

women's
health
matters!

Annual Report 2022–23

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

Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.

womenshealthmatters.org.au

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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.

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

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.

Our Core Values

<i>Informed by women's voices</i>	<i>Respectful</i>
<i>Local and unique</i>	<i>Valuing lived experience</i>
<i>Trusted</i>	<i>Recognising the social determinants of health</i>
<i>Independent</i>	<i>Evidence-based</i>
<i>Equity</i>	<i>Women-focused</i>
<i>Inclusive</i>	

Our Governance

The Board Structure

The Board was comprised of 8 elected members in 2022–23. At each Annual General Meeting, 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 WHM 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 Directors

Thank you to our Board Directors for the 2022–23 financial year:

- Mirjana Wilson (Chair)
- Jenny Welsh (Deputy Chair)
- Jolene Reece
- Tamzen Armer
- Amber Hutchison
- Lisa Anderson
- Claudia Jenkins
- Morag Millington

Women's Health Matters farewelled Renee Dockrill (Chair), Sheena Ireland (Deputy Chair), Jo Schumann (Treasurer) and Rebecca Smyth from the Board.

Board Role

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

The Board is responsible for:

- Establishing strong governance mechanisms and setting the strategic direction 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 six times in each calendar year, but can meet more often to conduct the business of WHM.

This year, the Board has held 6 meetings and a Strategic Planning Day.

Board Committees

Where necessary, the Board sets up committees. In 2022–23, there were three Committees of the Board:

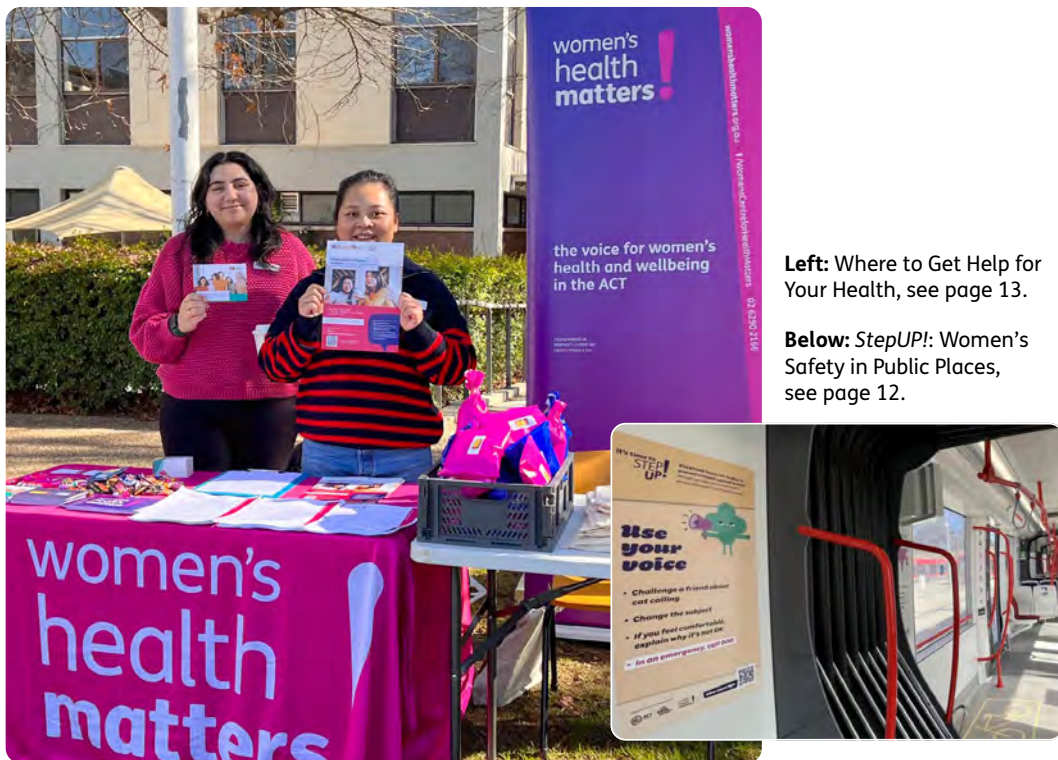
- Governance Committee
- Finance, Risk & Audit Committee
- Strategic Partnerships & Member Engagement Committee

Board Training

New Board members receive an induction, training where needed and access to all the core WHM 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.



Left: Where to Get Help for Your Health, see page 13.

Below: StepUP!: Women's Safety in Public Places, see page 12.

Chair Report



Mirjana Wilson, Board Chair

The 2022–23 financial year has concluded leaving Women’s Health Matters (WHM) in a solid position financially, increased areas of advocacy, exceptionally strong leadership, and a highly skilled staff team to deliver on the strategic and operational goals. This has enabled us to continue in our valued role as an independent, non-partisan think tank that works to improve the health and wellbeing of all women in the ACT and surrounding region.

As an organisation that values good governance with committed board directors, we worked towards updating our Constitution at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October 2022. We are confident that we have a contemporary corporate governance structure to ensure it is robust, future-proof, and fully complies with ACT laws and regulations. The new constitution maintains the “ethos” of WHM and enhances Members rights, including enabling Members to have an advisory, consultative, and counselling role in the strategic direction of WHM.

At the AGM we said goodbye to board directors, Renee Dockrill (previous Chair), Sheena Ireland (previous Deputy Chair), Jo Schumann (previous Treasurer) and Rebecca Smyth. All these extraordinary women contributed to WHM governance activities for a significant number of years. A special mention for Renee who served three terms and was vital in the overseeing of the transition to new leadership when a change in circumstances left the board supporting staff and operations suddenly.

We welcomed new board directors Lisa Anderson, Claudia Jenkins and Morag Millington and consolidated our new board with a wonderful strategic planning day held in February 2023 exceptionally facilitated by Susan Helyar. We are currently developing a new Strategic Roadmap to lead into review of the current plan in 2024–25.

It is appropriate for me to mention that much of what has been achieved this year would not have been possible if WHM was not so capably led by our CEO Lauren Anthes. Lauren completed one year with WHM in May 2023, fulfilling a very successful performance review. Lauren is highly respected both internally at WHM and externally amongst the many and varied stakeholders that the organisation engages with. Of note, is the work that Lauren led on behalf of WHM on the Reproductive Health Policy which was implemented in July 2022 following endorsement by the Board. The Policy has been noted as an example of Best Practice by the Sector Stakeholders and Unions and was an inspiration for a private motion by Suzanne Orr to the ACT Public Service for implementation of a reproductive health policy. It attracted media attention from Women’s Agenda, SBS News and ABC Radio Canberra and further consolidated our role in the ACT community and surrounds.

The board is very much looking forward to what the 2023–24 year will bring as we continue to advocate on behalf of all ACT women, especially those experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability.

CEO Report



Lauren Anthes, Chief Executive Officer

The 2022–23 financial year was a year of growth for Women’s Health Matters (WHM). Following the recruitment of a new team and consolidation of key areas of focus in the 2021–22 financial year, the WHM team has focused on strengthening and expanding the work of the organisation to achieve the organisation’s strategic objectives.

Staffing

WHM’s staff retention rate was 91% for the year. WHM’s staffing profile also grew by 45% with the establishment of the Health in My Language Program.

We welcomed the following new staff:

Health in My Language Team

- Anushe Khan (Project Coordinator)
- Fouzia Jabeen (Bilingual Health Educator)
- Bormey Ken (Bilingual Health Educator)
- Kate Chen (Bilingual Health Educator)
- Nehad Shaaban (Bilingual Health Educator)

Corporate Services

- Molly Stanley (Executive Officer)

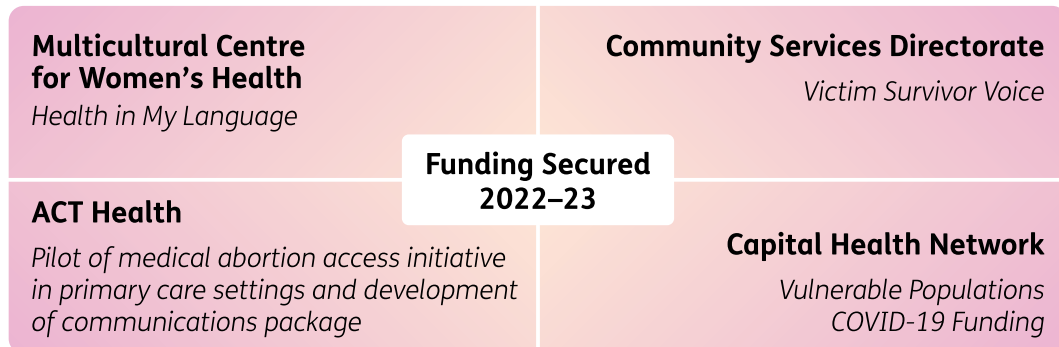
We also said goodbye to Karen Mowat, Executive Assistant. Karen played a core role in supporting the organisation to re-establish and led a significant office refurbishment project.

The following staff chose to remain with the organisation during the reporting period, where they each made significant contributions:

- Jodie Kirkness (Communications Manager)
- Romy Listo (Senior Health Promotion Officer)
- Merri Andrew (Senior Health Promotion Officer)
- Julia Tran (Senior Health Promotion Officer)

Funding

In addition to maintenance of WHM's core grant through ACT Health Directorate, the organisation was successful in being awarded new funding:



Key areas of focus

This year has been a big year for Women's Health, particularly reproductive health. WHM has been responsible for leading ACT community sector consultations and submissions to government to inform policy development and budget initiatives. We have also focused significant resourcing and time on improving access to women's health and safety data in the ACT.

Reproductive Health

- *Survey on Abortion Access in the ACT*
- *Submission into the Inquiry into Abortion and Reproductive Choice*
- *ACT Government Abortion Access Policy community and sector consultation*
- *Development of medical abortion access initiative in primary care settings*
- *Development of communications package for abortion access in the ACT*

Women's Health and Safety Data

- *Report on Survey of Women's Health and Wellbeing in the ACT*

Women from Multicultural Communities

- *Health in My Language sessions delivered to women from CALD communities*

Women's Safety in Public Places

- *StepUP! Active Bystander marketing campaign successfully rolled out across the city centre and public transport*

Ministerial Council appointments

During the year, I was successful in being appointed as a member and Chair of the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council and as a member of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. I look forward to representing the voices of ACT Women in these Councils to achieve positive systemic advocacy outcomes.

I am proud of everything the WHM has achieved this year and look forward to continuing to partner with the community, ACT Government, and the ACT Community Sector to improve the health outcomes of women in the ACT.

Our Team

Health Promotion & Research Team



Julia Tran
Health Promotion
& Research Officer



Dr Merri Andrew
Health Promotion
& Research Officer



Dr Romy Listo
Health Promotion
& Research Officer

Health in My Language Team



Anushe Khan
Project Coordinator



Bormey Ken
Bilingual Health
Educator



Fouzia Jabeen
Bilingual Health
Educator



Kate Chen
Bilingual Health
Educator



Nehad Shaaban
Bilingual Health
Educator

Corporate Team



Jodie Kirkness
Communications
Manager



Molly Stanley
Executive Officer

We are grateful for our new team members and current team members who have chosen to continue with us.

We wish to thank the team for their commitment and hard work.

WHM's Key Areas of Focus

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

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 that 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

Survey of Women's Health in the ACT

Between November 2022 and February 2023, Women's Health Matters conducted a major survey of women's health and wellbeing in the ACT. The survey asked about experiences with health and health services, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, pregnancy and parenting, discrimination, violence, and safety. We collected valid responses from 1668 people.

The survey findings were analysed in the [Report on the ACT Survey of Women's Health](#) and released to a warm reception on 26 July 2023.

The findings of the survey will be used to make the state of women's health and wellbeing in the ACT visible through high quality data, enabling Women's Health Matters and our community partners to advocate for gender responsive health and wellbeing services for all ACT women.

Multicultural Women's Report

Women's Health Matters was engaged by ACT Health in 2021 to assist in creating an information pack outlining health issues for ACT women from multicultural backgrounds.

218 survey responses collected in 2021, alongside in-language focus groups and key informant interviews, has been used to inform a research report that will help improve Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women's access to health and wellbeing information and services.

Survey on Abortion Access

Women’s Health Matters conducted a [Survey on Abortion Access](#). The online survey was open from July to August 2022 and collected 102 responses from women and people with uteruses who had accessed or tried to access an abortion in the ACT or surrounding region. This survey was complemented by consultation with health providers and community organisations.

The research was crucial to inform submissions to the ACT Government [Inquiry into Abortion and Reproductive Choice](#) and the [Senate Inquiry into Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare](#), in addition to recommendations on the implementation of the budget initiative to remove out-of-pocket costs for abortion and post-abortion Long Acting Reversible Contraceptive (LARC) services.

“We’ve learnt through our research how different barriers work together to make it really challenging to access what is a time-sensitive medical procedure.”

Lauren Anthes, CEO, in interview with ABC

Canberra Safety Map

Women’s Health Matters (WHM) continues to invite local Canberra women to share the areas in the ACT where they feel safe or unsafe. The [Canberra Safety Map](#) is utilised to help the ACT City Renewal Authority inform large scale urban design projects.

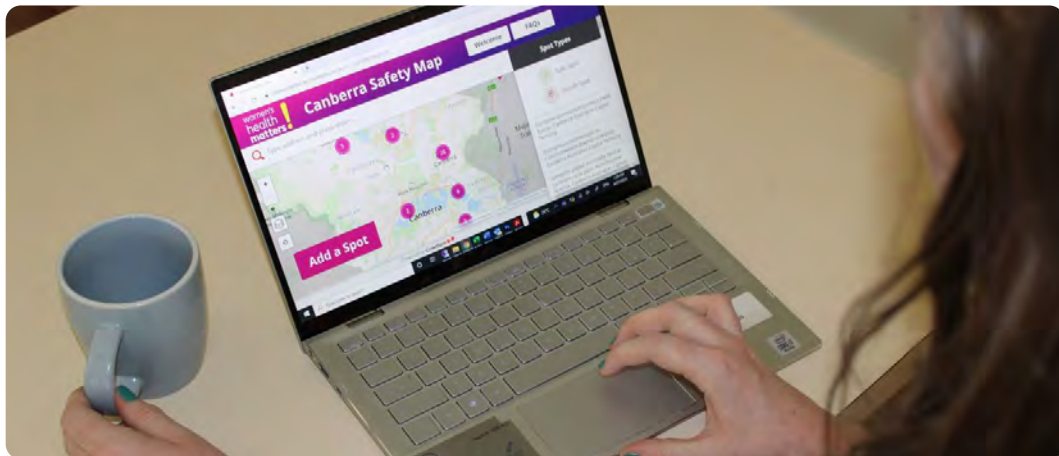
Notably, improvements to Haig Park in Canberra Civic have led to positive outcomes for the community, which have been reflected in the Canberra Safety Map data.

“Women’s Health Matters is the voice for women’s health and wellbeing in the ACT, and through the Canberra Safety Map, we can put local women’s views forward to Government about their safety.”

Vivien Bevan, Interim CEO

“Traditionally unsafe, the new path and new lights make me feel a lot better about walking through here at night and have done so many times now with no issues. Stick to the new well-lit paths!!”

Canberra Safety Map Spot regarding Haig Park, 22 July 2022.



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.

StepUP!: Women’s Safety in Public Places

WHM has developed materials to help increase women’s safety in and encourage their use of public spaces across the Canberra region, with a focus on the Canberra City precinct. This project has been funded by the City Renewal Authority and Office for Women.

WHM hopes the campaign will empower people to challenge disrespect and harassment of women by giving them tools that they can use when they encounter these situations in everyday life.

“Research shows that violence against women is driven by traditional and harmful gender stereotypes that influence our attitudes and behaviours. Violence against women is serious and common, but when you take action, you will have the support of most people around you. You don’t need to be a hero. There are little things you can do.”

Lauren Anthes, CEO, in interview with RiotACT!

“We are partnering with Women’s Health Matters to not only encourage women to speak up about the places where they feel safe or unsafe but also for the general public to step up when they see inappropriate behaviour towards women and girls.”

Yvette Berry MLA, ACT Minister for Women, in interview with RiotACT!

Visit [our website](#) to find more information or download our *StepUP!* Resource Pack to display in your community.

TACT Podcast

Women’s Health Matters has been delighted to support podcast host Jen Seyderhelm in production of the [TACT Podcast](#).

TACT is an educational and accessible podcast series about sex, sexual health, our bodies and identities, and mental health. In each episode, host Jen Seyderhelm joins in conversation with a range of guests who offer judgement-free advice, insight, and information relevant to the lives of all young adults.

TACT is made possible thanks to a YWCA and Beyond Bank grant, and with the support of Women’s Health Matters, and Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT. The series is produced in partnership with The Owl at the University of Canberra.

Where to Get Help for Your Health

The Women’s Health Matters team engaged with local women at a range of community stalls throughout the year. As a part of our community engagement, we have developed a range of fact sheets to help women find free or low-cost services for general, physical and mental health throughout the ACT region.

Find more information on [Where to Get Help for Your Health](#).

On Social Media

FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	LINKEDIN	NEWSLETTER
2100 fans ↑ 200	312 followers ↑ 160	523 followers	467 subscribers
161 posts	131 posts	149 posts	12 newsletters
5.96% engagement rate	11.86% engagement rate	6.97% engagement rate	42.4% open rate
147k organic reach ↑ 93k	11k organic reach ↑ 3.6k	11k organic reach ↑ 4.3k	

In the Media




Our **Reproductive Health Policy** was covered in **3 radio interviews** and **2 news articles**.





Our work on **Abortion and Reproductive Choice** was discussed in **4 radio interviews**, **4 TV interviews**, and **4 news articles**.



Our **Survey on Women’s Health in the ACT** was covered by **2 radio interviews**.




Our **StepUP! Campaign** was covered in **1 radio interview** and **1 news article**.

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

Abortion and Reproductive Choice

Women's Health Matters was one of 20 organisations, health providers and individuals that provided evidence on the need to improve abortion access through detailed submissions, and our representatives were later called to provide evidence into the Inquiry hearing in October 2022.

From 2023, funding will be available in the ACT Government Budget for people to access free medical and surgical abortions for up to 16 weeks. All ACT residents will be eligible for this service, including those without a Medicare card. Women's Health Matters welcomes this news.

In addition, the ACT Government has committed to the development of a communications package to help ensure accessibility and easier navigation of healthcare services available in the ACT.

WHM will continue to work with the ACT Government towards universal access, including expanding the provision of abortion services after 16 weeks in the ACT so women and pregnant people do not need to travel interstate.

“There are significant financial barriers to people accessing termination of pregnancy services in the ACT, particularly for our more vulnerable cohorts. This funding and access for those without Medicare cards will help to reduce these barriers and allow people timely access to these services in the ACT.”

Lauren Anthes, CEO

Period Poverty

Women's Health Matters provided an extensive [Submission to Exposure Draft of the Period Products \(Access\) Bill 2022](#).

We welcome the news that the ACT has since become the first jurisdiction in Australia to provide period products free of charge and ensure that crucial information on menstrual hygiene is available to the community.

Introduced by Suzanne Orr MLA, this legislation in the ACT is a step towards ensuring period products are provided free-of-charge across the country.

Assisted Reproductive Technology

Women's Health Matters 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.

This report explores the factors that people considered in deciding whether to use ART, issues of cost and support, and experiences of pregnancy loss. It describes people's needs for holistic, person-centered care, information and evidence-based treatment, equality, and access, particularly for LGBTIQ+ people and single people.

The [Report on Assisted Reproductive Technology \(ART\) in the ACT](#) was tabled and accepted in the ACT Legislative assembly.

Women's Health Matters...

The infographic is set against a light pink-to-orange gradient background. It features three icons on the left: a group of three people, two speech bubbles with arrows, and a document with a pencil and exclamation mark. Each icon is followed by a text statement.

- Participated in 13 reference groups**
- Engaged in over 70 meetings with key stakeholders**
- Made 8 submissions to government**

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.

Health in My Language

By providing health information and in-language education we can address persistent barriers and support migrant and refugee communities to feel more confident in understanding health information and more able to learn and ask questions in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. Underpinned by a peer-to-peer, strengths-based approach, information is shared in the participant's language and informed by their cultural needs.

The sessions are delivered in key community languages including Arabic, Cantonese, English, Hindi, Kannada, Khmer, Mandarin and Urdu.

Since May 2023, our team of trained bilingual health educators at WHM have delivered 12 sessions in a range of health topics including mental health, sexual and reproductive health, managing chronic conditions, COVID-19 safety and vaccination, and preventative health checks for women.

We have been engaging health care professionals, health service providers, advocacy organisations and community advocates to promote the program, seek input from and collaborate with. 526 people have been reached to date through community engagement and outreach activities.



Raising Respect

As parents and carers, we want our children to be safe, connected, and free to grow as their unique selves. To make this happen, we need to learn how to challenge disrespect and gender stereotypes.

In the past year, Women's Health Matters has run several Raising Respect sessions to help equip parents and carers when talking to their children and others about respect, gender equality and inclusion.

Visit [our website](#) to Download the Brochure, or read our Easy English version of the brochure.

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

Reproductive Health Policy

Women's Health Matters implemented a [Reproductive Health Policy](#) to create a more flexible and supportive work environment for all staff.

Ensuring reproductive health is acknowledged and supported in the workplace is critical in working towards gender equality and will result in improved health outcomes, job satisfaction and workplace productivity.

Since its implementation, the Reproductive Health Policy has informed the development of a private motion to implement period and menopause leave in the ACT Public Service and has also been referred to as Best Practice by the Australian Services Union and Australian Education Union.

WHM encourages all employers to consider implementing reproductive health policies in their workplaces to support their staff.

"We think good reproductive health policies promote gender equality. They're giving social and economic value to invisible gendered demands on reproduction and reproductive health."

Lauren Anthes, CEO, in interview with SBS News

Our Membership

Our members in 2023 consisted of:

- **111** Individual Members
- **3** Organisation Members

Figure 1: Returning v new members

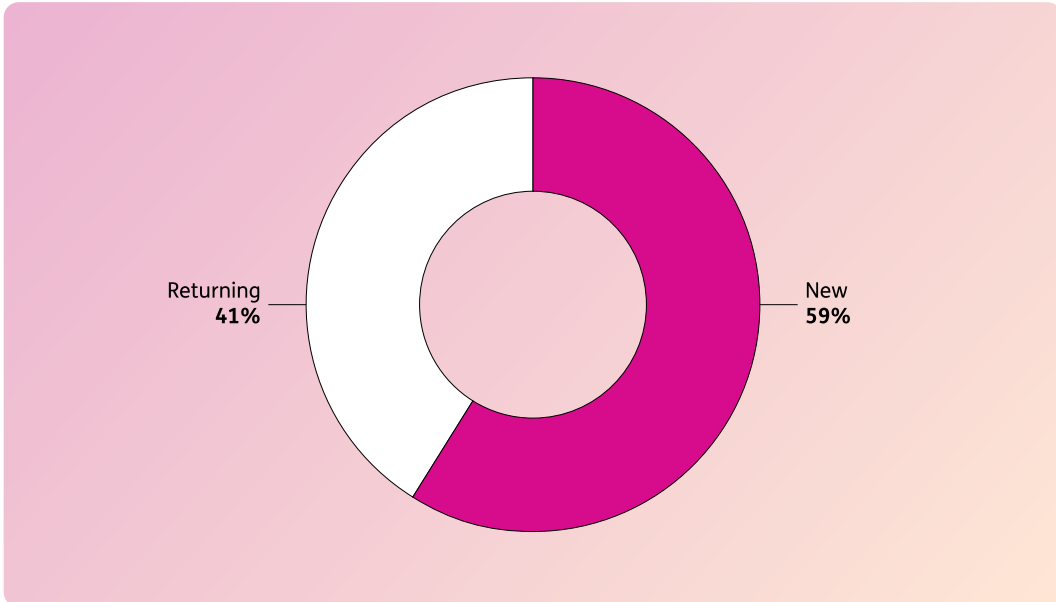
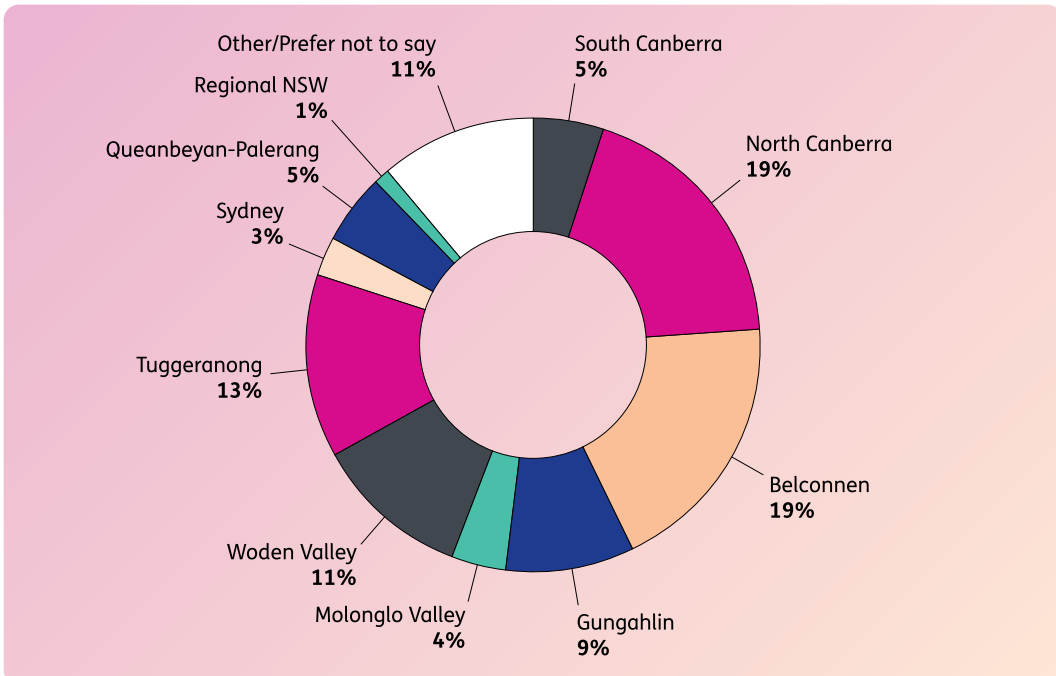


Figure 2: Members by location



Thank you to all our members for your support.

Local Women's Stories

Our [Local Women's Stories](#) feature ACT women who share their experiences of physical and mental health and wellbeing, with the goal that their stories help to raise awareness and help to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Thank you to the local women who have shared their stories with us in the past year!



World Cancer Day 2023
Uniting our voices and taking action



Q&A with Natalie
for Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Q&A with Belinda
for Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Q&A with Fleur and Maddy from Positive Motion
for Women's Health Week 2022



Q&A with Erin
for National Diabetes Week 2022



Q&A with Maeve
for Pelvic Floor Health

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