 2010 AGM and the 20th Birthday.

### **Introducing Sue Andrews**

Sue Andrews has made a significant contribution to the Women's Centre for Health Matters over time. Sue Andrews is a feminist with a passion for women's health activism and social justice and was instrumental in establishing the Women's Centre for Health Matters. She helped organise the initial community consultations that led to the establishment of what was to be the Canberra Women's Health Centre. From 1989 to 1990 she was on the interim management committee of the Centre which was formed to set up the Centre. She was a member of the Centre's first management committee until 1993. Sue helped to organise the Centre's inaugural public meeting and the official opening in 1991.

Three months after the opening, when the sex discrimination case was lodged against the Centre and Sue was one of many who invested a huge amount of time and energy into fighting the case to secure the future of WCHM and other women's services.

Sue has remained a supporter of the Centre for many years and has continued to work on issues related to gender and women's health. In the early 1990s Sue worked for Family Planning Australia, and then as the ACT Women's Health Adviser until 1998. She was Manager of the Women's Policy Unit in the Chief Minister's Department until 2001 and authored a number of instrumental reports for the Government, including a Review of Sexual Assault Services in the ACT. Sue went on to complete her PhD in Women's Studies at the Australian National University.

More recently Sue worked closely with WCHM staff to sift through the Centre's archives and write the history for the 20th Birthday, and to support the Centre in reconnecting with old members and staff. She delivered a moving speech at

the Birthday celebration and formally launched the WCHM history booklet.

## **A Summary of WCHM'S Achievements 2010/11**

### **WCHM Reports**

The WCHM report *It goes with the Territory! ACT Women's Views about Health and Wellbeing Information* was launched in July 2010.



*Authors Angela Carnovale and Liz Carr at the report launch*

Since then six companion reports have also been produced which present the experiences, thoughts and ideas of particular groups of women in the ACT.

Four of these companion reports were launched at the celebration of WCHM's 20th birthday:

- *It goes with the Territory! The views of ACT Women with Disabilities about Health and Wellbeing Information*
- *It goes with the Territory! The views of Women Mental Health Carers about Health and Wellbeing Information*

- *It goes with the Territory! The views of Older ACT Women about Health and Wellbeing Information*
- *It goes with the Territory! The views of Young ACT Women about Health and Wellbeing Information*

A further companion report *It goes with the Territory! The views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women about Health and Wellbeing Information* has since been released on the WCHM website and highlights that the greatest challenge for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is overcoming the barriers, financial and otherwise, that limit the information sources they can access.

A final report *It goes with the Territory! The views of ACT CALD Women about Health and Wellbeing Information* has also been completed and will be launched in the near future.

The research which was conducted with Sudanese women in the ACT will be released simultaneously in the report: "Navigating a whole new world: Access to health care and utilisation of health services by Southern Sudanese women in the ACT".

### **Consultations and Submissions**

WCHM advocated through meetings, consultations, and submissions for greater inclusion of gender sensitive policies, practices and infrastructure.

WCHM has disseminated its findings from all its work through the following submissions to consultations:

- Submission to the ACT Budget Community Consultation 2011-12
- Submission to the Whole of ACT Government Statement on Family Violence
- Submission on the draft ACT Primary Health Care Strategy

- Submission on the ACT Preliminary Model of Care for the Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health Inpatient Unit (AYAMHIU), and the ACT Secure Adult Mental Health Inpatient Unit (SAMHIU)
- Submission to the ACT discussion paper Maximising Potential: improving life transitions for young people in care
- Submission to the Independent Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC)
- Submission to the ACT Review of Taxis
- Submission to the National Carer's Strategy discussion paper
- A joint submission to the ACT Budget Community Consultation 2011-12 with Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT)
- A joint submission to the ACT Budget Community Consultation 2011-12 with the Women And Prisons (WAP) Group ACT
- Submission to the ACT Languages Policy Discussion Paper
- Submission in response to the draft ACT Charter of Rights for Mental Health Consumers
- Submission to the review of the ACT Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994
- Submission to Flexible Care Packages for People with Severe Mental Illness (DoHA)
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Mental Health Barriers to Education, Training and Employment
- Submission to the ACT Carers Charter Discussion Paper
- A joint submission with WAP to the Human Rights Commission's Review of Bimberi
- Submission to the ACQSHC Patient- and Consumer-Centred Care Discussion Paper

Results from all WCHM research and feedback from women are disseminated

to the Minister for Health; the Minister for Women, Disability, Multicultural, Ageing, and Community Services; the ACT Greens; various policy units within ACT Health; the ACT Office for Women; Disability ACT; ACT Mental Health; various units within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services; the Department of Transport and Municipal Services; the Department of Justice; the ACT GP Division; and other ACT public servants through funding and submission processes.

WCHM has also been a member of many committees and roundtables:

- The Women's Health Advisory Network which provides cross agency expert advice to ACT Health regarding the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the *Improving Women's Access to Health Care Services and Information: A Strategic Framework 2010 – 2015*
- The Migrant Health Unit Review Steering Committee
- The Adult Secure Mental Health Inpatient Unit Executive Reference Group
- The Community Integration Governance Group which was formed to provide a cross-sectoral community agencies forum with the aim of effective community integration of prisoners, detainees, and ex-offenders in the ACT
- The Patient and Family Centred Care and Family Escalation Steering Committee
- The Roundtable on the development of the ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy, and a subsequent Reference Group to provide more targeted recommendations on the ACT Strategy to go to Government
- The Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Implementation and Evaluation Group 2009 – 2014.

## Chair's Report

2011 has seen the Centre celebrate its 20th birthday. This is a significant milestone in the life of the Women's Centre for Health Matters. A wonderful birthday celebration was organised by the Executive Director and staff of the Centre and I thank them on behalf of the Board for their work in bringing together a wonderful celebration. The celebration was well attended by both members of the Legislative Assembly, former and current members of the Centre, and women, (and men) from groups in Canberra who assist us in our work to empower women to enhance their health and wellbeing.

As Chair, I had the pleasure of launching four significant companion reports at the 20th birthday celebrations. All four reports reinforce the view that women continue to be the primary seekers of health and wellbeing in the ACT. They seek this information not only for themselves but for their children and other family members. The reports demonstrate that they continue to face challenges in doing this. The reports highlight the views of ACT women with disabilities, young ACT women, older ACT women and ACT women who are mental health carers about access to health and wellbeing information.

This year the Board and the Centre continued its work towards achieving deductible gift recipient status. On behalf of the Board and the Centre I would like to extend our thanks to our former Chair of the WCHM Board, Margo Mitchell for her assistance and support in relation to this project. The work done to progress applying for deductible gift recipient status has seen the Board scrutinise its strategic plan, policies and Constitution. This has been time consuming work and the process is not yet complete. However, the Board is hopeful that our application for

deductible gift recipient status will be lodged in late 2011.

The Board conducted its annual review of the Strategic Plan in January 2011. The Board and staff take a full day on a Saturday in January each year to review the Plan and the Centre's direction for the year ahead. This year, we were ably assisted by facilitator Helen Swift to guide us and direct us in this process. The Board was also informed by very well prepared briefing documents presented to us by WCHM's staff members.

The Board has continued to meet monthly, and the various subcommittees have also met on a regular basis. A significant number of the Centre's financial policies have been reviewed by the Finance Sub-Committee. The Human Resources Sub-Committee has also considered and submitted constructive changes to WCHM's Employment Policy to the Board for approval that we hope will make the Women's Centre for Health Matters an employer of choice in the sector. And the Governance Sub-Committee also reviews the Centre's Risk and Legislation registers, and several key policies.

This year, the Board has farewelled two of its members, Sally Kingsland and Susan Stratigos, and we will soon farewell Susan Dalby and Padma Menon. Our thanks go to these women for their contribution to the Board and the Centre. We hope that they will remain in touch with the Centre into the future.

This year also saw much consideration and discussion by the Board about succession planning. One of the issues for boards in Australia (especially for small non-government organisations where there is no remuneration for Board members), is the ability to attract

committed and relevant people to their boards. It is also an issue for women. Many women feel that they cannot join a board because they do not have the relevant financial or governance experience. This year, at the instigation of our Executive Director, a trainee Board member mentoring program was established. There are three co-opted positions on the WCHM Board, and these positions were utilised as trainee Board member positions. WCHM advertised and the Executive Director and Chair interviewed a number of women who were interested in undertaking a trainee board member role. The successful trainee board members attend all Board meetings and are also invited to be part of Sub-Committees. Our three trainee Board members commenced in 2011, and at the end of the trainee process they are given the opportunity to nominate for a full Board position.

It is hoped that the trainee Board position will be something that WCHM can inspire other organisations to take up. The benefit of this system is that it allows women to obtain board experience in a positive environment and to learn the ropes of good governance. It also helps the Board in its succession planning, and is a means of keeping the Board dynamic, and of bringing women of diverse backgrounds onto the Board.

Again this year, the Board has had the assistance of its wonderful Executive Director, Marcia Williams, and the staff. I am very pleased to advise WCHM members that Marcia Williams has been nominated as a finalist in the Telstra Business Woman of the Year Awards for the ACT region for 2011. This is a credit to Marcia and is recognition of the wonderful work being undertaken by the Centre under her direction.

On behalf of the Board I extend our thanks to those organisations with whom we work on a day-to-day basis to bring about real change to the health and wellbeing of women. I would also like to thank those women who give their time freely to participate in the research undertaken by the Centre.

*Alison Osmand, Board Chair*

### **2010/11 Board Members (at 30 June 2011)**

Alison Osmand (Chair)  
Judith Briscoe (Deputy Chair)  
Kathleen O'Sullivan (Treasurer)  
Eve Burnes  
Jane Dahlstrom  
Susan Dalby  
Padma Menon  
Jackie Fairweather  
Robyn McClelland  
Brooke McKail  
Lauren Burke (co-opted)  
Alana McInerney (co-opted)  
Marilynne Read (co-opted)  
Marcia Williams (Public Officer)

*WCHM farewelled the following Board members during the year:*

Margo Mitchell (Chair)  
Sally Kingsland  
Susan Stratigos  
Lisa Hornsby-Scott

## **WCHM Governance**

**The Board Structure** - The Board comprises 10 elected members, and up to 3 co-opted ex-officio non-voting Board members. At each Annual General Meeting five Board members are elected for two-year terms.

Each elected Board member holds office from immediately after the Annual General Meeting at which they are elected until the second Annual General Meeting of WCHM after their election. No members of the Board may retain their position for more than three consecutive terms.

A replacement Board member may be co-opted to fill a vacancy, and they serve until the Annual General Meeting following their appointment or until the Board deems that their involvement is no longer required (whichever comes first).

Once elected the Board selects from its members, by a majority vote, a Chair, Deputy Chair and Treasurer and any other office bearers it deems appropriate.

**Board Role** - Board members serve on a voluntary basis and do not receive remuneration. The Board is required to meet at least six times in each calendar year, but generally meets more often to conduct the business of WCHM. It is responsible for:

- Setting the policies and strategic directions for the organisation
- Approving and monitoring the annual budget, and establishing the overall financial delegations
- Monitoring overall organisational performance
- Ensuring the organisation meets its regulatory and statutory requirements

**Board Committees** - Where necessary the Board sets up committees to conduct various aspects of organisational operation and management. There are currently 3 Sub-Committees:

- The Governance Sub-Committee
- The Finance Sub-Committee

- The Human Resources Sub-Committee.

A working group was also established to progress work on WCHM's application for Donatable Gift Recipient Status.

**Board Performance** - Board performance is assessed on an annual basis through a Survey of Board members about the Board's effectiveness.

**Board Training** - New Board members receive an induction and a comprehensive series of fact sheets, and also access to a Board members secure page on the WCHM website to access all the main WCHM documents.

## Executive Director's Report

There have been many exciting developments for the Women's Centre for Health Matters this past year.

WCHM were the very proud winners of the 2011 ACT International Women's Day Group Award. WCHM, to our great honour, was nominated for the award by members of the ACT Women's Services Network, who themselves do such important work in supporting the women of the ACT and surrounding regions.



*Executive Director, Marcia Williams, and staff member, Angela Carnovale accept the IWD Award from Minister Burch.*

This award is shared with the WCHM staff and Board members of the past

year whose passion for women has driven the Centre toward its goals. In particular, however, WCHM thanks all the women from the community who donate their time, experience, insight and sense of humour to make WCHM's projects and advocacy a success.

In January this year, the WCHM Board and staff came together to review the centre's strategic direction for the year 2011-12. The Strategic Planning days are a wonderful opportunity for Board and staff members to discuss the Centre's successes, lessons learnt, opportunities and potential, and to fine-tune the current Strategic Plan based on the changing external environment and emerging needs of the ACT community.



*Board and staff at the Strategic Planning day*

This year the Board agreed on a new priority for inclusion as a Key Area of WCHM's strategic plan—the Prevention of Violence against Women. This reflects the fact that violence against women and its causes and impacts are gendered, preventable and cause significant health and wellbeing issues. Violence against women is a breach of human rights and it has health, social and economic consequences for women, their families and their community. It contributes to women's marginalisation and isolation and, while violence affects the lives of many different women, factors such as age, sexuality, ethnicity, Aboriginality and disability contribute to the risk of

violence, and women in these groups may face barriers to appropriate support or services when they experience domestic or family violence. But it has been shown that violence against women is a preventable problem, and that its impact can be reduced by “changing the factors that contribute to violence, whether they are attitudes, behaviours, institutions or social structures” (WHO 2002).

Very little research has been done into the experience of ACT women in relation to violence—in particular the lived experiences of different groups of women—and this poses challenges for adequately responding and planning for services to meet the needs of specific population groups of women. So WCHM’s work will focus on collecting and collating local data, experiences and research to inform service responses to women experiencing violence. WCHM will use that evidence to inform advocacy initiatives and policy input, and to work to change community attitudes by working on the underlying causes which can lead to violence, as well as informing initiatives which work with the population as a whole.

The projects undertaken as part of this new Key Area will be developed in consultation and collaboration with our partners in the ACT Women’s Services Network. Not being a service provider places WCHM in a unique position to undertake social research and to contribute to systemic advocacy to support violence and crisis services and to inform initiatives being developed by ACT Government to address violence against women.

WCHM’s approach this year has continued to focus on building an evidence base that includes the voices of women and their lived experience as well as the collection of relevant national and international research and local ACT data. Many individual ACT women

participated in WCHM surveys and shared their experiences with us through focus groups—their personal stories and lived experiences have added depth to the WCHM reports and the discussion of their needs with bodies responsible for health policy development, planning and delivery, including the Territory and other government and community organisations.

WCHM also continued to develop strong relationships with other community sector stakeholders in order to build our knowledge and to influence policy and service design and to advocate to create change where needed. These partners also assisted us with our research by connecting us to many women in the ACT to seek their views. In particular we have worked closely with the Women And Prisons group, the women’s services sector, the disability sector, the multicultural sector and the mental health community sector to raise the profile of issues relating to women and to develop approaches to working together in relation to women’s services.

During the year WCHM launched the WCHM E-bulletin which is distributed widely to members and stakeholders. The WCHM E-bulletin provides a great opportunity for us to provide updates about the latest issues affecting women’s health in the ACT and nationally, to introduce new staff and to advise about upcoming events and the latest WCHM work and projects. Each edition also includes a feature article by a staff member.

Thank you to our members—WCHM values its members and is working to improve members’ access to information about WCHM work and to develop opportunities for member involvement.

WCHM appreciates the financial assistance from our funding bodies over

the last year that enables us to continue our work to enhance women's health and wellbeing.

And last but not least thank you also to those other organisations and women with whom WCHM has worked over the past year, and to the WCHM Board for their vision and support for the Centre and its focus on the health and wellbeing of ACT women.

*Marcia Williams, Executive Director*



*Members of Women With Disabilities ACT at Reclaim The Night*

### **2010/11 Staff (at 30 June 2011)**

- Executive Director—Marcia Williams
- Social Researcher—Angela Carnovale
- Project Worker (Mental Health)—Laura Pound
- Community Development Worker—Annelise Roberts
- Project/Administration Officer (WWDACT)—Nicole O'Callaghan
- Administration Officer—Jillian Emerson
- Temporary Project Worker (Older Women's Safety Audits)—Jac Torres Gomez
- Student—Rozi Celica (ACU School of Social Work)
- Student—Katie Doney (ANU Medical School)
- Student—Simone Huntingford (ANU Medical School)

WCHM farewelled the following staff during the year:

- Project Worker (Mental Health)—Kate Judd
- Community Development Worker—Rachelle Cole
- Temporary researcher—Jenni Gough
- Temporary Project Worker—Robyn Taranto
- Student—Kat Darlington (UC Community Education)
- Student—Jasmine Ebbels (ACU School of Social Work)
- Social Work student—Nurgul Sawut (ACU School of Social Work)



## The key Areas of Focus

The focus of the Women's Centre for Health Matters Strategic Plan 2008–2011 is in 4 Key Areas:

- 1. Unmet need:** Identifying the health and wellbeing needs of women that are not fully understood or are unmet or inadequately responded to by current policy and service responses, and using this evidence to inform practice and influence policy over time.
- 2. Social isolation and marginalisation:** Better understanding the impact of isolation and marginalisation on specific populations of women, and working to inform responses that will promote authentic social connectedness.
- 3. Increasing women's access to gender-sensitive health and wellbeing information:** In a manner that supports women in making informed health and wellbeing choices.
- 4. Prevention of Violence Against Women:** Work with government and services to better support women escaping violence, build a solid evidence base and establish the frameworks and approaches that will achieve the attitudinal and behavioural change that is necessary for preventing violence against women.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their children - *First Action Plan (2010–2013) – Building a Strong Foundation*, Commonwealth of Australia 2009

# The Year in Review — Our progress against our Strategic Plan outcomes

## Key Area 1 – Unmet Need

### 1.1 Women's Access to Women Sensitive Health Practitioners

#### *The intended outcomes are:*

- Stronger evidence base around access issues and barriers as well as of women's experiences of gender sensitivity
- A more gender sensitive workforce

#### Stronger evidence base

- Data was published from the surveys of ACT women (Key Area 3) about their access to health practitioners and women's experiences of gender sensitivity of GPs.
- Four additional companion reports included evidence about women with disabilities, older women, young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and women who are mental health carers.
- WCHM also finalised a position paper on *Sex Disaggregated Data*.

#### A more gender sensitive workforce

Over the past year WCHM has been working with two students—Simone and Katie—from the Australian National University Medical School (ANUMS) on research projects aiming to:

- Measure the effectiveness of storytelling as a means of teaching principles of gender sensitive health service delivery to first-year medical school students
- Measure the level of awareness of gender sensitive health service delivery principles in fourth-year medical school students before and after they undertake the Women's Health block.

The former project, conducted by Simone, involved the creation of an audio-visual resource for medical students and health professionals that features three women telling their story about their experiences of a consultation with a medical doctor who demonstrated great gender sensitivity or gender insensitivity. As they relay their story the women reflect on the ramifications of the experience for them and highlight the simple things that the doctors did that worked or that they could do differently. The DVD has been rolled out to a small sample of the ANUMS first year group and while the findings are inconclusive due to the small sample size, Simone did find that female students had a slightly better learning outcome from watching the DVD.

Regardless of the results the DVD is a great learning resource, and it is our hope that the ANUMS will look at ways to incorporate it into the existing medical school curriculum. It will be invaluable in communicating the importance of gender sensitivity to medical school students and health professionals alike.

The second project being conducted by Katie is still underway. Katie is surveying the fourth-year medical school students at ANUMS about their understanding of the principles of gender sensitive health service delivery before and after they undertake the Women's Health block of training. What is particularly exciting about this project is that it will not only measure how well the principles of gender sensitivity are communicated through the Women's Health block, but will also be a guide to how well the ANUMS curriculum communicates these principles overall. Katie is in the final stages of writing her paper, the findings from which will be presented in the WCHM Spring E-bulletin 2011.

## 1.2 The Mental Health Service System's Response to Women

### *The intended outcomes are:*

- Comprehensive, evidence-based gendered analysis of women's experience of mental health issues and implications for the design of mental health responses;
- Influencing and informing key stakeholders and relevant policies of the needs of women living with a mental health issue.

### Influencing key stakeholders about the needs of women living with mental health issues

WCHM continued to advocate through representation on committees and submissions to consultations for greater inclusion of gender sensitive policies, practices and infrastructure relating to women living with mental health issues.

WCHM developed joint submissions with the WMHWG including the Discussion Paper on the ACT Charter of Rights for Mental Health Consumers, and the Discussion Paper on the ACT Carers Charter. WCHM also contributed to an ACT Division of GP's consultation about the Department of Health and Ageing's Flexible Care Packages Discussion Paper, to inform the implementation in April of a new tier of access to Allied Psychological Services for people with severe mental illness.

WCHM is a member of ACT Health Directorate's Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Implementation and Evaluation Group 2009–2014, and the Adult Secure Mental Health Inpatient Unit Executive Reference Group.

WCHM continued to focus on working with the three ACT mental health community sector peak bodies—the ACT Mental

Health Consumer Network, the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT and Carers ACT—to ensure inter-sectoral collaboration and co-ordination in the planning, provision and evaluation of women's mental health services and programs. The focus has been on developing, improving and maintaining a full range of women friendly mental health services, to assist women with mental health issues to voice their issues and facilitate their participation in decision-making on health policy, and to ensure that women's mental health issues are raised in existing organisations and networks, and current and future government processes.

Positive links have also been established and collaborative work undertaken with a range of service providers relating to research about peer support for women with mental health.

## 1.3 Capacity Building and Organisational Support for Non Government Organisations and Peer-Led Support Groups

### *The intended outcomes are:*

- Transparent process for prioritising and engaging with groups requiring resourcing
- Capacity built with 2–3 selected groups

### ACT Women and Prisons group

WCHM continued to support the Women and Prisons Group with:

- Assistance with the development of their peer support model, funding applications, mentoring and assisting the convenor, attendance at meetings with ACT departments, policy development and governance
- Computer, Internet, telephone support
- Assistance with policies and procedures
- Support for gathering and collating information from incarcerated women in the ACT

WAP women with lived experience were also supported by WCHM to attend Mental Health First Aid and Accidental Counsellor training.

WCHM was successful with two auspiced applications for WAP under the ACT Women's Grants—one for Prison Kits and one for holding two planning days for WAP, which were intended to provide opportunities for WAP members to participate in two full days of professionally facilitated activities aimed at supporting individual leadership and development skills and enhancing their organisational capacity.



WAP member and Rachele, WCHM staff member, packing kits for women exiting prison

The WAP Planning Days were designed around the future vision of the women with lived experience to be both independent and autonomous (WAP “becoming a funded entity of their own”) as well as that of a group that will invite and involve more participation by women with lived experience of prison. As a result of the Planning Days, WAP was able to focus on enhancing the organisational capacity of WAP to negotiate and represent in strategic ways to Government and other organisations by:

- Reviewing WAP progress and achievements, and reflecting on the key lessons learned
- Considering the current and emerging external environment for WAP and its

implications for WAP's work, its external relationships, and its priorities for 2010-2012

- Agreeing on practical priorities for 2010-12, and considering strategies and capabilities
- Discussing the next steps for creating a strategic and policy framework for the organisation
- Considering models for the organisation for the future to enhance WAP's capacity to influence

As a result of the workshops the WAP women developed a joint Budget Submission to the ACT Budget, developed costings for practical organisational resources, developed a “WAP Strategic Framework” for 3 years using the agreed priority areas, and agreed upon a WAP “Peer Support” statement which reflects the new WAP model.

WCHM auspiced a successful application for WAP from the ACT Women's Grants. This will support them to attend the biannual Sisters Inside “Is Prison Obsolete?” Conference to be held in Sydney on 10-12 August 2011, and to facilitate a post-conference meeting to share their learnings with key stakeholders.

#### ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group

WCHM continued to facilitate the ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group (WMHWG) to develop policy in regard to services for women with mental health issues in the community, including:

- The identification of gaps in services for women with mental illness
- To plan and evaluate women's mental health services and programs as appropriate
- To coordinate the implementation of agreed strategies

Working Group meetings have been held bi-monthly and an email report is also sent out to keep members of the group informed of other working events or forums within the ACT that can be

instrumental in the WMHWG achieving their objectives.

WCHM conducted an evaluation of the WMHWG during May-June to collect feedback regarding the work and meetings of the WMHWG in the financial year 2010-11. The results were very positive about the support provided to the group by WCHM, the submissions made to consultations and inquiries on behalf of WMHWG, and the research undertaken in conjunction with WMHWG.

Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT)  
WCHM provided auspicing support to WWDACT's part time Policy/Administration Officer over the year, from the joint funding from ACT Health and the Department of Community Services and Housing. A position description was developed, an advertisement placed and recruitment conducted and finalised with the new worker, Nicole O'Callaghan starting in October. To support Nicole in her role, adjustments and equipment were put in place on her workstation in the workplace. A workplace assessment was arranged which identified potential barriers or issues that impacted on her ability to perform the tasks required in the job because of her vision and hand movement, and then the recommended adaptive technology and training support was supplied.

Support was provided to Nicole to develop WWDACT submissions (such as for the ACT Carers Charter) about the issues for ACT women with disabilities, and she also contributed the issues for ACT women with disabilities to the WCHM Submission to the ACT Budget Consultation 2010-11.

WCHM also worked with Nicole to develop a draft site map and ideas for content for a WWDACT website (situated on the WCHM site) which will allow information dissemination for ACT women with disabilities about their rights, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, National Disability Strategy, and ACT Plans (Women's Plan, Future Directions, Women's Health Plan etc) and

contribute to consultation with women with disabilities about their views on policy, discussion papers, and service planning.

WCHM worked with WWDACT to develop a joint submission to the ACT Budget Consultation 2010-11 seeking recurrent funding for WWDACT, and with WWDACT initiated discussions with Disability ACT and ACT Health about funding.

As a result we were successful in securing three years of recurrent funding for systemic advocacy from Disability ACT. WCHM will auspice the arrangement for them by hosting and supervising the additional worker resulting from that, and maintaining the administrative, budgeting/funding and reporting requirements for them.

## **Key Area 2 - Social Isolation and Marginalisation/Social Connectedness**

### ***The intended outcomes are:***

- Increased knowledge about the factors that act as barriers to social inclusion and which impact adversely on wellbeing for marginalised and isolated women, particularly in the 4 selected population groups
- Specific policy proposals developed and advocacy initiatives in place to increase social inclusion

### **2.1 Women with Disabilities**

#### Strategies

- Develop strategies to enable women living with a disability to connect/reconnect into community and build networks through fitness and sporting activities
- Develop strategies to address equity of access to health services

### Accessibility of DV services for women with disabilities

WCHM was successful in an application for funding to develop and deliver a targeted disability awareness training package during 2011-12 under the Community Funding Round of the ACT Health Promotion Grants. The aim of the project will be to increase the capacity of domestic violence/crisis service employees to understand and meet the needs of women with disabilities escaping domestic violence. WCHM will work with Women With Disabilities ACT and Advocacy For Inclusion to implement the project.

### Health and wellbeing issues for women with disabilities

WCHM launched the report *It goes with the Territory! ACT Women With Disabilities' Views on Health and Wellbeing Information* at WWDACT's quarterly meeting in February and agreed to focus during 2011-12 on conducting some specific research, and to document specific access and equity issues for women with disabilities in the ACT in relation to health and wellbeing services, in partnership with Women With Disabilities ACT. The report identified that the greatest barrier for women with disabilities in accessing the health and wellbeing information they need is not being able to access a range of information in an appropriate format. Not being able to access a diverse spectrum of information in a variety of formats can limit the extent to which a woman with a disability can make informed decisions about her health. More than this, however, it entrenches disadvantage by enabling some women access to health and wellbeing information and not others. Ensuring that all women can access the health and wellbeing information they require in the format that is most suitable empowers women and enables them to fully engage with health decision-making. It extends the right to women with disabilities to be their own best guide on matters of health and wellbeing.

### Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Consortium

WCHM continued to work with a collaborative group to address the issue of an inadequate system of wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs) in the ACT. The WAT Consortium included representatives from People with Disabilities ACT (PWD), Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT), the ACT Disability Council, the MS Society, Sharing Places and ACTCOSS.

WCHM also coordinated a response from the WAT Disability Consortium to the Draft Report by PricewaterhouseCoopers into the Taxi Industry, prior to the Final Report recommendations being sent to the ACT Government.

A significant number of the Recommendations in the WATs Consortium submission were agreed to, either in part or in full, in the Government's Final Report, and since then the Consortium organisations have ceased to meet formally but are maintaining a watching brief on the progress towards implementation of all the points.

## **2.2 Institutionalised Women**

### Strategies

- Develop a profile of women who have lived in or who are living in institutions in the ACT and of their health and wellbeing issues
- Raise awareness of issues impacting on the health and wellbeing of women affected by living in institutions
- Advocate for improved responses to the health needs of women affected by living in institutions

### Review of AMC

WCHM and WAP prepared a joint submission to the independent review of the Independent Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). The submission was structured around three core themes—access to health care, access to services and social support and rehabilitation of women prisoners—which are based on the 'social determinants of health', and focussed on the

characteristics and needs of female prisoners which are very different from male prisoners.

The content of the submission was informed by a Prison Forum which WAP, supported by the ACT WSN and WCHM, had held focussing on the issues for women prisoners in AMC, the views of other partners on the specific needs of, and issues facing, the women in the AMC, and feedback gained through direct consultation with women prisoners in the AMC.

#### WAP Quarterly Meetings with key stakeholders

WCHM supported WAP with a final Planning Day in April to complete the strategic discussions and practical requirements to enable the ACT Women And Prisons Group to develop its advocacy and peer support approach. From that WCHM worked with the women with lived experience to organise and prepare for a large meeting with key stakeholders from Government and the community sector and to determine how they could best:

- Use their provision of peer support in order to provide informed advocacy
- Collect and analyse data and document the stories from the women with lived experience to develop an ACT evidence base to inform the advocacy
- Conduct systemic advocacy with Government (with a focus on the social determinants)
- Advocate with, and educate, the prison system about the need for gender sensitive and equitable access to services

As a result a meeting was held in June with around 30 key stakeholders including the Executive Director of ACT Corrections, the AMC Superintendent, the AMC Program Manager, ACT Health, Justice Health, the Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Public Advocate and community sector and women's sector representatives across a diverse range of organisations including alcohol and drugs, mental health, domestic violence,

prisoners' aid, housing, counselling, women's health, and women's legal services. WCHM supported three women with lived experience from the WAP group to present data collated over three months from their peer support visits to the women of the AMC. The women presented statistics on the women prisoners' access to education and activities, visits, health care and nutrition, and case management and other services. These statistics had not been represented in the Final Report from the Hamberger Review because of the small number of women in the AMC in comparison to the men.

The information was received positively by the stakeholders, and the Executive Director of ACT Corrections and the AMC Program Manager stated their commitment to address the issues for the women at AMC. They also recognised that the small number women imprisoned at the centre was an issue as the staff and practices of the AMC had oriented to the majority population. They were able to provide details on changes that had already been put in place or which were progressing to address the issues for women prisoners. It was also agreed that these meetings will continue quarterly.

#### Meeting with Executive Director of ACT Corrections

As a result of the meeting WAP and WCHM were invited to have further discussions with the Executive Director of ACT Corrections as she was keen to hear their ideas for what could work to address the issues raised. WCHM worked with the WAP women to prepare their ideas for presentation to the Executive Director of ACT Corrections at a meeting scheduled for July.

#### Submission to Review of Bimberi

WCHM developed a joint submission with WAP to the Human Rights Commission's Review of Bimberi. The submission highlighted that because young women are a very small minority they are often forgotten in discussions about youth justice and are largely absent from

theories, research and policy documents, which claim gender neutrality and refer to young people when they are really referring to young men. Their small numbers makes offering a range of suitable services particularly challenging and there are very few examples of evidence-based targeted interventions and programs that have been proven to work for young women.<sup>2</sup> This is regrettable as young women differ from young men biologically and in the way they were raised, their socialisation, and the way they live. In relation to young women in the juvenile justice system, they tend to differ in the circumstances and nature of their offending and the care and support that they need in detention.

Results from WCHM and WAP consultations were highlighted which suggested that the Centre is lacking in a number of areas including staffing, educational and training opportunities, health and organisation culture and that it has not succeeded in creating an environment where young women feel safe and valued. Female residents at Bimberi continue to be young women in a young men's facility. The recommendations were that:

- Staff receive gender awareness training
- Teachers and other staff receive a proper induction and are issued with duress alarms as set out in Bimberi policy
- Action be taken to stop the name-calling and sexual harassment of young women
- Young women at Bimberi are offered the same educational and training opportunities as the young men and are consulted in this process
- Vocational Educational and Training courses be offered to all residents on a regular basis
- The side-effects of anti-psychotic and other medication be properly explained to the young women

- Appropriate counselling be provided to young women

#### Peer Support research

WCHM has completed its peer support project to document good practice peer support models, and the need for and experiences of peer support programs for women living with a mental illness in the ACT. One of the peer support groups evaluated was the WAP group. The evaluation framework used was designed to measure the effectiveness of peer support as a means of reducing mental health symptoms, and to measure levels of overall wellbeing and social connectedness in the lives of participants. The findings from the evaluation of the Women And Prisons group show that in relation to mental health, self esteem and social connection:

- WAP members experienced improved mental health and wellbeing through increasing their optimism and providing support for their recovery journey
- The most noticeable positive outcome was participants' increased confidence through learning new skills, participating in advocacy processes, receiving acknowledgement for their work, and feeling increased self worth and self esteem
- Participants felt increasingly socially connected through building relationships with the community, as a result of their increased confidence

The report is due to be released during Mental Health Week 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> CfBT Education Trust, 'Review of Provision for girls in custody to reduce offending', 2008, p 6.  
[http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/GirlsinCustody\\_v8\(W\).pdf](http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/GirlsinCustody_v8(W).pdf)

## 2.3 Women with Mental Health Issues

### Strategies

- Develop strategies to enable women living with mental health issues to connect /reconnect into community and build networks.

### Mental health carers research

The report *It Goes With the Territory! The Views of ACT Women who are mental health carers about Health and Wellbeing Information* was launched at WCHM's 20th Birthday event. The report identified that women mental health carers face a number of barriers to accessing the health and wellbeing information they need, which include but are not limited to: being shut off from information and knowledge by mental health professionals and workers; not being respected in their role by mental health professionals and workers; being denied information on the premise of confidentiality and privacy; not having a central source of ACT specific information on mental health treatments and services; and not being able to afford many of the options that do exist.

Mental health carers are also greatly affected by the level of discrimination and stigma that exists around mental illness in the community, which can be very isolating and curb their function as carers. Women who are mental health carers need access to up-to-date and relevant information from trusted sources. This means that local and trusted health and wellbeing information sources need to be promoted over time to be visible and accessible to them.

WCHM also finalised a literature review of the needs and experiences of women mental health carers, and has conducted a survey of ACT women mental health carers. Data analysis of the results has been completed, and the preliminary survey findings were released on the WCHM website. Interviews with mental health carers have been completed to explore more deeply the results of the

survey, and the transcripts of those interviews are now complete and thematic analysis is underway. The report will be completed in 2011-12.

### Peer support research report

WCHM has completed its peer support research project to document good practice peer support models, and the needs for and experiences of peer support programs for women living with a mental illness in the ACT. This research is a contribution to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of peer support, and is unique as it highlights the context of mental health, the ACT and the importance of gender sensitive practice. It is hoped that as a consequence of this research, peer support as a means of increasing social connectivity and managing mental health for women will become more widely understood in the ACT community.

This research found that peer support improves participant's mental health and wellbeing including examples of decreasing symptoms. Peer support increases self-esteem and confidence, for example through building skills. And peer support increases social support networks and reduces isolation, through building mutually supportive relationships with others, and connecting with the broader community through new activities such as work and volunteering.

It also emerged that for women, peer support provides improvements in mental health because it is an alternative to the medical model. The women outlined how being treated as 'normal' and 'as a person, not the symptoms' by peers is empowering. For many of the women a positive outcome of peer support was that it provides a sense of belonging, friendship and connection with others, and perhaps the only opportunity for social inclusion they have. Women in this study reported appreciating the time to socialise and 'get out of the house' to relieve boredom, lethargy or loneliness. In addition, peer support provided a feeling that 'you're not alone, other people are

having bad days as well', and the sense that others care about you.

This project showed it is important that peer support groups for women living with mental health issues in the ACT continue to grow. It also showed that peer support is a mechanism of health promotion as it positively influenced participant's health and wellbeing by increasing participant's confidence, and building skills in advocacy and communication, empowering them to 'take control' over their health. Peer support also educates members about the causes and impacts of stigma, and builds knowledge through sharing information about how to navigate the mental health system, treatment options, and increased awareness about mental health symptoms.

The report is due to be released during Mental Health Week 2011.

#### Working with the mental health peaks

WCHM continues to build partnerships with Carers ACT, the Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC) and the Mental Health Consumer Network (MHCN) to influence them about the needs of women living with a mental illness, and assist them to better engage with women. The Executive Director of WCHM is on the Board of the Mental Health Community Coalition and the Executive Director of the Mental Health Community Coalition is on the WCHM Board. MHCC and MHCN also have representatives on the WMHWG.

## **2.4 Women from CALD Communities**

### Strategies

- Develop a profile of women from CALD communities and the issues impacting on their social connectedness and wellbeing
- Raise awareness of issues impacting on social connectedness and wellbeing of women from CALD communities—advocate for initiatives that will promote inclusion

### CALD women research on health and wellbeing information

The report *It Goes With the Territory! ACT CALD Women's Views about Health and Wellbeing Information* was finalised, and will be launched in the near future in conjunction with MWA and the CMCF. The report found that CALD women are proactive in seeking out health and wellbeing information; seeking it from a variety of sources, in a variety of media, on a variety of topics. Yet they can face specific cultural and linguistic barriers that make obtaining the health and wellbeing information they need difficult, including not being able to access culturally appropriate services or information in languages other than English. At other times CALD women can access the information they need, but are unable to act upon that information because of restrictions placed upon them by others within their community or because of a lack of available and appropriate services, such as affordable female only exercise spaces.

### Sudanese women research

The research which was conducted with Sudanese women in the ACT, one of the new and emerging groups of humanitarian entrants settling here, to identify and understand the factors that impede or promote their access to health care and utilisation of these services will be released in conjunction with the CALD women's *It Goes With the Territory!* report in *"Navigating a whole new world: Access to health care and utilization of health services by Southern Sudanese women in the ACT"*. It identifies that cultural, language and financial constraints, lack of awareness of available services, and lack of health providers' understanding of the complex cultural concerns of refugees all limited their access to health care, as well as their understanding of the complexities of Australia's health care system.

### ACT CALD Women's Network

After the release of WCHM's "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women in the Australian Capital Territory" report in 2009, WCHM held a forum with service

providers who work with clients from CALD backgrounds to discuss how the report's recommendations could be moved forward. One finding from the forum was that there are very few CALD women in leadership roles in the ACT and that, because of this, there is a wider lack of representation to government and community on CALD women's issues. In response to this, forum participants suggested that there should be more collaboration across the different agencies that work with and represent CALD women, in order to strengthen representation, share information, and consolidate resources in the interests of improving health and wellbeing outcomes for CALD women.

From this recommendation WCHM has worked over the last 6 months with the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) and Multicultural Women's Advocacy (MWA) to develop support for a CALD Women's Network. The network is a group of organisations that have an interest in the issues that affect women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the ACT. These organisations will use the network to work together to advocate on behalf of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in order to influence local policy and service delivery. Ultimately, the CALD Women's Network aims to:

- Raise awareness of the issues that CALD women face in the ACT
- Collaborate and consult on a review of the access and equity issues that women from CALD backgrounds encounter in the ACT
- Ensure that the views and concerns of women from CALD backgrounds in the ACT are heard
- Identify opportunities and develop strategies to address these concerns
- Share knowledge around the key areas of health, leadership, prevention of violence against women, ageing, and employment/workforce participation

To date, the CALD Women's Network has met once, with regular meetings planned over the coming year. Member

organisations include Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT, ACT Women's Legal Centre, YWCA, ACT Women's Health Service, ACT Council of Social Service, Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance, Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, Mental Health Community Coalition, Women's Information and Referral Centre, ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs, ACT Office for Women and Toora Women's Inc.

#### ACT Women's Grants funding

WCHM was successful in securing funding from the ACT Women's Grants for a project in 2011-12 called "*empower: Building Opportunities for Mature women and Multicultural women in leadership and decision making roles in the ACT*". The project aims to address barriers to the participation by ACT older women and ACT women from multicultural backgrounds in representation, decision making roles and consultations. The project will include a training component informed by consultations with older women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and partnerships have been developed with HCCA, ZONTA, Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) and Multicultural Women's Advocacy (MWA).

## **2.5 Older Women**

### Strategies

- Develop a profile of older women and the issues impacting on their social connectedness and wellbeing
- Develop an evidence base around access issues and barriers for older women in the ACT
- Develop strategies to address equity of access to services, including health services, by older women
- Raise awareness of the issues impacting on the health and wellbeing of older women and advocate for improved responses to the health and wellbeing needs of older women

- Develop strategies to enable older women who are disadvantaged to connect/reconnect into the community and build networks

#### Older Women's research

The *It Goes With the Territory! The Views of ACT Women who are mental health carers about Health and Wellbeing Information* was launched at WCHM's 20th Birthday event. The report identified that older women rely upon health professionals—particularly GPs—for the majority of their health and wellbeing information. They are also, however, pragmatic about the reality of GP shortages in the ACT and eager to see alternative sources of information for older women in the ACT that can provide them with personalised information that is tailored to their history, circumstances and preferences in the way that information provided by a GP would be.

#### Social Connectedness project

WCHM is finalising the research into older women's social connectedness and the impact this has upon their health and wellbeing. The survey of older ACT women showed that the major factors influencing older ACT women's social connectedness—positively and negatively—were transport; volunteering; and caring responsibilities. The final report is currently being edited and will be launched in October.

#### Older Women's Safety Audits

Work on the project to undertake older women's safety audits has commenced, and a project worker has started. The purpose of the project is to mobilise older women in the ACT to discuss their safety concerns and come up with ideas about how to make public spaces safer and thus more frequently used by older women. The project has four parts: initial scoping through an online survey and analysis, focus group consultations with several groups of older women from different walks of life, the actual safety audits at several key public spaces in the ACT and surrounding regions, and finally sharing of the results, recommendations and audit

tools of the project with different stakeholders and older women. An initial survey has been conducted online to seek the views of older women around safety in public spaces. 102 women answered the survey, and some of the key issues highlighted were public transport (including a lack of transport to certain areas, issues at bus interchanges, lighting at stops in suburbs), public toilets (including lighting and locations), and issues with large public car parks as well as some identifications of specific locations or suburbs. WCHM is now completing a deeper analysis of the survey results including cross analysis of different demographics to determine if there may be specific issues affecting these different demographic groups. Focus groups will then be set up with older women to further explore and identify specific locations and issues to audit etc. Older women who are involved in the focus groups will also be asked to be involved in the safety audits, particularly related to the areas of concern to these women.

## **Key Area 3: Increasing women's access to gender sensitive health and wellbeing information**

### ***The intended outcomes are:***

- System wide improvements in the provision of gender sensitive information
- Demonstrably effective strategies for building women's capacity to access health and wellbeing information that meets their needs

### **3.1 Developing a better understanding of the ways in which (different groups of) women prefer to access health and wellbeing information**

This was completed in the previous year, through the survey and focus groups.

### **3.2 Identifying gaps in health and wellbeing information as well as barriers to accessing information**

The report *It Goes with the Territory! ACT Women's Views about Health and Wellbeing Information* findings demonstrate that barriers to accessing health services and information—including for preventive health—are part of the social determinants of women's lives that can lead to health inequalities. These barriers include:

- High cost of health care for some women
- Lack of awareness of existing services;
- Shortages of general practitioners, specialist medical services, and a spectrum of health services
- Lack of female doctors, especially for reproductive and sexual health
- Lack of culturally appropriate and gender sensitive services and information
- Health and wellbeing services which may not deal holistically with the physical, social and emotional

wellbeing and cultural needs of women, especially disadvantaged groups

### **3.4 Working in ways that will assist women to build their own capacity to seek and access the information necessary to support informed health choices.**

Work commenced on several projects over 2010-11 which came out of the recommendations from the *It Goes with the Territory! ACT Women's Views about Health and Wellbeing Information* report.

During 2010-11, WCHM has been implementing the findings from the WCHM report *It goes with the Territory! ACT Women's views about Health and Wellbeing Information* through further development of the WCHM website to provide assistance to ACT women as health consumers in using the internet, and in navigating and assessing the information that is accessed through the internet. A key element of this is the design of a Women's Health Hub as an online information portal—to be part of the WCHM website—that will link women in the ACT to credible information specific to the needs they expressed in our research. Three main sections were identified as lacking through *It Goes with the Territory*: menopause, sex and sexual health information for older women; information about having a baby in Canberra; and information for young women about body image, good nutrition, physical activity and eating disorders.

The content for the Health Hub components relating to menopause, and to sex and sexual health information for older women was focussed on during the past six months and is almost finalised and will be released soon.

The report also identified a need for tools and support for Internet literacy for ACT women. Enabling women to navigate the Internet better is essential for better access to appropriate health services; by

enabling women to access trusted information they will be able to make more rational and informed health decisions without needing to access GPs every time. In order to assist women to build their own capacity to seek and access information necessary to make informed health choices, WCHM researched and developed specific criteria for WCHM to assist ACT women with selecting trusted sites as sources of health and wellbeing information—an ASSURED tool has been developed to assist women to seek and access relevant information and it is awaiting internal review. WCHM also developed and signed off with its Board Website Criteria which WCHM is now using to link the WCHM website to trusted information on trusted sites.

#### *Making Your 40s Fabulous*

On Wednesday September 1, The Women's Centre for Health Matters and Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFPACT) jointly hosted a *Making Your 40s Fabulous* event; an opportunity for women to gather information on issues affecting them in their 40s such as hormonal changes, physical changes, libido, sleep, emotional health and preventative health measures.

The event was launched by 666 ABC Canberra Drive presenter Louise Maher and was attended by over 70 women. The evening began with the screening of a webcast by the Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health, which was followed by a question and answer session with three local health experts: Dr Linda Welberry (Senior Medical Officer, Menopause Centre Canberra - SHFPACT), Caroline Salisbury (ABC Radio Nutrition Presenter and Nutrition Consultant) and Leslie Betts (Physiotherapist, Southside Physiotherapy).

Louise reflected upon the negative 'f' words that are more commonly used for women in their 40s and replaced them with positive, and far more accurate, words such as fabulous, fit, and fun. She also noted the view of some

commentators that big pharmaceuticals are seeking to medicalise, control, and profit from women's libido. She encouraged women to be aware of these debates, seek out information from all perspectives and have discussions with peers in order to come to an informed position that is right for them

The night was a great success. The webcast was held simultaneously across Australia, and the Jean Hailes Foundation advised that the ACT event was the largest of all of them. The response from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many suggesting that we hold the information session annually. It was especially rewarding to be able to deliver health and wellbeing information to women in a format that from our research, we know they prefer: face-to-face, with the opportunity to ask health experts about individual issues and the opportunity for discussion with others.

### **Key Area 4: Prevention of Violence against Women**

#### ***The intended outcomes are:***

- Evidence based gendered analysis of the experiences, issues and barriers for women and their children escaping violence in the ACT
- Increased knowledge about how ACT's services and support can better meet the needs of women and their children escaping violence
- Development of specific strategies for building the capacity of more vulnerable groups of women escaping violence in the ACT to access appropriate support and services
- Specific policy proposals developed and advocacy initiatives in place with a focus on:
  - Promoting an understanding of gendered violence
  - Changing community and cultural attitudes to prevent violence against women

Identify innovative approaches to preventing violence against women through the promotion of respectful and equal relationships between men and women and work with schools, industry and organisations to test these in local approaches

Over the past year WCHM has been involved in a number of activities to combat violence against women, including taking a lead role in the organisation of the annual Reclaim the Night. Two WCHM staff have also been taking part in the innovative Sexual Assault Prevention Program in Secondary Schools developed by CASA House in Victoria who are partnering with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and selected secondary schools to roll out the program in the ACT.

The Program, known as SAPPSS, aims to prevent sexual assault and to enable schools to better respond to sexual assault in a way that ensures positive outcomes for victims/survivors. SAPPSS takes a multi-faceted approach to prevention which includes professional development for teachers, assistance with the improvement of policies and procedures around sexual assault, and an eight session curriculum for students.

Angela Carnovale and Rachelle Cole, along with other community partners, took up the task of delivering this curriculum to year 10 students at Campbell High. Each week they joined forces with teachers to facilitate discussion on sexual assault, consent, communication and respectful relationships with the hope of equipping students with the skills they need to negotiate those tricky situations they are likely to find themselves in during their adolescents and early adulthood. Some of the key messages are “consent=free agreement”; “the victim/survivor is never to blame”; and “sexual violence is about power”.

It is hoped that as SAPPSS at Campbell High nears completion, there will be many attitudinal changes.

Generate a sense of community awareness of and involvement in the prevention of all forms of violence against women

WCHM continues to work with and support the Women’s Services Network and has been working with them over the last few months to determine what approach might be taken within the ACT for Reclaim the Night 2011, given that SlutWalk has already happened this year in a format that is typically used for Reclaim and was very positively received by younger women in the ACT.

## **Treasurer’s Report**

Once again it has been a pleasure to be involved with the WCHM. We continue to grow both financially and operationally, receiving a number of additional grants during the year and working harder than ever. Congratulations to the Executive Director and staff for all the work that goes into applying for and winning those grants, and then, more importantly, being able to deliver on those commitments. It has been very satisfying to see the profile of the organisation grow, especially knowing that the work undertaken by the Centre is helping promote and address those issues that affect women in our community. A personal highlight for me this year was attending the 20th Birthday celebrations where the history of the organisation and achievements were applauded.

The Centre’s main source of funding continues to be received from ACT Health, and included specific funding in support of women and mental health issues, including funding to facilitate a Women’s Mental Health Working Group and to liaise with the mental health community sector “peak bodies”. In addition, funding for the second year for a Peer Support project was received under a Health Promotions Grant. Additional funding received by the Centre throughout the year included an ACT Seniors Grant to undertake Older Women’s Safety Audits; a Grant from Disability ACT to auspice Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT); two ACT

Women's Grants for projects with the Women And Prisons (WAP) Group for WAP Planning and Development and for Entering the Prison Kits for women; and a sponsorship from the ACT Health Promotion Branch to attend the Australian Health Promotion Association Conference.

Overall, our audited statements for 2010-11 show a deficit of \$5,852. Staff have again worked hard to ensure that funding was utilised to support the Centre and develop resources for the future. An excellent example has been the work undertaken in developing the Centre's Strategic plan and revisiting our goals for the future.

Finally, a big thank you to Brazen Books for their continued support and advice, the Executive Director and staff of the Centre for their very valuable and appreciated assistance throughout the year and the dedicated and committed members of the Board. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with you all over the last 12 months and I look forward to another successful financial year.

*Kathleen O'Sullivan, Treasurer*