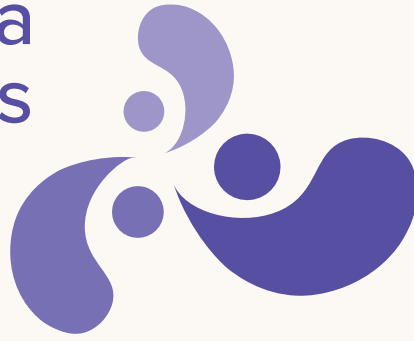


Illawarra  
Women's  
Health  
Centre

Established 1986



# Strategic Plan

2023 - 27

Health, safety and equality  
for women and girls.



## Acknowledgement Of Country

Our Centre is situated on the land of the Dharawal Nation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land, where the Aboriginal people have performed age-old ceremonies of storytelling, music, dance and celebration.

We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present, for they hold the memories, traditions and hopes of First Nations people.

We must always remember, that under the concrete and asphalt, this land is, was, and always will be, traditional Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge that we work in the context of generations of resilient, strength-based, holistic resistance to violence in First Nations communities.

We commit to actively supporting and promoting the voices of First Nations people and organisations in our work, and continuing to work on decolonising our views and actions.

# Foreword

## **Introduction by Chairwoman, Judy Daunt and Executive Director, Sally Stevenson AM.**

For over 35 years, the *Illawarra Women's Health Centre* has supported girls and women in the Illawarra to understand and address their health needs. Our Centre provides this critical service in a professional, caring and empowering way. We assist all women who walk through our door, regardless of age, ethnicity, sexuality or ability. Our Centre is a safe place. We put words into action in a way that demonstrates to women how they should be treated in all aspects of their lives: with respect, dignity and kindness.

Our approach to health is underpinned by a social determinants of health framework. This, combined with ongoing research and a culture of actively listening to, respecting and incorporating women's experiences and expertise, means we continually respond to and integrate our community's changing health needs into our services and programs.

We are a holistic and mature women's health and wellbeing organisation with a long-standing reputation for excellence and innovation. Operating from a place of strength, capability and confidence places us in a strong leadership position. We provide accessible and demonstrably cost-effective support to women in vulnerable and marginal circumstances, especially women unable to access relevant and reliable mainstream services in a timely manner. With over 3,000 women a year attending the Centre, we are a vital and dynamic component of the primary health care system in the Illawarra.

**As a proudly agile, fearless and creative organisation, this strategy will guide our programs' direction and inform how we build our capacity and sustainability.**

This sets an ambitious agenda for the next five years: to increase our support for individual women and girls; and to raise awareness of, and increase our impact on, the systemic issues that continue to marginalise and negatively impact women's health. Central to all consideration and action is our commitment to listen, hear and stand with all women. In developing the strategy, the Council of Women drew on the experience and perspectives of our staff, clients, volunteers, and community partners, as well as current health trends impacting our community, and research indicating the trajectory of such trends.

As a proudly agile, fearless and creative organisation, this strategy will guide our programs' direction and inform how we build our capacity and sustainability. It retains what has been distinctive and effective about our approach and builds on our ongoing learning and experience. It also provides a clear strategic framework for assessing our progress and impact.

In particular, we intend to grow our services for single mothers as they navigate the complexity of parenting, and cost of living and social isolation challenges; for young women who are experiencing increasing rates of mental health issues; for older women who are the fastest growing demographic experiencing homelessness; and for women with disabilities, 90% of whom experience sexual assault and domestic and family violence.

Over the next five years, individually and as Centre, we commit to ongoing and active learning about the strength, resistance, and resilience of First Nations people; an ongoing appreciation of the gracious and generous opportunity afforded to us by the invitation to walk alongside them as part of the Uluru Statement of the Heart; and to reflect on, and act to, reduce the immense and deeply harmful challenges that First Nations women and their families face through colonisation, including trans-generational trauma. In addition, we aim to provide quality health and wellbeing services that are informed by the Community, are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and wants of First Nations women and their families, and to partner with and learn from First Nation organisations.

**We will always raise our voices to advocate for social and cultural change so that women in our society are respected, equal and healthy.**

# Who We Are

## Our Vision

Women and girls are respected, safe, healthy, and supported to lead rewarding lives.

## Our Purpose

To improve the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of women and girls, and ensure their views, engagement and experiences inform decision making at all levels.

## What We Do

We are a community-based women's health centre run by women for women and girls.

## Our core business includes

- **Free or low-cost individual and group health care:**
  - Medical, including sexual and reproductive health services.
  - Mental health care services.
  - Domestic and family violence and sexual violence support
  - Complementary therapeutic and wellbeing programs.
- **A woman-centred safe space for social support and community activities.**
- **Health education and outreach programs.**
- **Advocacy and social change strategies to improve policy and services impacting women and girls.**

We support feminist health initiatives, and organisations or services that respond to unmet needs, gaps, challenges or prejudices in services and systems that impact women's and girls' health.

We stand and act in solidarity with First Nations peoples in their struggle for healing, recognition and justice. We support the implementation, in full, of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

## Our Values

The *Illawarra Women's Health Centre* values are grounded in progressive feminism and the proud history of women's health centres. Together, our values reflect our belief in women's ability to define their health needs and take responsibility for their health and wellbeing.

We respect the powerful voice of women with lived expertise, including victim-survivors, and understand that their experience, knowledge and insights bring invaluable contributions to policy development, advocacy, and program design and implementation.

## Respect

We treat all women with care, dignity and respect.

## Equity

We reach out to women and girls at high risk, and we stand with all women as we fight for justice and equity.

## Diversity

We respect women's diversity across age, race, culture, ability, relationship and parenting status, sexuality, gender and intersex status.

## Compassion

We provide a caring, non-judgemental and woman-centred approach to service delivery.

## Integrity

We are honest, transparent, and trustworthy.



## Our Approach To Women's Health

We operate from feminist foundations and through a feminist lens that is reflective, flexible and forward thinking. This means we understand and value women's lived experience and expertise, and recognise the continued discrimination and structural inequality we face in our communities and Australian society. It also means we recognise the ongoing need for a gendered analysis and approach to health, continuing empowerment of women and girls, and strong advocacy for gender equity and women's rights.

We embrace a social view of health, as framed by the *World Health Organisation*, and reflected in Australian federal and state health policies. This view recognises that health status is shaped by the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Factors such as financial security, affordable housing, education, employment, disability, racism, locational disadvantage, gender inequality and discrimination based on sexual identity and preferences cause health inequalities which impact individual health outcomes.

Our feminist beliefs and social view of health shape our approach to women's health, and they underscore why our focus on marginalised and disadvantaged women and girls is so important.

**The Illawarra Women's Health Centre is a nationally accredited community health service. We are committed to excellence in service delivery and continuous quality improvement and learning, guided by national standards, lived expertise and research.**



# Our Strategic Direction

# The Outcomes We Work For

## 1. That women of all ages accessing our services, programs and groups:

- Can exercise choice and control over their health and how their health needs are met.
- Experience improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Feel connected, valued and empowered.
- Receive timely information and specialist advice directly and through referral to other services – on a range of issues, including sexual and reproductive health, mental health, domestic and family violence, sexual violence, housing, legal matters, relationship breakdown, child protection and financial management.

## 2. That girls are supported to make healthy life choices and can access safe and personal support when needed.

## 3. That the health and community service system in the Illawarra and, where relevant across NSW and Australia, is accessible, reliable and effective for women and girls, especially those at risk of poor physical and mental health.

# Context and Positioning

Over the five years of the last strategic plan, there have been negative seismic and destabilising changes in our world – both locally and globally. At the commencement of this plan in January 2023, our communities and, in particular women and girls, will continue to face significant and specific challenges.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual, domestic and family violence rates, as well as mental illness rates, will be very high for many years to come. The full effect of Long COVID is still to be seen and understood. The housing and homelessness crisis in the Illawarra has no foreseeable end unless radical just and resourcing changes are made urgently. The increasing cost of living, the soaring price of energy, and the potential global recession will impact disproportionately those in the most vulnerable and marginalised circumstances.

The impact of climate change currently and in the future including natural disasters, food and water crises and global migration will inevitably result in loss, grief and trauma that will reverberate through the generations.

The Illawarra Women's Health Centre - relatively small as we are - will continue to provide services within this context, and we will work to understand how these overarching political, economic, cultural, and climate change forces will affect women's daily lives, their health and access to health services. We will continue our fight for health, education, racial and climate equity, and safety and justice.

## Priority Focus Areas

With a strong and positive reputation and an increasing demand for our services and programs, we envisage a period of growth to meet the ever-increasing needs of women and girls in the Illawarra and improve equitable access to our services. Building on the Centre's current strengths and to address significant gaps in health services for women and girls, we will have a primary focus on three health domains:



The Centre will continue to prioritise population groups with high or complex needs, both directly and in collaboration with other organisations, services and government agencies committed to improved outcomes and systems change. **These population groups include the following:**

- **First Nations women**
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse women**
- **Women from the LGBTIQ+ population**
- **Victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and sexual violence**
- **Women with a disability**
- **Young women and girls (aged 10-25 years)**
- **Older women facing financial hardship, isolation and homelessness**
- **Women seeking family law justice and/or support following the removal of their children**



## Goal One

**Strengthen the core women's health service offering in the Illawarra.**

### Strategies

- Develop a business model that enables the Centre to retain and access GPs specialising in women's and girls' health to work alongside nurses and other health professionals.
- Expand sexual and reproductive health services available through the Centre, including access to free contraception and abortion.
- Increase service levels to match demand by securing additional resources, reducing waitlist times and offering services after hours.
- Advocate for and establish one or more additional sites to ensure access to women's health services and programs in central and northern Illawarra areas.
- Improve awareness of the Centre's health services among recently arrived migrants and women from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Maintain the Centre's multidisciplinary approach to health and wellbeing, explore new ways to optimise women's experience and facilitate access to the full suite of health services.

# Goal Two

## Expand and improve the quality of individual and group programs, community engagement and social collaboration.

### Strategies

- Build capacity to offer the Centre's group activities and wellbeing programs to more women and girls in ways that better reflect the diversity of women in the community.
- Develop community partnerships and initiatives focusing on prevention, early intervention, and health education targeting high-risk populations of women and girls.
- Increase organisational partnerships to collaborate, deliver and/or co-facilitate workshops, groups and programs.
- Continue to build relationships and community connections with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.
- Strengthen outreach, consultation, and engagement with women and girls who could benefit from the Centre's services and programs and utilise their expertise to design and improve services.
- Ensure the current facility and future sites remain welcoming, safe, and accessible, and provide the versatility needed for workshops, groups, celebratory gatherings and social networking.
- Expand our Young Women's Program, which focuses on empowerment, resilience, self-protection, and care.
- Progressively work on contemporary understandings of sex, gender and sexuality for women and how the Centre can provide inclusive and safe services to all women.
- Strengthen the Centre's offering through a variety of platforms, including on-site, online and through community outreach, to offer women and girls choice and flexibility in how they access health information, advice and support.



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## Goal Three

**Maintain the Centre's position as a recognised expert and trusted voice on women's and girl's health matters, by advocating for women-led social change on critical new or ignored issues.**

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### Strategies

- Continue to partner with the University of Wollongong and other research institutions to build the evidence base of community needs, including in relation to the impact of service delivery and advocacy initiatives.
- Build a network of women with lived health and violence expertise who can advocate to decision makers, and therefore contribute to policy and program design, implementation and evaluation.
- Advocate for affordable and accessible abortion services in the Illawarra, plus the expansion of sexual and reproductive health services more generally.
- Advocate for single mothers, whose health and wellbeing are impacted twice as much by their parenting responsibilities and the social, legal and economic injustices they experience.
- Maintain a high awareness of the housing crisis facing women and girls in the Illawarra and advocate for timely access to long-term safe, secure and affordable housing for women, particularly older women, single mothers and women who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- Challenge the objective representation and abusive and degrading treatment of women, particularly within the media and the pornography industry.
- Collaborate with others within the women's health services network to revitalise national and state women's health policies and increase funding for women's health services.

## Goal Four

**Build the governance, business and practice model for the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre to ensure its success.**

### Strategies

- Lead and resource the *Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre* through the planning and implementation phase.
- Manage further development of the business and practice model during the transition of the *Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre* becoming a separate and independent legal entity.
- Work to maintain political capital and strong engagement with NSW and Australian Government health agencies, as well as local government.
- Continue to convene the high-level working group to ensure ongoing regional support for the initiative.
- Build marketing and communication strategies that position the *Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre* for regional success and national replication.
- As this *Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre* becomes operational, refocus the *Illawarra Women's Health Centre's* work with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to referral for crisis assistance and ongoing therapeutic support.



## Goal Five

**Build the Centre's organisational capabilities and capacities critical to future sustainability and success.**

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### Strategies


- Increase base funding for the Centre and develop strategies to achieve more diversified and stable funding.
- Continue to leverage the Centre's strong reputation as an initiator of new programs to attract funds and improve women's services in the Illawarra.
- Invest in the capabilities and capacities needed to deliver on this Strategic Plan, including recruitment of doctors, fundraising, public relations, advocacy and community mobilisation.
- Utilise increased funding and employment conditions to achieve a healthier balance between full-time and part-time staff and improve employee salaries and conditions.
- Ensure strong succession planning for key leadership roles and foster a culture of staff care and opportunity.
- Provide for strong governance of the Centre through a stable, capable and committed Board.







## Illawarra Women's Health Centre

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 **Open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm**