

Illawarra
Women's
Health
Centre

Established 1986



NSW Pre-Budget
Submission
2024-2025

**SECOND SITE IN
NORTHERN ILLAWARRA**

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey, MLC
Treasurer
NSW Treasury
GPO Box 5469 SYDNEY NSW 2001
Via: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/ministers/treasurer>

CC: The Hon. Chris Minns, MP, Premier
The Hon. Ryan Mark MP, Minister for Health and Minister for Regional Health
Anna Watson MP, Member for Shellharbour
The Hon. Jodie Harrison, MP, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

5 March 2024

Dear Treasurer

The Illawarra Women's Health Centre welcomes the opportunity to make this 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission to the NSW Government. The content of our Pre-Budget Submission has been discussed with the Hon. Ryan Park MP, Minister for Health and Minister for Regional Health, Anna Watson MP, Member for Shellharbour, the Department of Regional NSW, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, and other relevant government and community stakeholders.

We seek investment of \$10,000,000 over three (3) years, followed by recurrent operational funding specified in Table 2 (Page 9), from the NSW Government to establish a second site located in the Northern Illawarra. This will offer the significant cohort of disadvantaged women in this area the same comprehensive range of multi-disciplinary services provided at our current site in Warilla.

This Submission draws on the extensive knowledge, expertise and experience of the Centre in identifying the need and rationale for a second site and provides evidence-based qualitative and quantitative data to support it.

Please note that this Submission will outline the case for a second site in two stages:

1. An interim site for up to 3 years – to be funded in 2024-25

2. A permanent site which will house the Illawarra Women's Health Centre, Northern Site in the long-term – to be funded commencing 2025-26

ABOUT THE ILLAWARRA WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE

Our Centre has delivered evidence-based, multi-disciplinary clinical, therapeutic and holistic healthcare services to the Illawarra community since 1986. 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.

Nationally accredited, the Illawarra WHC has a focus on mental health, women experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault, and sexual and reproductive health. The community-based Centre sees over 5,000 women a year and has an exceptional reputation, providing integrated care and social support to women with complex needs. Its social model of health and community development approach to service delivery strongly utilises and nurtures its partnerships with other local services including Women Illawarra, Healthy Cities, Supported Accommodation and Homelessness Services Shoalhaven Illawarra (SAHSSI), Homeless Hub, the Housing Trust, Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS) and Mission Australia amongst many others.

A women's only space, inclusive of trans women and non-binary persons with a female reproductive system, its doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors, and social workers are all female, experienced and trauma informed. The Centre offers specialised domestic and family violence programs for girls, boys and young women, and women with intellectual disabilities. It developed the first in Australia, Mothers and Sons Program which focuses on raising young boys into respectful men, has a comprehensive outreach program for Illawarra schools that includes a key focus on specialised domestic and family violence, and consent and healthy relationships, and was part of the campaign for the establishment of the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre.

The Centre also runs a wide range of health and wellbeing programs and group activities. These include community led group activities, as well as structured programs on healthy relationships and self-esteem. The groups are critical to reducing social isolation (a risk factor and symptom of domestic violence) and building community cohesion and capacity.

In summary, 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.

A SECOND SITE IN NORTHERN ILLAWARRA

THE DEMAND

1. THE ILLAWARRA WHC GEOGRAPHICAL CLIENT BASE – Gerringong to Helensburgh

- In FY21-22 83% of our clients from within a radius of 25km from Warilla, southern Illawarra (south of Dapto and Primbee) and 17% from northern Illawarra.
- In FY22-23 it was 85% and 15% of our clients respectively.
- Evidence tells us that there are significant numbers of potential clients in northern Illawarra who currently have limited to no access to safe, affordable, women-centred care but for a number of reasons, cannot attend our Warilla site.

2. ILLAWARRA DEMAND

a. Illawarra WHC client numbers on waitlist, as at 28 February 2024

- Counselling is 90 women, with a 12 month wait.
- Casework escalated over the last 6 months from 19 to 32 women, despite employing a second caseworker. We are experiencing increasing crisis drop-ins, clients with increasingly complex and intersectional needs, and a significant increase in financial stress and homelessness due to the cost of living crisis.

b. Key services and context

Wollongong LGA has a higher proportion of women on low incomes than the NSW average, and higher than average rates of one parent families. In addition, between 4.2% and 4.4% of women experience chronic and long-term health conditions.

Across the Illawarra Shoalhaven LHD, rates of women presenting to emergency for mental health related conditions exceeds the state average. More than 61% of women in the area are overweight or obese and adults have poorer levels of nutrition compared with the rest of NSW.

IN RELATION TO:

Domestic and family violence and sexual assault

- Sexual assault increased 8% 2021-22. 79% female. 68% under 18 years. [ABS]
- Domestic and family violence V 5-year trend [NSW BOCSAR]
 - Annual increase DV assault: 3.2%, DV Intimidation, stalking and harassment 8.2%, Breach ADVO: 8.28.9%
 - **Warrarong double and Wollongong and Bellambi 50% higher than overall NSW rates.**

- University of Wollongong, in northern Illawarra with a student population of nearly 33,000. 18.5% of students have experienced sexual harassment since starting university (national rate 16.1%), sexual assault 6% (national rate 4.5%). Noting COVID impact and absence from campus. [National Student Safety Survey] 2022

→ **The UOW Safe and Respectful Communities Team reports increasing and unmet demand for support. Significant difficulty in finding any referral pathways.**

- Coercive control legislation will result in more women reporting and seeking support.

Sexual reproductive health and women's health

- specifically, we are seeing an increasing demand for:

- Abortion care, related to lack of information of pathways, lack of services and cost
- Access to contraception, including LARC (long term reversible contraception)
- Cervical screening, related to lack of services and cost
- Menopause, related to expertise and understanding
- Continence, related to expertise and judgement.

Mental health

- specifically, we are seeing an increasing demand for:

Anxiety, depression, suicidality, loss and complex grief support, particularly in young women aged 16-24. In 2022, nearly half (45.5%) of Australia's young women in this age category had experienced a mental health condition in the previous year, up from 30.1% in 2007 [ABS]. We are also seeing increased demand for counselling support and peer connection from older women to combat the growing trend of social isolation and loneliness.



THE SOLUTION

An expansion of the Illawarra Women's Health Centre

The Illawarra WHC has demonstrated return on investment of at least 80% (Sustainable Investment in NSW Women's Health Centres for the Women's Health Program, Women's Health NSW Business Case, 2022) representing a cost-effective community-based response to increasing health demands that require specialised women's health services and support. This Business Case (at Attachment 1) was funded by the NSW Government and used as the basis to double the funding to Women's Health Centres in the September budget.

Year on year, the Illawarra WHC is seeing a significant increase in demand for our services with women on our waiting list for counselling and casework experiencing anywhere up to twelve (12) months' wait time, to the point that we have had to close our books to external referrals twice in the last eight (8) months. There is a strong need in our region for more community-based services, specialised women's health services, and services with specialisations in domestic, family, and sexual violence.

A second site, leveraging our reputation, expertise and infrastructure is a practical, equitable and financially responsible investment. This fully aligns with our Strategic Plan 2023-27 (at Attachment 3). Having leveraged \$25,000,000 over five (5) years for the Illawarra Women's Recovery Centre, we continue to demonstrate that we are a low-risk investment for a high rate of return.

A second site would enable our Centre to offer women in northern Illawarra access to the same range of multidisciplinary services provided at our current site in Warilla, with an increased focus on young women, women from culturally diverse backgrounds and women with a disability. In particular, the Centre would seek to:

- Significantly expand counselling services and casework support.
- Expand therapeutic group programs with a particular focus on supporting women recovering from trauma associated with domestic and family violence and sexual assault;
- Engage a specialist health worker to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women presenting to the Centre;
- Increase clinical capacity to provide mental health care plans and specialist women's health services including reproductive health screening, long-acting reversible contraceptives and terminations.
- Expand our service model to include greater corporate and community education and counselling support for women in workplaces and community settings experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault.
- Greater access to UOW student population and to Illawarra CALD community.

TABLE 1

PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED INTERIM NORTHERN SITE MODEL FOR INVESTMENT.

THE MODEL

Initially tenating an existing site and building, retrofitted to modernise and provide a safe and appropriate space for our client group for a period of up to three years.

CORE COMPONENTS

1. Fit-Out and Rental of Site

\$775,000
(one-off)

We have identified a suitable location for lease at 100 Railway Street Corrimal (plans can be provided upon request).

We estimate that this site would require approximately \$550,000 to upgrade, modify and fit out. Lease term is 3 to 5 years with an annual rent of \$71,165.29 (GST exc.) in the first year, subject to a 4% increase per year thereafter.

The site is easily accessible by train, bus or car, with extensive public parking available in the area, and being the rear suite of the building, will offer a physical and psychological sense of safety for our clients.

2. Workforce

\$1,000,000
(for up to 3 years)

Workforce funding would allow for minimum staffing structure and would see the Northern Centre operate with a clinical and mental health team, caseworkers, client support, appropriately skilled administrative and triage support and operational/site management.

Recurrent funding for a minimum of nine (9) positions as specified but not limited to the below:

- 2.1 Operations Manager x 1 FTE
- 2.2 Receptionist/Records Management Officer x 1 FTE
- 2.3 Women's Health Nurse Practitioner x 1 FTE
- 2.4 Senior Counsellor x 1 FTE
- 2.5 Specialist Counsellor x 1 FTE
- 2.6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker x 1 FTE
- 2.7 General Caseworkers x 2 FTE
- 2.8 Community Engagement Officer
– Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) x 1

3. General Operating Costs

\$120,000 p/a
(for up to 3 years)

Recurrent funding for the overhead costs of the site including but not limited to finance, auditing, accreditation, cleaning, facilities maintenance, IT, and community engagement.

BENEFITS

The proposed model for investment in an interim site is quick to implement and able to bring services to the women of the Northern Illawarra community rapidly. A second site located in this area will enhance our ability and capacity to respond to the varied and complex needs of the priority populations of the area, including but not limited to:

- Improved access to free or low-cost individual and group health care including but not limited to medical/clinical (including sexual and reproductive health services), mental health care, domestic and family violence and sexual violence (support, and holistic and therapeutic well-being programs
- Enhanced referrals of local women to other complementary service partners
- Divert demand from local GPs, EDs, other hospital presentations
- Build on our established social model of care and evidence-based interventions in physical local infrastructure
- Increase the service level of the Illawarra WHC to match increased demand and reduce Warilla waitlist
- Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the investment in a second site, to successfully implement service delivery and increase the return on investment by the NSW Government year on year.

COST

Year 1: **\$1,895,000 in 2024-25**

Years 2 & 3: **\$1,120,000 (+ CPI increase) per year**



TABLE 2

PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED
– PERMANENT NORTHERN SITE MODEL FOR INVESTMENT.

THE MODEL

Either constructing a new building or purchasing and customising an existing site and building for a permanent second location.

CORE COMPONENTS

1a. (Preferred)
\$4.5 to \$5,000,000
(one-off)

Secondment of Department of Education land on the corner of Carroll and Murray Road, as per the North Illawarra Women’s Health Centre Location Plan at Attachment 2.

OR

1b.
\$2.5 – \$3,000,000
(one-off)

Provision for the purchase of existing building and modification costs.

2. Workforce
\$1,200,000 p/a

Recurrent funding per Table 1, with the addition of up to (four) 4 more FTE positions as it will be a larger space and increased service delivery.

3. General Operating Costs
\$130,000 p/a

Recurrent funding for the overhead costs of the site including but not limited to finance, auditing, accreditation, cleaning, facilities maintenance, IT, and community engagement.

BENEFITS

The proposed model for investment in a permanent second site ensures that the services delivered to the women of the Northern Illawarra community can continue and expand without pause following the end of the interim site leasing arrangement. A permanent second site located in this area will maintain and grow IWHCs ability and capacity to service, monitor and continually evaluate the needs of the community.

Specifics are outlined in Table 1.

COST

Year 1: \$2.5 to \$5,000,000 in 2025-26
Recurrent: \$1,330,000 (+ CPI increase) p/a

POLICY PRIORITY ALIGNMENTS

The proposed second site for the Illawarra Women's Health Centre aligns with and supports NSW Government commitments under:

1. NSW Health Workforce Plan 2022-2032
2. NSW Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022-2032
3. NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026
4. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025
6. NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027
7. NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027
8. NSW Health Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence 2021-2026
9. NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Strategy (draft).

CONCLUSION

The funding of a second, Northern Illawarra site for the Illawarra Women's Health Centre will improve the quality of health care to women as well as significantly reducing the current pressure on existing, over-burdened primary health service providers of the Illawarra.

This second site will also enable us to expand our critical community engagement, advocacy, and health education and promotion work, working with all our stakeholders to:

- Improve women's health literacy and capacity to make informed health decisions about their health and wellbeing.
- Reduce the disease burden by raising awareness of factors that contribute to illness.
- Work with health practitioners and key stakeholders to reduce the pathologisation of women's mental illness through trauma-informed wrap-around services and supports.
- Develop and maintain collaborative approaches to improve health care, support and outcomes for women and girls in the community.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Sustainable Investment in NSW Women's Health Centres for the Women's Health Program, Women's Health NSW Business Case, 2022
2. North Illawarra Women's Health Centre Preferred Location Plan
3. Illawarra Women's Health Centre Strategic Plan 2023-27

CONTACTS

Sally Stevenson AM
Ali Anderson

Executive Director
General Manager

4255 6800 | 0419 169 911
4255 6800 | 0492 041 950

