



WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN THE NORTH

voice • choice • power

1991  
2016

*Celebrating 25 years of*

WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN THE NORTH

[whin.org.au](http://whin.org.au)

BREAK THE SILENCE  
THE NORTH SAYS NO!  
TO FAMILY VIOLENCE.



“ We never  
forget who we are  
working for – **women**.

We work in an organisation  
that embodies our beliefs and  
values, in an environment  
that is inclusive and  
consultative. ”

Adriana Uteda,  
staff member



Original premises, 1991



Staff member Cecilia Palma (in red) with women from WHIN Italian Group



Voula Messimeri AM, founding WHIN Board member and Chair of Board

**Women's Health In the North** (WHIN) opened its doors in 1991 as a drop-in centre, library and telephone help line for women living and working in Melbourne's north. Known originally as the North East Women's Health Service, WHIN's work supported women of non-English speaking backgrounds and tackled issues such as mental health, alcohol and drugs, and ageing. At this time, WHIN serviced the municipalities of Whittlesea, Preston, Northcote, Heidelberg, Eltham and Diamond Valley.

**Women and Mental Health Projects**  
- refugee and migrant women

**Older Women's Projects**  
- alternatives to medication, targeting isolated women

**Sexuality and Reproductive Health of Arabic and Turkish Young Women**

**Women and Work**  
- injured women workers, multilingual Workcover pamphlets

**Beyond the Tradition**  
- female genital cutting

**Women's Sexual Health Education**  
- refugee and migrant women

**Alcohol and Drug Service Utilisation among People of Non English Speaking Background**

1991

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

1995

**Joan Kirner**  
Victoria's first female Premier

**Fourth World Conference on Women**

**Beijing Declaration**  
calls nation states to address and report gender inequality

Since our creation, WHIN has evolved from a service conducting short term projects to promoting women's health, safety and wellbeing in a more strategic, policy-oriented way by:

- Providing health information and education to women and organisations
- Developing policy and research
- Creating innovative resource materials
- Training health and welfare professionals on issues affecting women's health and wellbeing, and
- Supporting and partnering with other organisations on issues of strategic importance.



Staff at 'Food, Pay, Love' event in 2015, from left Alyssa Duncan, Debra Parkinson, Ain Cohen, CEO Helen Riseborough, and Toni Bentley

Our work focuses on prevention of violence against women, coordination and integration of family violence services, sexual and reproductive health, economic participation, gender and disaster, gambling and environmental justice. WHIN has shown itself to be nimble and adaptable, harnessing online and digital technologies for information provision, training and resource development.

WHIN's feminist approach values all women, listens to their voices, learns from their experience, and supports their choices. This approach acknowledges that women are disadvantaged by the unequal distribution of wealth and power between women and men, that gender is a determinant of women's health, safety and wellbeing. By addressing gender inequities, WHIN aims to achieve equitable and just health, safety and wellbeing outcomes for women.

“ A key challenge is that it's really unwelcome work, we're **challenging the status quo**. People who are beneficiaries of the current system are going to resist change, even if it's passive resistance. ”

Debra Parkinson, staff member

Golden Girls - self-sufficiency for older women

Maori and Pacific Islander Women's Health Network

Somali and African Women's Support Groups

Koori Women's Project

Young Women's Health and Homelessness - including Chat and Chew

Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program (FARREP) funded, ongoing

Newly Arrived Women Talking About Family Violence

Still Singing, Still Dancing, Still Imagining Peace

1996

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

2000

**Hockeyroos** most successful side in history of women's hockey after 8th consecutive major title win

**Dawn Casey** first Indigenous woman to head a national institution, National Museum of Australia

**Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999**



Participants at 'Body Moves: A Cultural Journey Through Dance'



Performer Ruby Hunter, centre, with WHIN women at the 1998 AGM



'Golden Girls' participant practising home maintenance skills

## In the Beginning

**WHIN** emerged from the work of the North East Region Women's Health Network, a group of women from a range of community groups initiating local projects to benefit women. Network members assisted numerous migrant and refugee women on a weekly basis, and thus identified the health needs and specific language groups of the women. The Network formed a working party with the express task of developing a women's health service in the north east metropolitan area.



“What makes us unique is that **we're a feminist service**. Who else talks about being overtly feminist? The women's health services, the family violence sector and sexual assault services, that's it. We're proud of that, we're drawing on it.”

*Sandra Morris staff member*



● Jen Missing, Souad Mourad and Ethnic, Municipal and Community Affairs Minister, Mrs Hogg, at the health service launch earlier this month.

## Service off to healthy start

Article in local newspaper *The Leader* at the service's launch, 1992

Following a feasibility study, a funding submission was made in 1989 to the Health Department of Victoria. The submission proposed a service for all women in Melbourne's north east with a focus on women of non-English speaking background. Funding was approved in late 1990 and an interim Committee of Management was appointed by the Health Minister to establish the service.

Before incorporation in late 1992, the service was auspiced by the Lalor and District Community Health Centre and the appointed coordinator worked from an office at the centre. Her immediate task was to find premises and appoint administrative staff. By October 1991, 76 Edwardes Street Reservoir had been leased. Caroline Hogg, Minister for Ethnic, Municipal and Community Affairs officially launched the service in March 1992, and it remained in Reservoir for the next ten years.

In the mid 1990's, WHIN's catchment increased to take in the newly defined 'Northern Metropolitan Region'. WHIN now services the local government areas of Darebin, Banyule, Hume, Moreland, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Yarra, an area covering more than 1,600 square kilometres from inner city Richmond to remote parts of the Kinglake Ranges. The region contains suburbs diverse in ethnicity, socio-economic status and infrastructure. Over 35 percent of women currently living in WHIN's catchment area were born outside of Australia, in Italy (8.7%), the UK (5.6%), Greece (3%), China (2.3%) and Iraq (2.3%).

In 2002, WHIN moved to its current premises at 680 High Street, Thornbury. The Thornbury premises were formally opened by John Thwaites, Acting Premier, and Mary Delahunty, Minister for Women's Affairs and WHIN member.





Reading the Royal Commission Into Family Violence Report, 2016

“The work on **family violence prevention** [has been] the biggest challenge because we have such a crisis in our society in relation to women continuing to experience violence and for some women that resulting in death, such an urgency around fixing it and yet no quick fixes. ... Organisations like WHIN are absolutely critical to helping the government understand it, how we address gender inequity which is at the base of this problem. But that's change over a generation, which is frustrating, when we want the violence to stop now.”

*Susan Rennie, former Board member*

“For a small organisation [WHIN] really can **make a difference to women's lives**. [What's exciting about working at WHIN] is influencing, networking, advocacy and partnering with other organisations ...”

*Kathleen Walsh, former CEO*



Equal pay rally, 2010

Social activist Molly Hadfield OAM was an inspiration for WHIN over many years, attending each International Women's Day event and AGM, and keeping the flame of women's rights alight. Throughout her 90-years, Molly fought for better conditions for women, the aged and those experiencing housing insecurity.

2011

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- For Love or Money - financial abuse DVD
- Preventing Violence Against Women Advisory Committee established
- Increasing the Odds for Safety and Respect - gambling and family violence project
- Submission to Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence
- Healing Together - family violence group work manual
- Identifying Family Violence training for professionals commenced
- Week Without Violence began regional coordination of activities
- Submission to Victorian Government Gender Equality Strategy Consultation

**Julia Gillard's 'misogyny speech'**

**Managing Money: Every Woman's Business**  
- A Guide to Increasing Women's Financial Capability

**Building a Respectful Community – Preventing Violence Against Women**  
- A Strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016

**Gender restrictions on Australian Defence Force combat roles removed**

**Natasha Stott Despoja**  
Global Ambassador for Women and Girls

**RU486**  
emergency contraception introduced



Staff member Chamut Kifetew at a 'Going South in the North' forum



Performer Ajak Mabia at the 2012 AGM



Members event at CERES at environmental park, 2011

**Current WHIN priorities include:**

- Improving women's health outcomes through gender analysis: Imparting expertise on gender as a key determinant of women's health, conducting research and creating resources that provide gendered data to policy and program development, and applying a gendered lens to issues impacting on women's health, including women's financial capability, gambling, and the effects of environmental and economic change
- Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights: Providing leadership, resourcing and promoting women's sexual and reproductive health, and leading the implementation of a regional strategy
- Preventing violence against women: Providing leadership; identifying, building on and resourcing strategic partnerships to prevent violence against women
- Coordination and support of family violence services in the region: Providing leadership for regional integration of responses, disseminating information, delivering training and facilitating links between local, regional and state-wide family violence governance structures
- Providing a gendered perspective on climate change and environmental disaster: Influencing emergency management policy and planning, conducting research and delivering professional development

WHIN is part of a state-wide network of women's health services funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human

Services (DHHS) to provide health promotion programs and services.

Worked with councils in northern region to enhance their work in gender equity, developed/delivered gender equity and gender analysis training and forum for council staff

Going South in the North - A Snapshot of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Status of Women Living in the Melbourne's NMR

A Strategy for Going South in the North 2016-2021 - health strategy launched

Northern Metropolitan Region Sexual and Reproductive Health Network established

Living Longer on Less - women's retirement incomes produced with WHGNE

Gender and Disaster (GAD) Pod, GAD Taskforce and website established with WHGNE and Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative

Position paper on impact on women's health of climatic and economic disasters commissioned

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**

**2016**

Women, Lawyers, Workers - improving legal access for those leaving violent relationships with Women's Legal Service Victoria, Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) and Berry Street

Second National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children launched

First Australian conference on natural disaster and family violence held with WHGNE and Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse

Victorian Government launched Victoria Against Violence campaign

Linda Burney first indigenous woman elected to House of Representatives



Staff member Toni Bentley with participants at financial literacy workshop, 2013



WHIN staff at 'Building a Respectful Community' Strategy Endorsement Event, 2013



Staff member Catherine Reidy, right, at a women's homelessness event, 2010

## Future Directions

We continue to see high rates of sexual assault and violence against women. Gender inequities persist in pay, superannuation and political representation. **A strong women's health sector is crucial** to ensuring that women have access to resources, opportunities to participate in all aspects of life, and are empowered to make decisions regarding their health and social wellbeing. WHIN is well positioned to provide regional leadership and expertise on women's health and social justice issues, build and resource strategic partnerships, contribute to the evidence base on women's health, safety and wellbeing, and advocate with, and on behalf of, women in our region.

“It's been very important for [WHIN] to be **grounded in the community**. [Early on] it was a really core focus of the service which in some ways wasn't realistic because the catchment is absolutely huge, with hundreds of thousands of women. WHIN is now much more strategic in trying to influence change at a different level as well as providing services.”

Jen Missing,  
former Coordinator

Essential to WHIN's success is that we perform the functions of a 'backbone' organisation, supporting and working with other parties on issues of strategic importance. An example of this role is WHIN's leadership in the integration and coordination of the regional family violence services and prevention of violence against women. This approach also guides our work in gender equity, gender and disaster, environmental justice, financial capability and sexual and reproductive health.

WHIN's future work will involve pushing our influence out even further out into various communities, for example into early years education, business, and sporting clubs. CEO Helen Riseborough comments, "We need to seriously look at those most disadvantaged, [that's] where our effort should be most focused, so for example ... indigenous women, homeless women, culturally diverse women and women with disabilities."

“We've developed into new spaces like working with early childhood education providers and with the emergency services sector with the Gender and Disaster work. There's been a great take up by local government of the gender equity work and we have **strengthened our work on sexual and reproductive health** in the region and are far more recognised by others as the leaders on these issues.”

Helen Riseborough,  
CEO



Participants at 'Girls Talk Health' workshop, 2013



Staff members Sandra Morris, left, Carmen Hawker and Annie Douglass, right, at White Ribbon Day event, 2014.



Financial literacy workshop in Lalor, 2012



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