



## Women's Health Loddon Mallee

Providing health information and support for all women in the Loddon Mallee region

### Overview - Summer 2011 – 2012



Women's Health Loddon Mallee is a small non-government organisation that works alongside community health and other health providers to improve the status of women's health in the region. Most of the work is directed at assisting women to make choices which will maintain or improve their social, emotional and physical health and improving the conditions of women's lives in order to promote health. The work is project based with some community development and service delivery.

#### Organisation Description

- Offices in Bendigo and Ouyen - 8 eft, 15 staff (mostly part time)
- Staff have health promotion, marketing, research, social work, teaching, counselling, nursing and natural therapy qualifications and skills.

#### Health Promotion

##### Pap screening strategy

Across the Loddon Mallee region the number of women participating in pap tests screening is lower than the state average. Women's Health Loddon Mallee is working with the health sector to ensure that pap testing is available across the region and has a range of strategies to achieve this including:

- Increasing the number of trained nurses who are supported to provide a pap test service by working with GPs and other clinic providers to recognise the importance of the role nurses can play and the need to run Pap test clinics.
- Elise in Bendigo and Tracey in Ouyen both provide preceptorship and other support for regional and rural pap test nurses

##### Elder abuse prevention

This project raises community awareness of the issue of abuse of older people and provision of strategies to respond to or avoid abuse. Health providers have now developed protocols that make sure that responses are consistent and are managed using the appropriate services. We are continuing to inform relevant workers about the issue and pathways for responding to elder abuse. We are adapting the resource, on request from several groups to meet the needs of their community and workers. Njernda Aboriginal Coop is one of these organisations.

##### "Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community"

We are very excited about the funding from the Office of Women's Policy that has been announced for the local government cluster of Mt Alexander Shire, Macedon Ranges and the City of Greater Bendigo. We will be working with that group of local governments on this 4 year project that will focus on violence prevention.



##### Supporting Local Governments to respond to the prevention of violence against women

We have been working with organisations in the **Central Goldfields Shire** to develop a violence prevention plan. It is clear that prevention of violence against women is not a well developed area of work yet so we are also researching what has been found to work and how to best target prevention strategies. The **City of Greater Bendigo** has initiated a Violence Prevention Plan which we will be involved in through the reference group. It is very encouraging that these organisations are actively engaged in this issue which is critical to women's health.

##### Sexuality and relationships education in schools

Our work in delivery of health education in the Ouyen P-12 year 7s and 8s has lead to an interest in ensuring that all Mallee schools are able to deliver a good program to their students. We are therefore researching what schools do, how they resource their work and what they believe the needs are. It is clear that school level education about relationships, adolescent development and personal safety are key for building skills for healthy adult relationships.

## **Community Capacity building**

Women's Health Loddon Mallee supports community women's groups through the provision of meeting rooms and other administrative support. We partner with women's leadership programs, women's networks and provide resources to women's events in the region. We work with groups such as the Integrated Family Violence Consortiums and the Primary Care Partnerships to improve service systems, plan regional responses and do collaborative projects. We also respond to local issues from time to time such as by bringing emotional support services to a community that has experienced flooding or drought.

## **Gender Equity**

Our focus is to develop ways in which organisations and groups can investigate how they perform in relation to gender equity. Our support includes developing tools to support conversation, focus attention to critical areas and provide examples of innovative and effective actions taken by organisations to address equity issues.

*Organisational Checklist* – We have developed a conversation starter which can be used by clubs, boards, committees or other types of groups to raise discussion about gender equity. Contact us if you would like to a copy.

*Organisational Audit* – we are continuing with our pilot with St Luke's and learning a lot about what issues are easy to discuss and what is more challenging. St Luke's are looking to use a gender lens to evaluate all of their existing policies.

## **Services**

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### **Pap testing**

Clinics are run every school holidays at our Ouyen office for women in the Mallee Track area. Our Bendigo clinic has appointments on Thursdays and clinic days are booked out a few weeks in advance. We now have a clinic at the Long Gully Neighbourhood Centre on Wednesday mornings. Bookings through the Centre on 5442 1165.

### **Counselling**

There is a counselling service at each office that specialises in non crisis impacts of violence against women and mental and emotional health issues such as depression, stress and anxiety. We assist women to find options counselling about pregnancy and will be offering it ourselves again when our new nurse attends the training.

### **Choices Counselling**

Our nurse is able to offer pregnancy advice, including but not limited to advice about abortions.

### **Group programs**

The 'Walk and Talk' continues through sun and rain in Ouyen. A 'Scraptherapy' program train the trainer has just been completed with great success. We have produced a relaxation CD, created by group facilitator Bridget Nutting which is available to women who want to use it for relaxation at home.

### **Health Information**

We specialise in providing information to women about where they can find appropriate help. We can assist with locating information about issues on line, in brochures or in books in our library. We have a strong knowledge of health services for a range of women's needs (medical and social or emotional) and can assist with contact information. Women or their partners contact us by phone, email and in person. We are currently running focus groups with women about how they check their health – what checks, how they are reminded about when to do checks and how they record the results. We are happy to run this focus group with other groups of women.

### **Regional Integration Coordination – Violence Services Reform**

We have just started to do this work in the Mallee – alongside many partner agencies in Mildura, Swan Hill and Robinvale. The role involves facilitating better integration of the services system that responds to violence.

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#### **Contact us**

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