

# Annual Report **2019-20**

## **Funding Bodies 2019-20**

### **ACT Health Directorate**

- Women, Youth & Child Health Policy Unit

### **ACT Community Services Directorate**

- ACT Women's Grants
- Community Support & Infrastructure Grant
- Participation (Digital Communities) Grant

### **ACT Corrective Services**

## Table of Contents

About WCHM	1
A summary of WCHM 2019-20 stats	2-3
Chair's Report	4
2019/20 Board members	5
WCHM Governance	5
Chief Executive Officer's Report	6
2019/20 Staff	7
WCHM's five key areas of focus	8
The Year in review—Our progress against our Strategic Plan outcomes	9
Key Area 1—Knowing what matters	9
Key Area 2—Communicating what matters	11
Key Area 3—Influencing what matters	15
Key Area 4—Empowering women in what matters	18
Key Area 5—Doing what matters	20
Treasurer's report	21
Financial Statements (inserted)	

**The Women's Centre for Health Matters acknowledges that we live and work on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respect to their Elders – past, present and future - and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

### About WCHM

The Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) works to improve the health and wellbeing of women in the ACT and surrounding region, by providing information and representation on health and wellbeing issues and the social determinants of health affecting women, with a focus on those who are marginalised or experience disadvantage.

We do this by providing local and accessible information to support women in their pursuit of health and wellbeing, by working to ensure that women can contribute to and are aware of the health choices available to them, and by encouraging the Territory, the health system and other services to be more responsive to the needs of women.

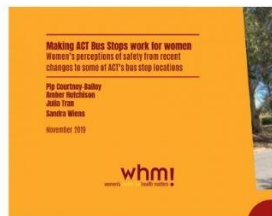
WCHM informs our work by listening to ACT women about their stories, attitudes, assumptions, experiences and views. We use the data and evidence, local women's views, and the stories of ACT women and their lived experiences to inform the social research reports which WCHM develops and to inform our work with services and policy areas in the ACT so that they can better meet ACT women's needs.

WCHM also advocates on behalf of ACT women through ACT Government consultation and submission processes (including to ACT Legislative Assembly Committees), directly with ACT Ministers and ACT Directorate officials, and through representation on high level advisory committees. We use these opportunities to disseminate the findings from our work with ACT women about their needs in order to influence responses in the ACT.

# SUMMARY OF 2019-20 STATS

women's  
health  
matters!

## COMMUNICATING OUR MESSAGE



## ONLINE PRESENCE



**13,119**  
people visited  
the Women's Health  
Matters website



New online and digital information  
released for ACT women:



➤ **106,454** views



➤ **38,378** views



▶ **2,132** views



➤ **1,045** views



➤ **1,074** views



WOMEN'S HEALTH MATTERS 2019-20 STATS

# SUMMARY OF 2019-20 STATS continued

women's  
health  
**matters!**

## IN THE MEDIA



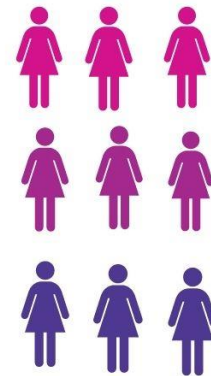
articles in the media  
about our work



interviews on TV



radio interviews



events/forums  
held

4

submissions to  
government  
inquiries

1

public hearings of ACT  
Standing Committees



12

high level Committees,  
Councils and advisory  
groups which  
we represented

31

meetings attended  
with MLAs/  
committees or  
Directorate  
officials

## Chair's Report

While the year has not been without challenges, from natural disasters to a global health pandemic, WCHM has continued to be here as the voice for women in the ACT and supporting their health and wellbeing. WCHM has continued to lead the way in researching local women's health issues and advocating for and giving a voice to women in the ACT and surrounding region in relation to health and wellbeing matters.

Notably, WCHM played a key role in ensuring that the Second Action Plan 2020-22 as part of the ACT Women's Plan 2016-26 was reflective of the health needs and interests of women in the ACT and surrounding region. WCHM also responded to the safety needs of women resulting from changes to ACT's bus routes, and the needs of older women through active consultations.

Congratulations to Marcia Williams (CEO) who is also a finalist for the 2020 Westfield Local Hero of the Year Award. These are only snippets of the fantastic contributions that WCHM staff have made.

The WCHM Board was energised with new members joining our Board over the course of 2019-20, including Sheena Ireland, Romy Listo, Jolene Reece and Mirjana Wilson.

It was also great to have the expertise of Jo Schumann (Treasurer), Gaylene Coulton, Renee Dockrill (Deputy Chair), Karen Redshaw and Lori Rubenstein during this financial year.

Unfortunately, we farewelled active and long-standing Board Members Karen Redshaw and Lori Rubenstein earlier in 2020, and more recently Melissa Hobbs has announced she will be stepping down from the Board.

We will also be farewelling Gaylene Coulton following the upcoming AGM. And I will also be stepping down after almost four years on the Board.

A huge thank you to all our Board members for their contributions to the Board. It has been a pleasure working with you to support WCHM and the women for whom WCHM advocates.

This year the Board has been focused on ensuring that staff have the resources to adjust to COVID-19 related impacts, continuing to ensure our governance frameworks are robust, and exploring options for reaching out to membership and boosting our profile through media and communications.

A particular focus has also been on reviewing our governance policies and frameworks including risk frameworks, as well as our Constitution. We continued to note the importance of remaining sustainable and overseeing WCHM's financial health to ensure that WCHM can continue to support women in the ACT. We conducted a close review of WCHM's finances and organisational structure to ensure this.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank WCHM's membership who have continued to contribute to and support WCHM's activities.

I would also like to congratulate the staff at WCHM for their fantastic work and resilience during what have been difficult circumstances. In particular, I would like to thank Marcia Williams (CEO) and Emma Davidson (Deputy CEO until January 2020) for their leadership and ongoing support to the Board during the 2019-2020 financial year.

*Farzana Choudhury, Board Chair*

### **2019/20 Board Members**

(at 30 June 2020)

- Farzana Choudhury (Chair)
- Renee Dockrill (Deputy Chair)
- Jo Schumann (Treasurer)
- Gaylene Coulton
- Melissa Hobbs
- Sheena Ireland
- Romy Listo
- Jolene Reece
- Mirjana Wilson
- Marcia Williams (Public Officer)

**WCHM farewelled Lori Rubenstein and Karen Redshaw as Board members earlier in the year.**

## **WCHM's Governance**

### *The Board Structure*

The Board comprises 10 elected members. At each Annual General Meeting, five Board positions become available for two-year terms. Each elected Board position 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.

Once elected the Board selects from its members, by a majority vote, a Chair, Deputy Chair and Treasurer.

### *Board Role*

Board members serve on a voluntary basis and do not receive remuneration.

The Board 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 Meetings*

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.

This year the Board had eight Board meetings during the year, and a Planning Day.

### *Board Committees*

Where necessary, the Board sets up committees. There were three Sub-Committees of the Board:

- Governance Sub-Committee
- Finance Sub-Committee
- Member Engagement and Fundraising Sub-Committee.

### *Board Training*

New Board members receive an induction, training where needed and access to a Board members' secure page on the WCHM website to access all the core WCHM documents and a comprehensive series of fact sheets and relevant information on their roles as Board members.

### *Board Performance*

Board performance is assessed annually through a survey of Board members. This is used to evaluate the Board's effectiveness and helps to highlight priorities for further focus and improvement.

## Chief Executive Officer's Report

The Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) knows from our work for over 29 years that social and economic factors affect the health and wellbeing of ACT women's lives, and their ability to live healthy lives. That is why we work in the ACT across the social determinants of health for women.

WCHM staff were required to work from home from mid-March for the remainder of the financial year due to COVID-19 restrictions. Early planning meant we had technology and teleconference facilities in place, and we were able to move to the home-based work immediately.

Because we are not a direct service delivery organisation, the work that WCHM staff perform was suitable to perform at home, and WCHM could still meet the requirements of our Service Funding Agreement with ACT Health Directorate.

Despite working from home, the year was still busy and eventful year, and WCHM was able to remain involved in a wide range of important social issues which impact on women in the ACT.

While most of our advocacy work was undertaken via phone, ZOOM, Teams or Webex meetings, the results of our social research, and the stories from ACT women about their lived experience, remained crucial to us being able to get key issues for ACT women on the agenda in the ACT during COVID-19.

As a result WCHM continued to engage in influencing key health and wellbeing issues for women in the ACT over 2019-20 including the needs of women in the AMC and influencing the responses needed in the AMC and on exit to the community; the health needs, barriers and gaps in access to health services for older women and LGBTIQ women in the ACT; responses

during COVID-19 to violence against women and their children; the issues for women accessing housing and homelessness services; influencing the design of public spaces and public transport to recognise women's safety (or perceptions of safety); and women's sexual and reproductive health.

Despite the impacts from COVID-19 during 2019-20 WCHM:

- released 4 social research reports, and worked on another 3 which will be released in 2020/21;
- developed 2 new information websites for ACT women for release in 2019-20, and began work on 2 other information websites;
- represented the views of women in the ACT as a member of 12 Committees, Councils and high level advisory bodies;
- contributed 4 submissions to Government;
- held 7 forums and events for women; and
- shared the results from WCHM's research and from feedback from women to the relevant Ministers and MLAs; to various policy units within the relevant Directorates including ACT Health Directorate, the Community Services Directorate, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the Transport and Municipal Services Directorate; to ACT Corrections and the Alexander Maconochie Centre; to the ACT Human Rights Commission and the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services; to the ACT Primary Health Care Network; to ACT service providers; and to other ACT public servants through funding and submission processes.

WCHM continued to maintain a focus on developing and delivering new sources of accessible information for women, including a focus on COVID-19 that was relevant to ACT women in their many roles. And the release of the

new *ACTeen Choices* website, which complemented our other popular websites which continued to receive large numbers of visitors.

Our Facebook engagement with women was very important for this period, and we stayed connected throughout the year.

We were able to continue our work because of the support of our community partners which allowed us to continue informing our understanding of women's needs. And because of our relationships with key areas of ACT Government Directorates who enabled us to continue contributing our knowledge and expertise - via remote means. These relationships remained invaluable to continuing our work and our advocacy.

My thanks to the volunteer members of WCHM's Board, who are generous with their time, expertise, skills and ideas. They have shown a continued commitment to the organisation and its good governance through a tough environment with COVID-19. And developed an excellent understanding of the pressures and risks that emerged in our operating environment, and the responses needed to those.

For those who are leaving, or have left, the Board this year thank you for your contributions and commitment, and best wishes for the future. The organisation has navigated a difficult year and benefitted from your expertise, skills and ideas.

Thank you to our members for their continued support and their involvement in our work. We look forward to working with you all in the coming year, and to having your support to continue our work in the leadup to our 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in April 2021.

Thank you also to the funding bodies who have supported our work over the last year, and who continue to support us in working to enhance women's health and wellbeing in the ACT.

And a special thank you to our wonderful bookkeeper who helped us navigate the COVID-19 period and its complexities despite also working from home – with all the added work of maintaining records and sharing information using electronic means.

And last, but not least, thank you to our small group of talented and dedicated staff. Their commitment to WCHM's social determinants approach, their diverse skills and interests, their innovative ideas, and their passion for the work we do, has been key to highlighting the issues that women in the ACT face, and to helping WCHM maintain our position for the future.

*Marcia Williams, Chief Executive Officer*

**2019/120 Staff (at 30 June 2020)**

- Chief Executive Officer—Marcia Williams
- Health Promotion Officer — Pip Courtney-Bailey
- Health Promotion Officer – Amber Hutchison
- Health Promotion Officer — Julia Tran
- Communications and Admin Officer — Sandra Wiens

WCHM farewelled Emma Davidson during the year.



## **WCHM's Key Areas of Focus**

The WCHM Strategic Plan focusses on five key areas which further our work in supporting ACT women.

**1. KNOWING WHAT MATTERS!**

**2. COMMUNICATING WHAT MATTERS!**

**3. INFLUENCING WHAT MATTERS!**

**4. EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WHAT MATTERS!**

**5. DOING WHAT MATTERS!**

# The Year in Review

## Our progress against our Strategic Plan

### Key Area 1: **KNOWING WHAT MATTERS!**

Work with women in the ACT (especially those who are vulnerable to disadvantage and marginalisation, or who have specific gender-related needs) to:

- Gain knowledge and evidence about the economic, social and environmental issues affecting women's health and wellbeing in the ACT
- Understand the lived experience of women and the way this impacts upon their health and wellbeing
- Identify the health and wellbeing services and support available
- Identify new and emerging issues in women's health that are not adequately responded to by current policies and services

**Our strategies and actions** include: the use of research, forums and consultations with ACT women; working with networks, service providers and peer led groups to identify emerging issues; gender analysis; safety audits; attending conferences; and using gender based data from other sources to inform our work.

WCHM involves women in all aspects of its work and our research to ensure that we are representing their issues and lived experiences in our work – these include the involvement of a diverse range of women in consultations, surveys and forums. This was made more complex during the COVID-19 period.

WCHM focussed early in the financial year in facilitating the input of marginalised ACT women through forums and social research so that there was improved understanding about their experiences and barriers.

WCHM continued to maintain formal and informal networks with relevant

organisations to ensure that information provided to women was accurate and up to date, and that we tapped into the feedback of women to those organisations.

During 2019-20 WCHM continued to develop strong relationships with other community sector stakeholders so that we could build our knowledge. And we worked closely with other community sector peak bodies to raise the profile of issues relating to women and to develop approaches to working together in relation to services and responses for women, especially during the COVID-19 period.

Nationally and locally many health studies and policies relating to health issues, access, barriers and needs focus on the broader population, or on specific disease areas or parts of the health system. Very few focus on local ACT data, and even fewer on data about the needs of women, the social determinants, gendered evidence about the impacts on women's health or their emerging health needs and barriers in accessing the health system.

So during 2019-20 WCHM continued to focus on building our evidence base and including the voices of women and their lived experience as well as the collection of relevant national/ international research and local ACT data.

During 2019-20, WCHM focused on several key areas relating to health and wellbeing and service planning and delivery, and issues impacting on health outcomes, including:

- the experiences and barriers that face women in accessing support and services for their health and wellbeing (especially older women and women in the ACT);

- safety at public bus stops in the ACT for women;
- influencing urban design responses to meet the specific needs of women;
- sexual and reproductive health, and the improved affordability of long-term and reversible contraception and termination of pregnancy services for women in the ACT;
- the needs of parents in the early years; and
- domestic and family violence.

We also used a wide range of options to ensure that ACT women are aware of the health choices available to them, and, where there are gaps identified by women through our research and consultations we work with women to design appropriate responses.

For example, a wide range of women have been involved in contributing to and advising WCHM about maintaining the content for our current information websites (such as the *Having A Baby In Canberra* website and the *Borderline in the ACT* website) and contributing their issues and ideas to the new information websites we have been developing during 2019/20 - *ACTeenChoices*, the Women's Health Hub and a website for women over 25 about their sexual and reproductive health.

And WCHM held several health promotion events and forums for women to raise their awareness about their health and wellbeing, and to connect them to local services and responses in the ACT.

## **Social Research**

### COVID-19

During COVID19 we conducted an online survey about the impacts of COVID-19 on women in the ACT. In only two weeks we received over 540 responses from ACT

women and used the results to inform policy and services in the ACT.

### Older Women Research

WCHM received completed responses from 194 older women for this research and also sought the views of 29 women who participated in further focus groups and interviews to inform the survey results, and to explore areas that WCHM wanted to understand in more depth.

### Making bus stops work for women (Women's perceptions of safety from recent changes to some of ACT's bus stop locations)

During 2019 the ACT government made significant changes to the transport system in Canberra to accommodate the tram line from Gungahlin to the city. The bus system was revamped with the mission of "safe, active, efficient & cost-effective, accessible and socially inclusive, sustainable, integrated with land use planning public transport." As a result, many of the bus routes were changed and many bus stops were decommissioned.

In September WCHM began to hear from many women that changes to ACT's bus routes had affected them and their feelings of safety.

As a result, WCHM conducted a short survey to explore this further and to obtain information from ACT women about the changes that had affected their feelings of safety at the bus stops they now had to use, and to identify and map the locations of those bus stops. In the short time the survey was opened we received 144 responses.

## **Working with women in the AMC**

A key area of focus has also remained on the women in prison in the ACT, with a focus on improving their wellbeing in the AMC and on improving their reintegration back into the ACT community by working

with them to seek their input and get a better understanding of their needs.

We also continued to focus on assisting the women with lived experience in the AMC to contribute their views on issues affecting them in prison. This is because their experiences are unique and their contribution is unique because:

- Women who are or have been incarcerated represent one of the most marginalised groups in our community.
- Women's offending and imprisonment is often closely related to their poverty, and they are disproportionately affected by homelessness, domestic violence, sexual assault, mental illness, substance abuse, and poverty.
- When women are released from prison they face the same barriers to re-entry as men—social stigmatisation; and few or no employment opportunities.
- Because of their gender, while in goal women prisoners have different health needs and they require care that addresses their reproductive health, histories of abuse and status as primary providers and carers of children.
- Aboriginal women are hugely overrepresented in prison.

We consulted with women in the AMC to inform a submission from them to the ACT Healthy Prison Review. We also used this information to inform our own submission. Both these resulted in significant recommendations in the final report to Government about the need for improvements for the women.

We also consulted with them and used their stories to guide discussions on

improvements needed to policy affecting their health including housing and justice responses.

### Other consultations

We also facilitated the input of women in consultations - using online and survey methods - to inform specific areas for ACT government in the near future including informing the First 1000 days approach, for Canberra Health Services about women's needs in the provision of services to parents after birth, and with JACS to seek the views of women with lived experience of the AMC and Community Corrections.

## Key Area 2: COMMUNICATING WHAT MATTERS!

Communicate the evidence and insights gained from women in the ACT, particularly from our own research, but also from research conducted by other organisations to inform and educate others—including government—about ACT women's health and wellbeing needs.

**Our strategies and actions** include: developing/launching reports using evidence and lived experience; submissions and advocacy to consultations, committees, advisory groups and working groups; media releases about the issues and the evidence; support for specific sectors/services about the needs of women; training/awareness raising to build an understanding of the gender issues for services/sectors; supporting health literacy in women/groups of women; online support/information for women; health promotion events; providing information to women about policy/service changes; skills development/training of vulnerable groups of women; and awareness raising in the broader community about specific gender and equity issues.

The results from WCHM's research and from feedback from women have been disseminated widely, and have been included in consultations, meetings,

advocacy and to Committees that WCHM has informed.

Results from all WCHM research and from feedback from women through forums, have also been disseminated to the relevant Ministers; to inform the ACT Women's Plan; to various policy units within the relevant Directorates including ACT Health Directorate; the Community Services Directorate; the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the Transport and Municipal Services Directorate; to the ACT Primary Health Care Network; to ACT service providers and to other ACT public servants through funding and submission processes.

### **Reports launched**

WCHM released the following social research reports during 2019/20.

#### July 2019 - Below the surface

This report was a follow-up to WCHM's 2018 report *Hidden disadvantage among women in the ACT* and explored the findings for women living in middle income households in the ACT, and their potential area of disadvantage, because these may be hidden.

This report used NATSEM gender-based data to explore the risk of disadvantage for this groups and was used as part of a codesign project with the Office for Women to inform the ACT Women's Summit.

This report found that 46.4 per cent of those women were likely to be reliant on the income of parents or partners to remain in that income category, and that women living in middle income households in the ACT are at risk of homelessness if they experience a relationship breakdown, loss of employment for the higher income earner in the household, loss of security of tenure on their rented home, or death of the higher income earner in their household.

Women in these households are also unlikely to be eligible for government or

community sector support programs that are usually targeted at the most financially disadvantaged. As a result, middle income households must cover the costs of living from their own resources.

#### The views of same sex attracted women in the ACT about their health, "This is what the real experience is like..."

This research was conducted to compliment previous WCHM reports on the experiences of health and health needs of ACT women, and also explored issues such as sexual health including STIs and cervical screening, alcohol, tobacco and drug use and experiences of violence and anti-LGBTIQ behaviour.

There has been limited local ACT data on the needs of the LGBQ women's communities, and their health needs and barriers, which is why WCHM - with the support of the AIDS Action Council - decided to work together to investigate and highlight the specific local issues for same sex attracted women in the ACT.

Respondents described having difficulties accessing good health information that was specific to their health needs as LGBQ women.

Like many women in the ACT, affordability, appointment availability, their experience with their health care providers, and time were significant barriers to addressing health needs.

Unlike other women, LGBQ women may experience access issues such as heterosexism and non-inclusivity which make their experience unpleasant and stigmatising.

Most women in the study had experienced domestic, family, or sexual violence, and discriminatory or homophobic behaviour. This had effects on their individual health and the health of the LGBTIQ community.

And LGBQ women in the study screened for STIs less than the general ACT

women's population as many felt that it wasn't necessary to do so.

The findings demonstrated the importance of health services which display inclusivity and have an understanding of LGBTQ women's lives, as well as the need for health promotion and health information that is representative of the diversity of women's lives, including LGBTQ women.

#### Creating opportunity or entrenching disadvantage? 5 Years on – ACT Labour Market Update

For Poverty week 2019, the Women's Centre for Health Matters with the ACT Council of Social Service released this analysis of ACT labour market data and future trends, focusing on wages, levels of qualification and growth across major industries. The report continued a gender-based analysis begun in 2014 in a report titled *Creating Opportunity or Entrenching Disadvantage? – Labour Market Trends in the ACT*.

The report drew on existing publicly available labour market data to consider the labour market operation and outlook in Canberra, and how these affect the work opportunities and incomes that are earned by women in the ACT.

The report showed that the trends identified in 2014 that disadvantaged women in the labour market continued in 2019, although there were some encouraging signs of a better future.

A welcome finding was evidence of growth of women in the relatively high paid occupations of contract, program and project administration, intelligence and policy analysts, management and organisation analysis and software and application programmers.

Women continued to be disadvantaged in the ACT labour market because the industries they are most likely to work in, and the occupations they are most likely to be employed to do, are underpaid.

Women were more likely to be living on low incomes, and were over represented in the bottom 40% income groups in the ACT.

The second largest employer in Canberra, Healthcare and social assistance, was projected to have the highest growth in jobs between 2019 and 2023. If this growth trend occurs, by 2023 Health Care and Social Assistance will employ twice as many people as the Construction Industry.

Yet the community services occupations reviewed were between 75-90% female, and part timework had increased from 33% in 2014 to 46% in 2019. Across all occupations in the health care and social assistance industry reviewed, the wages were below average earnings.

So eliminating inequality of opportunity and remuneration in the labour market is essential to reducing poverty for women in the ACT.

#### November 2019 - Making ACT bus stops work for women

The report summarised the findings from WCHM safety assessments of individual bus stops in the ACT, which women had identified as feeling unsafe. The report included photos which helped convey the key factors which led to women feeling unsafe.

The audits identified a number of common factors which contributed to women feeling unsafe and more vulnerable at those stops which were audited:

- Lighting
- Isolation
- Areas of possible entrapment

The report identified some ways to make changes in urban planning principles that will make buses a more accessible and safe transport option for women.

### **Facebook**

Facebook is used to provide regular and up-to-date information on women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and to raise awareness about issues relating to women's health and wellbeing; local events, activities and forums; WCHM's activities, women's health promotion information and events; link with other community events and campaigns (eg such as important weeks for women and women's health, and Domestic and Family Violence campaigns with other organisations such as DVCS); to promote more widely the work we do and our projects, research reports and findings; and to raise awareness around current issues.

With health promotion days occurring regularly and a steady flow of news, research and events relating to women's health and wellbeing WCHM is never short of items to post. This includes health information from trusted sites, women's health news and research, highlighting quality health sources and awareness raising during key health promotion dates.

#### Covid-19

WCHM used Facebook to promote trustworthy information for ACT women about COVID-19.

#### BPD Awareness Week and Mental Health Week

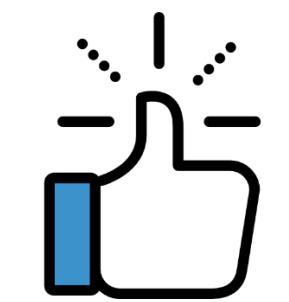
During this time WCHM promoted Borderline Personality Disorder and mental health articles and information on our websites and Facebook.

#### 16 Days of Action

Throughout the 16 Days of Action, WCHM posted messages and information regarding gender-based violence on our Facebook.

#### Women's Health Week

During the five days of Women's Health Week we shared information about key women's health themes on our Facebook page and website.



### **Health promotion events**

While we could not hold face to face events or activities during COVID19, we continued to undertake health promotion activities using Facebook and our online mechanisms for key health promotion dates relevant to women including developing articles for social media during BPD Awareness Week, Mental Health Month and Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Week.

#### Women's Health Week

During Women's Health Week MLA Tara Cheyne shared her story about the importance for women of accessing health information and helped us to launch WCHM's ACT Women's health Hub at an event at WCHM.

And we celebrated Women's Health Week early with the women in the AMC, with an art exhibit showcasing art work made by the women with the theme chosen by them, *'My health and wellbeing-what brings me peace'*.

### Key Area 3: INFLUENCING WHAT MATTERS!

Use the evidence to work with others to:

- Encourage services and systems to be responsive to women's needs
- Promote women's participation in decision making and management
- Promote health equity among women
- Build knowledge about gender, from a women's perspective
- Ensure that ACT policies and services are gender sensitive, from a women's perspective

**Our strategies and actions** include: advocacy and lobbying, awareness raising, and highlighting gender and equity issues in the design and implementation of policies and services; writing submissions; participating in consultations; representation on committees, advisory groups and working groups; providing support to community sector in responding to any reviews or policy changes that impact on the delivery of services.

WCHM shared the results from WCHM's research and from feedback from women to the relevant Ministers; to various policy units within the relevant Directorates including ACT Health Directorate; the Community Services Directorate; the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the Transport and Municipal Services Directorate; to the ACT Primary Health Care Network; to ACT community service providers; and to other ACT public servants through funding and submission processes, and through media.

And we continued to focus on advocacy to encourage the Territory, the health and wellbeing system, and other services to be more responsive to the identified issues and to incorporate them into policy, planning and service design.



During 2019-20, WCHM has contributed to and influenced a wide range of discussions in the ACT and we have engaged with the ACT Health Minister, the Minister for Domestic and Family Violence/ Women/Housing, the Minister for Mental Health/ Corrections, the Minister for Transport and other MLAs.

WCHM attended the ACT Women's Summit to represent the issues for women in the ACT, particularly those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. We were also involved in helping the Office For Women develop information for the Summit, and in informing the final responses from that Summit. We were also able to inform a specific commitment in the ACT Women's Plan for women in the AMC among others.

WCHM has been involved in many discussions with Directorates and Ministers/Advisers in identifying the gaps and issues that we are seeing emerge and advising on possible responses. These have included advice on domestic and family violence, women's access to health services, mental health issues for women, the need for improving responses for women at the AMC, and informing access to Canberra Health Services for women during COVID-19 including to maternity services.

WCHM's advocacy and lobbying also included:

- Engaging the Minister for Corrections and Corrective Services on the need for improved responses for women in the AMC using the stories and views of women in the AMC to guide discussions on improvements needed to policy affecting their health including housing and justice responses;
- Since then we have been working with Ministers Rattenbury and Berry, with ACT Corrections, the Family Safety Hub and ACT Health to discuss possible responses to the gaps and issues in the approaches in the ACT;
- Using the findings from our research into sexual and reproductive health to influence improved responses by influencing discussions with the ACT Government about more affordable access to contraception and termination of pregnancy, resulting in new legislation which gave ACT women greater and more affordable access to medical termination through GPs;
- As a result of advocacy about our report on safety issues for women at ACT bus stops, and
- Used the information from ACT women in the AMC to influence changes in the AMC to the delivery of services and responses for women.

We also hosted a local consultation to inform the development of the National Obesity Strategy.

### **Informing discussions on access to sexual and reproductive health services**

The findings from the research into sexual and reproductive health was used to inform ACT Health and relevant Ministers and advisers about more affordable access to contraception and termination of pregnancy for women.

This resulted in greater access to medical termination medication with new legislation which was introduced giving trained and registered GPs and pharmacists the ability

to prescribe the medication in their own clinics without the requirement of a hospital setting.

This meant that women seeking medical terminations in the ACT no longer have to face the choice between going interstate or paying high costs to access private services. These new laws ensure greater access to safe, reliable and affordable termination and reinforce the right to choose for all ACT women.

### **Informing the Family Safety Hub co-design**

WCHM continued to be involved in informing codesign by the Family Safety Hub, and contributing to the directions that emerged from the co-design.

### **Informing Urban Planning**

WCHM has continued to use the feedback from women from our Safety Mapping Tool and specific consultations to work with ACT planners about what makes certain urban areas safe and unsafe.



### **Submissions**

As relevant opportunities arise, WCHM prepares submissions in response to issues impacting on ACT women's health and wellbeing.

WCHM has disseminated its findings from its work through the following submissions to consultations during 2019-20:

- A submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services: Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT;

- We coordinated 3 Submissions to the ACT Healthy Prison Review (from WCHM, summarising the input of Women in the AMC, and summarising input from ACT women's services); and
- Appearing before the public hearing for the Health, Ageing and Community Services Inquiry into Maternity Services.

### **Representing the views of ACT women on advisory bodies, reference committees, and working groups**

WCHM continued to advocate through representation on committees for greater inclusion of gender sensitive policies, practices and infrastructure relating to women.

WCHM has represented the views of ACT women on many ACT advisory bodies, reference groups and working groups has highlighted the results of our reports and the need for women sensitive approaches to legislative, policy and service delivery through membership on these high level ACT advisory bodies, including:

- As a member of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council;
- a Ministerial Roundtable about the needs of women in the AMC;
- the ACT Women's Summit to inform the ACT Women's Plan;
- a Justice Housing Program ACT Community Roundtable;
- as part of a small Steering Group for a children and young people experiences of DFV project for the Family Safety Hub;
- the Capital Health Network's Community Advisory Council;
- a Reference Group to inform the development of an ACT Women's Offender Framework;
- the First 1000 Days Reference Group;
- the ACTCOSS Peaks group;
- the ACT Justice Reform Group;
- the Maternity Design Working Group for Canberra Hospital for Women and Children Expansion Project; and
- the Canberra Health Services Strengthening Health Responses to Family Violence Steering Committee.

### **Media**

WCHM has strong links with local media and had much coverage this financial year to highlight the issues affecting ACT women and their health and wellbeing including COVID-19:

- **ACT Women and COVID-19 survey** (*ABC Radio Afternoons with Adrienne Francis - April 23rd, 2020*)
- **ACT Women's Honour Role and International Women's Day** (*ABC Canberra Radio Drive with Anna Vidot - March 6th, 2020*)
- **Public Spaces Safety Survey** (*ABC Canberra Breakfast Radio with Lish Fejer - February 25th, 2020*)
- **The surprising science behind lighting** (*ABC Canberra's Facebook page - February 14th, 2020*)
- **The bus stops where women fear for their safety** (*The RiotACT by Ian Bushnell - 3rd December 3rd, 2019*)
- **Gender still a barrier in the ACT jobs market** (*The Riot-ACT by Rebecca Vassarotti - October 24th, 2019*)
- **Uni degrees reap little reward for underpaid community service advocates** (*The Canberra Times by Cassandra Morgan - October 22nd, 2019*)
- **ACT Women's Summit** (*ABC Radio Canberra Drive with Anna Vidot - October 14th, 2019*)
- **Borderline Personality Disorder: Help is at hand and treatment works** (*The RiotACT, October 8th, 2019*)

- **Probing the polls: revenue raising parking fines and safety on the bus routes** (*The RiotACT by Genevieve Jacobs - September 9th, 2019*)
- **Research discovers significant barrier for local LGBTIQ+ women to access health care** (*The RiotACT by Genevieve Jacobs - September 1st 2019*)
- **New transport network raises safety concerns for women at bus stops** (*The RiotACT by Lachlan Roberts - September 2nd, 2019*)
- **Bus stop safety for women (ABC News ACT reported by Tahlia Roy** (*August 21st, 2019*)
- **Same-sex attracted women face ‘troubling’ barriers to healthcare: report** (*The Canberra Times by Kimberley Le Lievre - 18th August 2019*)
- **ACTeenChoices website** (*Drive on ABC Radio Canberra with Melanie Tait - 9th August 2019*)
- **New local website helps teens and their parents navigate tricky conversations** (*The RiotACT by Rebecca Vassorotti - 8th August 2019*)

#### **Key Area 4: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WHAT MATTERS!**

Support women and women’s groups:

- To make informed health and wellbeing choices
- To understand how to access appropriate gender-sensitive services and information that support their health and wellbeing
- By providing capacity building and organisational support for small NGOs and peer-led support groups

**Strategies and actions** include: developing and delivering support for specific sectors or services about the needs of women; training and awareness raising to build understanding of gender issues for services/sectors; capacity building for small organisations; building health literacy in women/groups of women; information provision for women; online support for women; health promotion events; support for women to understand changes in the environment (changes to Medicare, e-health, NDIS); community sector planning, and training and support; skills development/ training of vulnerable groups of women.

We know from our research that ACT women still struggle with finding relevant and accessible information (including local information) that meets their needs, and so WCHM has been focusing on delivering on accessible information in some key areas.

WCHM has continued to work closely with others to look at how we can work with them and share our capacity and skills to complement their work.

#### **Online information for ACT women**

We use a wide range of options to ensure that ACT women are aware of the health choices available to them, and where there are gaps identified by women, we work with women to design responses.

#### **Support women to build their skills to independently access information on health-related issues.**

Our digital platforms collate links for women to follow to access reputable and reliable information. We also support women to build their skills through the use of guidance resources such as the WCHM ASSURED Tool (assisting ACT women to assess whether health and wellbeing information on the Internet is credible or trustworthy).

We also ensure that women can contribute to, and are aware of, the health choices available to them.

This has been achieved through our digital platforms and our many websites (including Having A Baby In Canberra, Borderline in the ACT, the ACT Women's Health Hub, ACTeen Choices, What To Say, and Help Stop DV).

#### Launch of ACTeen Choices website

WCHM launched ACTeenChoices in July 2019 ([www.ACTeenChoices.org.au](http://www.ACTeenChoices.org.au)). We developed the content with input from Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT who are sexual and reproductive health experts.

This website built on the results of WCHM's local research, which found that it was hard for young women (and young men) and their parents to find trusted and local links about sexual and reproductive health (including contraception, STI prevention and treatment, and abortion), what makes a relationship healthy or unhealthy, realistic expectations about sex, the safe use of technology, normal body image, what consent looks like, and where to go for reliable trusted advice and support (local ACT services and trusted online information).

The website provides easy local access to a range of reputable and trusted information sources and resources that are targeted to younger people, and uses a range of technology and methods used by younger people (including animations, images, clips etc) to spark their interest.

#### COVID19 information for women

During the COVID-19 lockdown we developed and maintained an online hub for ACT women which compiled all the information and advice - across the social

determinants of health – that ACT women needed to know about COVID19 (including guidance for parenting and pregnant women). We worked with Canberra Health Services to ensure that we communicated changes to services to women including the changes to visitor numbers for maternity services.

WCHM also shared the same COVID19 information via our Facebook site, and received high numbers of views during that period.

WCHM also maintained its main website and it's other digital information websites to ensure they were updated with relevant COVID19 information – including 'Having A Baby In Canberra', 'The ACT Women's Health Hub', 'Borderline in the ACT', and 'ACTeen Choices'.

#### **Health promotion events**

WCHM held several health promotion events and forums for ACT women to raise their awareness about their health and wellbeing, and to connect them to local services and responses in the ACT.

#### Women's Health Week forum

While we could not hold face to face events or activities during COVID19, we continued to undertake health promotion activities using Facebook and our online mechanisms for key health promotion dates relevant to women including developing articles for social media during BPD Awareness Week, Mental Health Month and Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Week.

#### Women's Health Week

During Women's Health Week MLA Tara Cheyne shared her story about the importance for women of accessing health information and helped us to launch

WCHM's ACT Women's health Hub at an event at WCHM.

And we celebrated Women's Health Week with the women in the AMC, with an art exhibit showcasing art work made by the women with the theme chosen by them, *'My health and wellbeing-what brings me peace'*.

We used promotional material and free gift bags from Jean Hailes Foundation and other information which was sourced from local ACT health providers to provide them with information that the women could take away including pamphlets from a wide range of services and on a wide range of topics such as menopause, heart health for women, nutrition, health checks, mental health, eating well etc.

### **Key Area 5: DOING WHAT MATTERS!**

Ensuring that WCHM:

- Represents a strong and diverse membership
- Is actively engaged with the women we represent
- Is a well governed and managed organisation with accountability and transparency for members, staff, funders and stakeholders
- Has controls in place which ensure compliance with its obligations and legislation

Using the WCHM website and social media WCHM communicates with members and stakeholders about women's health and wellbeing.

The WCHM website is used to ensure up-to-date access to current news and information about events, services, programs, reports, consultations and other matters that may be of interest to ACT women.

WCHM used Facebook to complement our main channels of communication - the WCHM website, our monthly newsletter, and our use of media. Daily posts on Facebook are used to provide regular and up-to-date information on women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and to raise awareness about issues relating to women's health and wellbeing; local events, activities and forums; WCHM's activities, women's health promotion information and events; links with other community events and campaigns; to promote more widely the work we do and our projects, research reports and findings; and to raise awareness around current issues.

We have steadily increased the page likes and reach over the last year on our Facebook page.

The WCHM team prepare and release twelve editions of the monthly electronic newsletter during 2019—20 (plus 2 mid-month editions during COVID-19). This provides an opportunity for WCHM members and supporters to be updated about issues affecting women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and nationally, be informed about upcoming WCHM events, be introduced to the WCHM staff and find out about WCHM projects.

### **Maintaining the highest level of professionalism**

The WCHM Board continues to maintain and review organisational policies and governance processes to ensure efficient, effective and accountable management practices.



## Treasurers Report

The operating result for the financial year ended 30 June 2020 was an operating profit of \$25,635. Total income for the year of \$711,567 represented a 9% increase as compared to the 2018/19 year, mainly due to grant funding. Total expenditure for the year of \$685,932 represented a slight increase as compared to the 2018/19-year total of \$629,042. Retained earnings increased from \$225,694 to \$251,329.

The Board began the financial year in a tight position. It carefully managed the organisation's tight financial position, including undertaking a financial review in the last quarter of 2019, and continues to do so.

As a result of the review at the Board Planning Day in January 2020 the Board agreed to an organisational restructure that reduced operating costs into the future.

The restructure was achieved and then COVID-19 hit but with the impact of the tragic pandemic being positive to the bottom line of the organisation from the Government's COVID cash boost stimulus package. The payments covered some staff tax liabilities in our Balance Sheet and helped with our reserves.

The organisation has also benefited from the impact COVID had on our expenses, with reduced office expenses in the final quarter from the Pearce Centre, reduced promotional and advocacy costs, and travel/parking costs reduced as staff worked from home.

Good news also included our ACT Health contract being increased slightly, as anticipated, and this was supplemented by a few extra grants.

The fabulous news was that in July we were advised that the ACT Government Subsidisation for the pay equity case, which was due to end after 2020, has been continued which will further enhance our bottom line going forward.

All of the above will result in the financial year 2020-21 being a more financially sustainable one for the organisation.

*Jo Schumann, Treasurer*