

Annual Report 2021-22

the voice for women's health and wellbeing in the ACT

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About us

Women's Health Matters (Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.) is an independent, non-partisan think tank that works to improve the health and wellbeing of all women in the ACT and surrounding region. We seek to improve access to health information and enhance knowledge and understanding about the causes of health and illness among anyone who identifies as a woman.

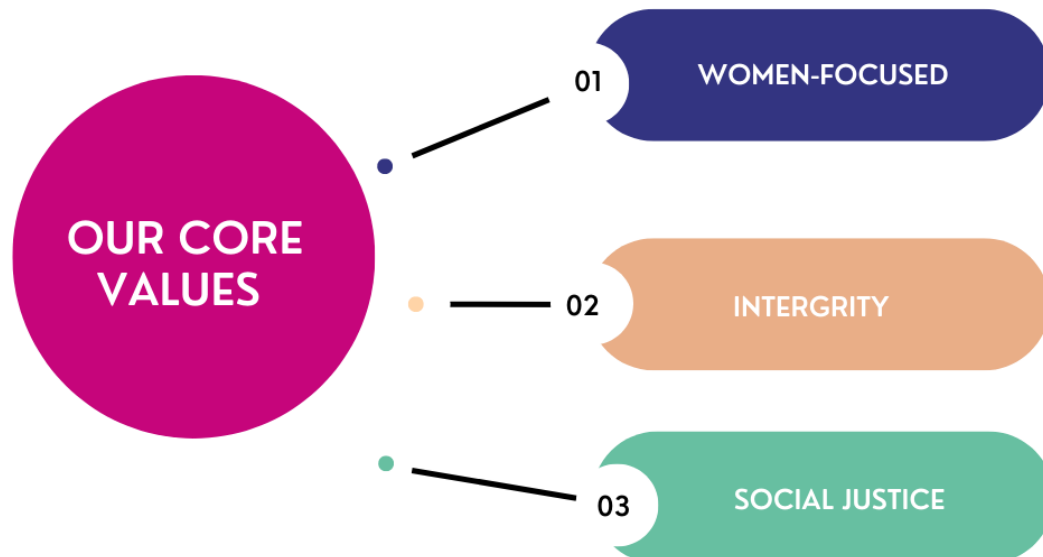
We advocate on behalf of all ACT women, especially those experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability. We want women to feel in control of and understand the determinants of their own health and wellbeing.

We do this through health promotion and by providing evidence-based social research, policy development and advocacy services to governments, the corporate sector, policy makers, service providers and peak bodies.

We are the voice for women's health and wellbeing in the ACT.

Our Vision is that our local research, evidence and data (informed by women for women) is used by decision makers to be more responsive to the needs of women and to improve the health and wellbeing of women in the ACT.

Our Vision is also that our guidance supports ACT women to make informed health and wellbeing choices and to understand how to access appropriate gender-sensitive services and information in the ACT.



The Women's Centre for Health Matters is committed to reconciliation and acknowledges the Ngunnawal People who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the strength of Aboriginal women and their continuing connection and contribution to this land, these waters, and our communities. May we walk gently and treat the earth and each other with care and respect.

Chair's Report

The pandemic continued to impact the world and hit the ACT in earnest this financial year. Once again, this has reinforced the need for women in the ACT to have a voice to support their health and wellbeing.

This year we saw eight Board members return and welcomed Amber Hutchison to the Board. We said goodbye to Dr Melanie Dorrington and Dr Romy Listo, and I would like to acknowledge their contributions to the organisation during their time on the Board.



This year has marked a significant period of change and consolidation for the organisation, which has been supported by the WHM Board and our primary funders, ACT Health. Following the sudden departure of Marcia Williams, our long term CEO, in 2021 we received significant support from ACT Health in allowing Vivien Bevan to be appointed as our interim CEO. Vivien worked closely with the Board during this period to re-build and stabilise the team.

Following an extensive recruitment process, our new permanent CEO, Lauren Anthes was appointed in May 2022. I want to thank Vivien for all of her work during the transition period and welcome Lauren to the organisation. You have both been instrumental in building and unifying the amazingly talented team we now have.

Lauren comes to WHM with significant experience in the health system development and advocacy space across private, academic, not for profit and government sectors. She has a strong interest in health equity and person centered, outcomes driven care. This will be an exciting new phase for the organisation as Lauren works with the WHM team to consolidate the organisation's rebranding and to take forward a number of new strategic priorities to contribute to improving women's health outcomes and health equity in the ACT.

This financial year has seen movement among WHM staff, with the departure of Adelaide Haynes, and Amber Hutchison, who is continuing to support the organisation as a member of the Board. During the year, we welcomed Romy Listo, Merrindahl Andrew, Jodie Kirkness, Lavanya Nithiyananthan, Scarlett Harbin-Owens and Karen Mowat. I would like to commend both departing and remaining WHM staff for their ongoing delivery of outstanding and valuable work.

After six years on the WHM Board, I have reached the end of my tenure and will be stepping down at this year's AGM. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on the WHM Board and am proud of what WHM has accomplished, including:

- robust research reports across a range of important and often overlooked areas impacting women of the ACT (including, views of women with disabilities and older women accessing health services, hidden disadvantage among women in the ACT)

- playing a pivotal role in partnering with and co-ordinating organisations, particularly across the not-for-profit sector to drive more impactful outcomes (such as the establishment of the Assistance Beyond Crisis microfinance facility), and
- a strong history of representing and advocating for women of the ACT to impact policy and effect change (such as impacting new legislation allowing greater access to medical termination medication).

We also have two Board members who will be stepping down at this year's AGM, including the WHM Treasurer, Jo Schumann and Rebecca Smyth. I would like to thank them both for their contribution to the organisation.

Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our stakeholders and members for their ongoing contributions and support to WHM throughout the year.

Renee Dockrill, Board Chair

WHM'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.

2021/22 Board members (at 20 June 2022)

Renee Dockrill (Chair)
Sheena Ireland (Deputy Chair)
Jo Schumann (Treasurer)
Jolene Reece
Mirjana Wilson
Tamzen Armer
Rebecca Smyth
Jennifer Welsh
Amber Hutchison

WHM farewelled Dr Romy Listo and
Dr Melanie Dorington

Chief Executive Officer's Report

2021-2022 has been a year of significant change for WHM and for the women's health landscape more broadly. I have been incredibly privileged to be a part of this change, starting at WHM in May 2022.

I would like to thank Interim CEO, Vivien Bevan and the WHM Board for their leadership through a period of significant flux for the organisation. Vivien worked closely with the WHM Board to recruit several new team members, led the organisation through our 2020/21 Audit, worked with the Board to review the structure of the organisation and worked with the WHM Team to successfully obtain a number of one-off grants for the organisation.



2021/22 Staff Members

Karen Mowat
Dr Romy Listo
Dr Merri Andrew
Jodie Kirkness
Scarlett Harbin-Owens
Lavanya Nithiyananthan
Adelaide Haynes
Amber Hutchison

WHM farewellled Scarlett Harbin-Owens,
Lavanya Nithiyananthan, Adelaide Haynes
and Amber Hutchison

During the year we had new staff commence with the organisation on ongoing and short-term contracts.

I would like to thank the team for their commitment and hard work.

A significant area of focus this year has been reproductive health, in particular abortion access, assisted reproductive technology and supporting reproductive health in the workplace. We have seen Roe v Wade overturned in the USA, triggering a renewed focus on abortion access in Australia. With the inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT, the ACT Government abortion access funding announcement and the federal inquiry into abortion access, 2022/23 will continue to see a strong focus on reproductive health. I look forward to working with ACT health professionals, service providers and people with lived experience to continue to advocate for improved service access,

outcomes and experience in relation to reproductive and sexual health in the ACT.

At WHM we know that Women do health differently. Their health and wellbeing are significantly impacted by social determinants like education, employment, income, access to health services, safe and affordable housing and experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence. For this reason, viewing health from a social determinants perspective has remained central to the research and advocacy work of WHM this year.

In addition to the work we have undertaken in the reproductive health space, throughout the year we have worked with stakeholders and people with lived experience to understand and highlight the needs of ACT women and specific at risk communities in relation to health and key intersectional issues. This has included developing a report that captures the views of ACT women with disabilities, about their health and health needs, experiences and barriers to care.

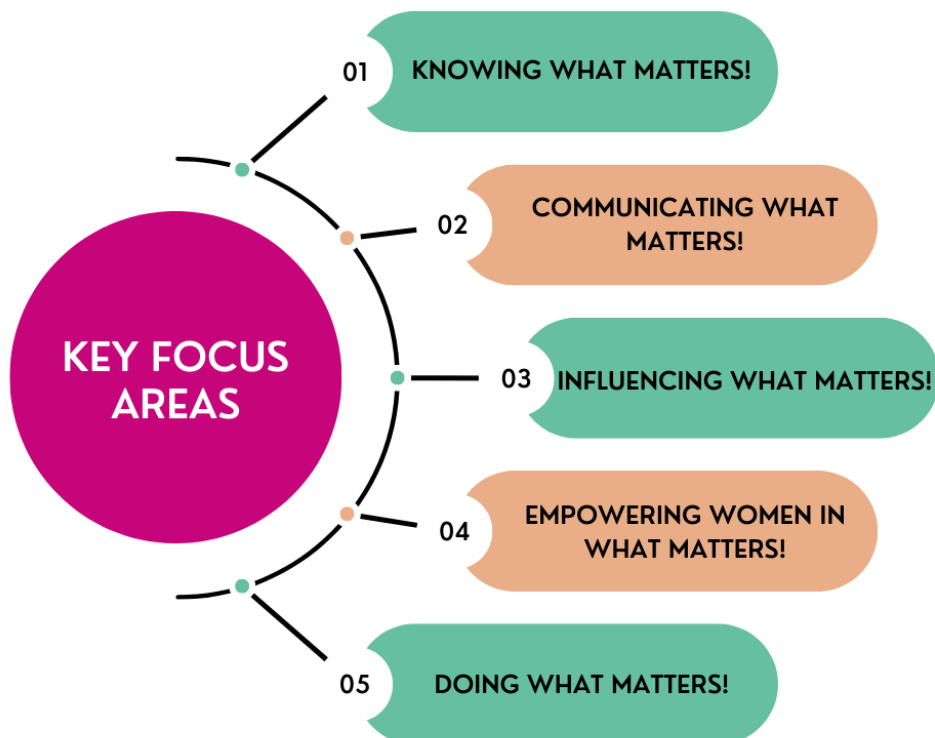
We pride ourselves on our ability to engage with women in the community to ensure that the voices of lived experience are included in reports and submissions to government. This year this included a number of focus groups with particular communities to inform the work we were undertaking, as well as other community engagement activities like our survey on Women's experiences of seeking help following a sexual assault and stalls at community events like University O-Weeks.

2022/23 will be another big year for WHM, as we look to provide evidence based recommendations back to ACT Government on improving access to abortion services, launch our Reproductive Health Leave Policy and call for other ACT employers to do the same, explore options to improve reproductive and sexual health experiences and outcomes and develop and implement key initiatives across the social determinants with specific at risk groups.

Lauren Anthes, Chief Executive Officer

WHM's Key Areas of Focus

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



The Year in Review

Key area 1

Consultation with women in the ACT and surrounds and our research on the social determinants of women's health has informed us in identifying disadvantages women experience, especially those from marginalised groups.

- In 2022, we conducted 2 in-language focus groups in collaboration with Alo Women (in Bengali language) and Canberra Multicultural Women's Forum (in Arabic language) to further inform our research on multicultural women's health.
- In October 2021, the findings from our survey on *Women's experiences of seeking help following a sexual assault* were submitted to ACT Government as part of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program.
- In March 2022, we conducted survey, focus group and interview research on the experiences of people who have had difficulties getting pregnant or becoming a parent, to inform policy and legislative development on Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) in the ACT. Our report on ART was widely referred to in the ACT Government response to the Assembly motion on this topic. Several of our recommendations were adapted into commitments by the government on improving access to and quality of ART in the ACT.
- In March 2022, WHM conducted a focus group to understand and report on lived experiences of mothers, caregivers, and families with children on accessing health services and health information during the first 1000 days of life. Information from this focus group was utilized in a report to ACT Health to inform the development of a *First 1000 Days* strategy.
- In March 2022, we conducted a small survey of ANU students which went on to inform a submission to Suzanne Orr MLA on the exposure draft of the Period Products (Access) Bill 2022.
- In April 2022 WHM successfully acquired funding from the Canberra Foundations Collaborative (Snow Foundation) to deliver a survey on the state of women's health in the ACT. WHM hopes to repeat the survey bi-annually to inform the state of women's health and shifting priority areas over time.
- In July - August 2022, WHM implemented a survey about accessing abortion in the ACT and surrounding regions. The survey collected 102 responses, creating a unique and valuable dataset. In collaboration with health care providers, peak bodies and community organisations and services across the sector, WHM utilised these responses to inform the *ACT Government Inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT*.
- Our online *Canberra Safety Map* continued to inform us about how women feel about public spaces. This is an interactive tool where women can drop a pin on a map and select options about how safe or unsafe they feel about the area. This information is continuously collected and used to inform the design of urban spaces and planning of public transport systems that welcomes more positive and efficient use of the built environment.

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

Key area 2

Women's Health Matters continues to provide ACT women with current and innovative health and wellbeing information.

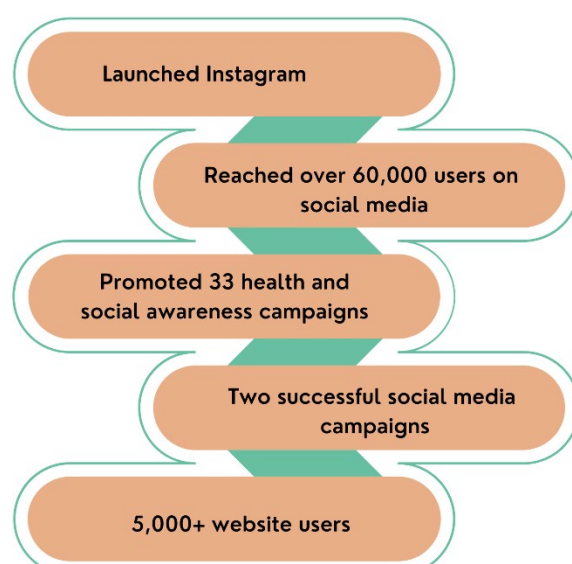
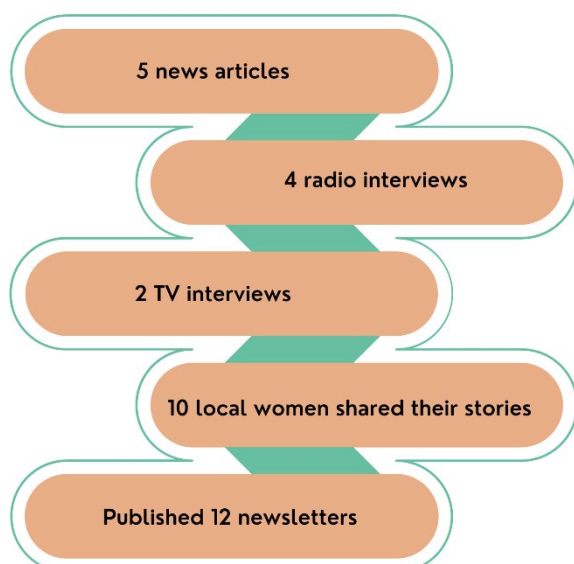
We continue to promote key public health messaging through social media to help with the dissemination of quality health information to women about COVID-19, and other issues such as health screening and domestic violence.

This year we:

- Had our work featured in 5 news articles, 4 radio interviews and two TV interviews
- Put out 12 monthly e-newsletters covering topics such as our Assisted Reproductive Technology survey, TACT Podcast, Period Products Survey, Canberra Safety Map, Sexual Assault Survey and Women with Disability Report
- Broadened our reach on social media with the introduction of an Instagram account and held two successful social media campaigns, Meet the Team and National Diabetes Week.
- Engaged 10 local women to share their stories with the local community
- Created social media content that has reached over 60,000 users
- Developed and maintained website content that has reached over 5,000 users
- Promoted 33 health and social awareness campaigns
- Promoted a range of stakeholder projects including the ACT Disability Health Strategy, Take Control – Live Well Program and Australian Public Service Gender Equity Strategy

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.



Key area 3

Women's Health Matters continued to be a strong voice for ACT women in informing ACT Government and community services. This year we were involved in several discussions with Directorates, Ministers/Advisers and news media in identifying the gaps and issues that impact local women.

- In March 2022, we made a submission to the Woden CIT Campus Consultation based on the Canberra Safety Map, which highlighted women's feelings of being safe and unsafe in the Woden area.
- In early 2021 we conducted research asking women with disabilities about their health and wellbeing and their access to health services and supports in the ACT. This report has since been used as a foundational document for scoping and further consultation on the ACT Disability Health Strategy.

Women's Health Matters' advocacy and lobbying also included engaging with:

- The ACT Minister for Health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and Children, Youth and Families;
- The ACT Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Disability, Employment and Workplace Safety, and Government Services and Procurement and;
- The ACT Minister for Disability, Justice Health, Mental Health and Veterans and Seniors.

Women's Health Matters also represented the views of ACT women on many ACT advisory bodies, reference groups and working groups including:

- National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas;
- ACT Disability Health Strategy Steering Committee;
- as a member of the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council;
- the ACT Justice Reform Group;
- At the Domestic Family Violence Roundtable;
- a Ministerial Roundtable about the needs of women in the AMC;
- 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;
- 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 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.
- Expanding Public Health Care Services for Eating Disorders for the Territory Reference Group

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

Key area 4

Women's Health Matters continued to work with the health system and other services in 2021-22 to deliver a rich assortment of **health promotion** programs to empower local women to better manage their health and wellbeing.

- In February 2022, WHM held a stall at the ANU O-Week Market Day to provide local women with information and resources on health and wellbeing, and delivered a workshop called '*How to Adult: When you need help for your health.*'
- In February 2022, as part of the Women's Participation Grant, we designed navigation series on sexual and reproductive health for young women in the ACT. The project works with young people to create a video series about navigating local sexual and reproductive healthcare in the ACT in order to encourage respectful, enjoyable and safe sexual relationships in younger ACT women.
- In April 2022, WHM successfully acquired funding from the Canberra Foundations Collaborative (John James Foundation, Hands Across Canberra and the Aspen Foundation) to develop and deliver a health literacy education program to support the health and wellbeing of women in the Alexander Maconochie Centre.
- In early 2022 WHM successfully acquired funding from the City Renewal Authority and Office for Women to design and implement a *Women's Safety in Public Spaces* health promotion campaign. WHM will continue to work with stakeholders and members of the community with the goal of increasing women's safety and encouraging their use of public spaces across the Canberra region, utilising the Canberra Safety Map within a broader active bystander approach.

While our ability to hold face to face events and traditional health promotion activities was limited during COVID-19 restrictions, we used Facebook and newsletters throughout the year to provide regular and up-to-date information on women's health and wellbeing in the ACT. This included reminders for regular health checks, promotion of local health and community organisation websites, events, and services.

Our **digital platforms** and our many websites continue to provide information to assist empower local women manage their health; 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, Women with chronic conditions, Sexual and reproductive health for women.

Our **ASSURED** tool continues to assist ACT women to assess whether health and wellbeing information on the internet is credible or trustworthy. We have also updated our resources on **financial issues** for women that promote independence and financial clarity.

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

Key area 5

Women's Health Matters continued to communicate with and support its members and stakeholders about women's health and wellbeing.

Our Board and staff continued to work together to ensure the efficient and effective management of our organisation.

We will continue to implement actions within the Strategy in 2023/23 with the aim of further raising our profile and broadening our membership and readership base so that we can strengthen the value of services we provide for ACT women.

Through our consultations and social research, we actively engage with women in the ACT and provide opportunities to help shape policies and health systems.

For example, women who had experienced difficulties getting pregnant participated in our focus group for our research on Assisted Reproductive Technology. These women expressed a desire to influence service provision, and following publication of our research we were able to report back to them on our recommendations and steps towards improved access. In promoting our research on the health needs of women with a disability, we have shared our findings and heard further from women with a disability in various community and consultative forums.

Key area 5: DOING WHAT MATTERS!

Ensuring that WHM:

- 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

Treasurers Report

The operating result for the financial year ended 30 June 2022 was an operating profit of \$2,116.

Total revenue and other income for the year of \$666,649 represented a 7% decrease as compared to 2020/21 financial year due to the cessation of COVID support funding and other grant sources.

Retained earnings remained stable at \$274,149.

The Association has \$454,225 in cash and cash equivalents at 30 June 2022.

The Association secured funding for \$656,914.94 (GST exclusive), per annum, from ACT Health for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2027. In addition, 4.43% indexation was received for the 2022/23 financial year. While this indexation is welcomed, based on employment conditions under the Social



Community Home Care and Disability Award and other increased operating expenses, the Association will be operating with a deficit from the 2022/23 financial year.

The Association was successful in receiving several short-term grants for 2022/23, including –

- Hands Across Canberra and Aspen Medical Foundation - \$30,000
- John James Foundation - \$20,000
- City Renewal Authority and Office for Women - \$48,567
- Women's Safety Grant – \$19,945
- Snow Foundation - \$25,000

Based on the current cash position and secured funding for 2022/23 financial year, there will be sufficient funding to meet the expenses for the Association in the foreseeable 12 months.

Jo Schumann, Treasurer