

Women in the 21st Century

International Women's Day 2008 Celebrating 100 years of women's suffrage in Victoria

Suppose she thinks for herself.

Over the dinner table
wife is to quarrel with
husband and sister with
brother.

Political faction is to
divide the home and
drive man's helpmeet
from his side.

We reiterate our
conviction that the great
body of women do not
want it: we are perfectly
sure that in the end it will
be for evil."

- The Brisbane Courier,
editorialising on women
having the right to vote.
1 September 1900



Knowing our Past, Transforming our Future

This year, Victoria will celebrate the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote. This hard earned victory did not include all women, as most Indigenous women did not fully participate until the 1960s.

The Victorian Government has developed a range of events and initiatives throughout Victoria to mark the milestone and to celebrate the contribution of all women to our civic and political life. So far, a launch of *Victorian Women Vote 1908-2008* was held in Federation Square and 50 grants were announced to organisations in Victoria.

Other outcomes planned are:

- Curriculum materials for all primary and lower secondary students – our leaders of tomorrow
- The installation of a significant new public art work in central Melbourne that immortalises the 1891 Monster petition
- A finale event for all Victorians including the Parliament House Open Day in November

The Office of Women's Policy website has details of how to be involved and the history of winning the vote www.women.vic.gov.au

Celebrating on the local front!

WHGNE collaborated with members from Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation; and the North-East Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to write one of the 50 successful submissions:

"Our Vote Counts: Stories of Aboriginal Women's Voting Experience"

It will bring young Aboriginal women together with older Aboriginal women to hear how they felt about voting for the first time in the 1960s. This important history will be captured on DVD in 2008 - the Century of Women's Suffrage year.

This project will highlight an aspect of women's suffrage not generally considered in our celebrations. It will explicitly include the perspective of Aboriginal women in the celebration of Women's suffrage and most importantly, will capture an oral history that soon will be lost to us.

We believe it will contribute to positive mental health as older Aboriginal people may experience some emotional healing through sharing their history. And, it will strengthen family bonds by sharing history and knowledge, and making a new connection as older Aboriginal women remember voting for the first time and share this with their younger relatives.

Australian National Sorry Day

To the stolen generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry. I offer you this apology without qualification. We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering that we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied. We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments. In making this apology, I would also like to speak personally to the members of the stolen generations and their families: to those here today, so many of you; to those listening across the nation—from Yuendumu, in the central west of the Northern Territory, to Yabara, in North Queensland, and to Pitjantjatjara in South Australia.

I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally. Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that. Words alone are not that powerful; grief is a very personal thing. I ask those non-Indigenous Australians listening today who may not fully understand why what we are doing is so important to imagine for a moment that this had happened to you. I say to honourable members here present: imagine if this had happened to us. Imagine the crippling effect. Imagine how hard it would be to forgive. My proposal is this: if the apology we extend today is accepted in the spirit of reconciliation, in which it is offered, we can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia. And it is to such a new beginning that I believe the nation is now calling us.

[The Hon Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister, 13.2.2008]

**Women's Health Goulburn
North East**
supports the Australian
Government saying

sorry

to members of the stolen generations of Indigenous people, their families and communities. We, too, believe saying sorry is a powerful healing symbol. It recognises past injustices and their consequences. It is an important step forward for all Australians.



[You Tube, accessed 3.3.08]



[Outside WHGNE 13.2.2008]

The Victorian Law Reform Commission's Review of Termination of Pregnancy

On the 20th of August 2007, the Victorian Premier, Mr John Brumby announced that the Government would ask the Victorian Law Reform Commission for advice on drafting laws that reflect existing Victorian abortion practices. This came in response to a Private Members Bill to decriminalise abortion brought before the Parliament by Upper House MP Candy Broad in July 2007.

The Commission will report to the Government no later than the 28th of March 2008.

The aim is to remove abortion from the Crimes Act in Victoria. This is needed because:

- Abortion is the only widely practiced medical procedure in Australia that is criminalised.
- We are currently experiencing a crisis in service provision. Although it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers, the region of Greater Melbourne is serviced by only a handful of private clinics and public hospitals. In rural and regional areas of Victoria, the situation is critical with few private clinics and access to terminations in public hospitals limited or unavailable.
- Women are having difficulty in accessing services due to restrictive practices in some areas, particularly regional and rural parts of the state. In at least one regional hospital, training doctors were told that the hospital should turn women away as the hospital doesn't perform abortions.
- Restrictions in access to abortion make it unsafe- the threat to privacy, the increase costs, increase distress and delay in finding services puts women's health at risk.
- The legal situation allows hospitals and doctors to avoid their responsibility to provide a full range of medical services to their communities, including reproductive health services, and including abortion.
- The current legal situation places doctors and their staff in an invidious position. It deters young doctors from training to provide abortions, it provides ammunition for those in society who harass and abuse doctors involved with abortion. This further exacerbates the crisis in service provision as older doctors retire and younger doctors do not replace them.
- The uncertain legal status contributes to an atmosphere that allows groups of people to attack abortion clinics, harass and intimidate women and their partners attempting to access abortion services
- MPs may ask how we know all this- we are informed of these situations by service users, health professionals working in field, General Practitioners, and Obstetrician/ Gynaecologists.

Eight Victorian Women's Health Services have joined in calling on MPs across political parties to listen and understand what support for decriminalisation of abortion means. It is vital that any abortion law reform results in the removal of all possibility of criminal prosecution within the bounds of good medical practice.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission is due to report to the Victorian Government on March 28th. Commission Chairperson Professor Neil Rees said the commission will "provide the government with possible legislative options for decriminalisation of abortion law". It is clear in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference that the Commission should have regard to the "Government's commitment to modernise and clarify the law, and reflect current community standards, without altering current clinical practice".

It is unmistakable. The Victorian Government wishes to decriminalise abortion and reflect community standards. We applaud this conviction and look forward to a Bill put before the Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity that reflects this conviction. When that time comes, we call on all MPs to vote to remove the legal ambiguity for women, their partners and doctors and the stigma they experience.

(Abridged from Women's Health Services Statement March 2008)

What action can we take?

Contact your State MP and urge him or her to vote to take abortion out of the Crimes Act. See website for Upper House members and tips on lobbying: www.whealth.com.au/ourwork/abortion_law_reform.html
Namely: Be informed; Be honest; Don't waste time; Be sure to know what you want; Say thanks!

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Tatura

Murray Valley District
Cobram, Yarrowonga
Numurkah, Rutherglen, Wangaratta

Benambra District
Wodonga, Yackandandah
Corryong, Mitta Mitta

Benalla District
Benalla Bright
Mansfield Eildon

Seymour District
Seymour Yea Alexandra
Marysville Healesville Kilmore

National Women's Health Policy

The women's health sector was pleased to hear Nicola Roxon's announcement prior to the election (29.10.2007) that a Rudd Labor Government would develop a national policy on women's health.

The Hawke Labor Government provided a sound basis for improved women's health with the 1989 *National Women's Health Policy* and led the world in delivering a health policy that responded to the specific needs and issues facing women. There has been no revision since 1989 – an indication of the neglect of women's issues by the Howard Government for over a decade.

With a new Labor government in power, we believe this is a critical time to explicitly include women in the national health agenda. The Women's Health Association of Victoria (WHAV) has invited Nicola Roxon, now the Minister for Health and Ageing to meet with them in regard to addressing women's health as a priority.

The Australian Women's Health Network has a discussion paper on what a 'New National Agenda' for women's health, dated July 2007. It suggests five priority areas: women's economic health and wellbeing; women's mental health and wellbeing; preventing violence against women; women's sexual and reproductive health; and improving women's access to publicly funded health services. Within each, critical issues would be incorporated such as improving Indigenous health and life expectancy.

http://www.awhn.org.au/images/stories/AWHN/AWHN_Discussion_Paper.pdf