



The Board and Staff of Women's Health Goulburn North East wish everyone a peaceful Christmas and a New Year full of good health and well being. Our office will be closed from Tuesday 23rd Dec and will re-open on Monday the 5th January 2009.



Victorian Parliament supports women's right to control their lives and bodies

On 11th September, a majority of members of the Legislative Assembly stood before parliament to support a woman's right to control over her body and her life. Again on Oct 10th the Legislative Council voted to support the Abortion Bill without amendments. The passion, commitment and dedication of MPs, individuals, and organizations who had supported the decriminalization of abortions was tangible in this history making moment.

The Bill, based on option B of the Victorian Law Reform Commission final report, provides women with final decision making authority, up to 24 weeks gestation. After 24 weeks, final authority will reside with two medical practitioners who must consider all relevant medical circumstances and the women's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances.

The importance of having more women in parliament, particularly around issues most affecting women, was clear in the breakdown of votes between the sexes. Women in the lower house voted 19-6 in support of the Bill, while the men voted 28-29. This was reflected in the upper house where women, who comprise 12 of the 40 seats, voted 9-3 and men voted 14-14. MPs were afforded a conscience vote on this Bill, rather than voting along party lines.

This Bill will now become law in Victoria and provide a legal framework that reflects current clinical practice and widespread community attitudes about a woman's right to choose.

The new legislation provides clarity and legal certainty to women seeking to terminate a pregnancy and to medical practitioners who provide abortion services.

Summary of the new abortion bill

- Abortion will be regulated like any other medical procedure up to 24 weeks gestation.
- After 24 weeks, women must gain the approval of two medical practitioners who will take into account all relevant medical circumstances and the woman's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances.
- Doctors are required to inform women if they have a conscientious objection to abortion and to provide contact details of a doctor or organization unopposed to abortion.

Making Two Worlds Work, a partnership project with Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation, aims to build the capacity of the health and community sector to work more effectively and respectfully with the local Aboriginal community. Since the resource kit was launched in NAIDOC Week, July 2008, we have been distributing the kit far and wide. It has also been chosen as a case study for DHS health promotion website and will be featured in the 2009 Improving Care for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Patients (ICAP) calendar. Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership is currently designing a plan to evaluate the project. The six original paintings will be displayed at local agencies in north east Victoria. For more information please contact WHGNE on 0357223009 or view this resource on our website www.whealth.com.au



This artwork for the DVD and cover is by artist, Rita Wenberg, who was one of the women featured in the DVD.

Copies of the DVD are available for purchase from WHGNE for \$20, including postage.

The Aboriginal women who agreed to take part shared their recollections of first time voting with younger Aboriginal women, granddaughters, nieces and friends who interviewed them on film. Some women spoke of delight at finally being allowed to vote, over sixty years after Victorian women had achieved that right. Others remembered that the vote, when it finally came to Aboriginal people, was not so important; that the Aboriginal people had been let down so many times before by Australian governments that this new 'right' was viewed with suspicion by many.

Birthing Project

Caesarean birth is widely reported to be steadily increasing throughout the Western world. The most recent *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report on Australia's Mothers and Babies 2004* states that the average national rate of caesarean section was 30% of mothers giving birth in hospitals, compared with 19% a decade ago. (The World Health Organisation recommends a caesarean section rate of between 10 -15%.) While there are broadly accepted medical indications for caesarean birth, little is known about the acceptability of caesarean section to women and why they might choose this intervention for non medical reasons.

WHGNE is working in partnership with Northeast Health Wangaratta (NHW) and Melbourne

Our Vote Counts – Stories of Aboriginal Women's Voting Experience

Our Vote Counts – Stories of Aboriginal Women's Voting Experience was showcased at the Parliament House Open Day on Sunday 23rd November 2008, with other projects from around Victoria. It was one of only a few projects which included the experience of Aboriginal women. Irene Thomas, better known as "Aunty Irene" from Shepparton, commented: "Our children don't want to know about our past now, but they will when we are gone".

This DVD, featuring six local Aboriginal women telling their stories, was part of the 100 Years of Women's Suffrage celebrations.

The project was supported by a State Government Centenary Grant and was coordinated by WHGNE and a reference group with local Aboriginal women from the Goulburn Valley and N.E Victoria.

University to find some answers to this. In the past weeks, we have conducted three interviews with obstetricians and four focus groups with women, fathers, and midwives.

In addition, we are assisting with coding of the questionnaires gathered in wider research led by Helen Haines, the project coordinator for the study entitled, "An International Multi Centre Study of Non-Medical Reasons for Caesarean Section". This exciting study is a joint project between Northeast Health Wangaratta (NHW) and Midsweden University and endeavours to understand what factors may influence women to choose a caesarean birth when there is no medical indication to do so. Two rural settings have been chosen for comparison: Wangaratta and Västernorrland Sweden.

Victorian Local Government Action Plan for Women's Health 2008-2012

Before the November Council elections, WHGNE contacted everyone who was standing for election in the 12 local government areas in our region, asking for their commitment to support the *Victorian Local Government Action Plan for Women's Health 2008-2012*. The following candidates agreed to support the implementation of the plan.

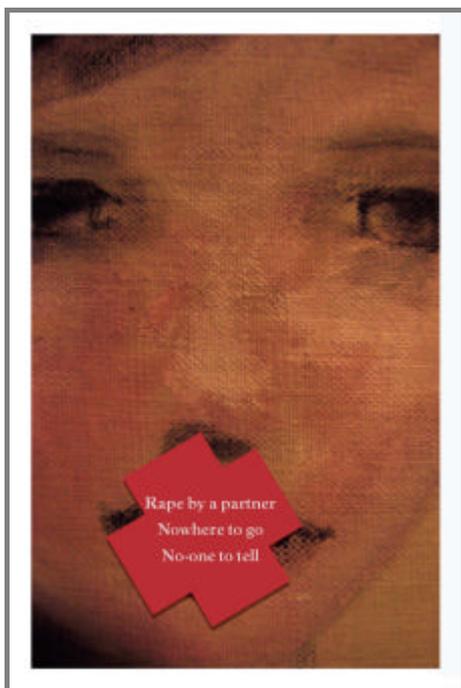
They are:

Jan Vonarx- Alpine Shire Council
Peter Graham- Indigo Shire Council
Kelley Stewart- Mitchell Shire Council
Sue Marstaeller- Mitchell Shire Council
Jessie McCallum- Moira Shire Council
Geoffrey Dobson- Greater Shepparton City Council
Michael Polan- Greater Shepparton City Council
Lisa McInerney- Wangaratta Rural City Council
Rozi Parisotto- Wangaratta Rural City Council

We would like to congratulate each of them on their election to Council. WHGNE will support these (and other) councillors in their commitment to the plan and the nine actions outlined in it. Our first step will be to resource these councillors with a factsheet of key data about women in their locality.

The document councillors supported is *Safe, Well and Connected: Victorian Local Government Action Plan for Women's Health 2008-2012*. The full report is available from www.whealth.com.au

The plan is based on the *Women's Health Matters: From Policy to Practice. 10 Point Plan for Victorian women's health 2006-2010* and its accompanying discussion paper *Setting an Agenda*. Full versions of both of these documents are available to be downloaded at www.whealth.com.au



You can help in just four steps:

1. ASK: Are you safe within your relationship?
2. NAME IT: What you've just described to me is rape and it's a crime
3. RESPOND: Give contact details of the local CASA, DV Service and Vic Police SOCA Unit
4. FOLLOW UP: 'Last time you spoke about your safety. I'd like to know how you are now.'

Funding for Partner Rape Film

In November, Women's Health Goulburn North East was successful in obtaining \$46,140 to produce a *Partner Rape* DVD. The project is funded by *Wesnet Inc. Women's Services Network*, through the Australian Government's Women's Safety Agenda from the Office for Women.

The project is entitled *Partner Rape - Know about it, respond effectively, prevent it: an educational DVD for health professionals and community members*. This is another element in the Partner Rape project which aims to reduce the incidence of partner rape, and improve service sector response to women suffering partner rape.

A literature search suggests that no Australian DVD currently exists which is specifically on partner rape and how to respond effectively to it. We know from our recently published research report that partner rape, while the most prevalent form of sexual assault, is also the most neglected. Health professionals have traditionally addressed sexual assault or family violence, leaving an identified gap in our understanding and treatment of partner rape.

The DVD will give an overview of partner rape with background, context, and prevalence and will include expert and women's perspectives. This overview will be followed by separate, more specific 'chapters' targeted to particular audiences.

We have received approval from the Victoria Police Film and Television Co-ordinating Committee and we are delighted that we are able to interview Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, along with two local police officers from the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit.



WOMEN GATHERING

Women throughout the Strathbogie, Moira and Shepparton local Government areas are gathering together for fun, friendship, recreation, support (or all of the above!) through Women Gathering.

A Women Gathering in Dry Times workshop held on Tuesday the 16th September in Euroa and one held on Wednesday 17th September in Numurkah provided women with the skills, networks, inspiration and support needed to get a 6 week Women Gathering group up and running in their community. Workshops were facilitated by WHGNE and Barb Martin from the Dept of Planning and Community Development.

Twenty women attended in Euroa and 18 in Numurkah. After attending the workshops, women were able to access \$500 to help them begin their groups. A total of 20 groups have been funded. Please see http://www.whealth.com.au/ourwork/women_gathering_goulburn_valley.html for groups and locations.

Groups included **Scrap Attack**: A series of scrapbooking workshops where women can come and use the group's scrapbooking equipment; **Around the world in 8 weeks**: Multicultural sharing of traditional cooking skills; **Turkish Women's Group**: Educational sessions on computer skills and using the internet for older non-english speaking Turkish women; **Recipe - Swap Meet**: A series of gatherings where women bring along a sample of food they have made for others to taste and a copy of the recipe to share, are all providing a place for women to make new friends and gather together.



Bsafe is a personal alarm system for women and children escaping family violence.

Currently there are 17 women in the Hume region with Bsafe kits. This includes 36 children. Referrals have mostly been received from family violence services and Victoria Police.

All of the women and children who have received kits have been in extreme danger and having access to a personal alarm system has provided them with a sense of increased safety.

THE BREASTSCREEN BUS IS IN WANGARATTA JAN 2009

REMEMBER every woman over the age of 50 should have a mammogram every two years.

Call 13 20 50 to book for an appointment.

CAN YOU HELP????

Can you spare two hours on Thursday afternoons to collate and pack health information into our WHGNE bags to be distributed via the Breastscreen Van when it arrives in Wangaratta in early January. Please call Karen at WHGNE on 0357223009.

CAN YOU HELP????

A coincidental meeting with RCH workers has made us aware that the Royal Children's Hospital are looking for carers in the North East for children with complex medical needs. Training provided. If you think you can help please call Julie Anania or Nina Hardcastle on 93455480 or 93455334 for more details.