



What's missing or mind the gap

Report to the Premier by the
PREMIER'S COUNCIL FOR WOMEN
July 2009

Women and the State Plan

- *The State Plan: A New Direction for NSW* was released in November 2006 and set out the priorities for Government action over the next 10 years.
- The Plan was the product of an extensive consultation process and was intended to reflect the goals the community wanted the Government to work towards.
- Peak women's groups voiced concerns from early days that the State Plan did not address specific key concerns for women, and contained very limited acknowledgement of women and girls in NSW.
- The Premier's Council for Women (PCW) proposed to the Minister for Women, the Hon Verity Firth MP, that these concerns be investigated and submitted to the review of the State Plan in 2009. Two stages of consultations were held with women across NSW.

Women consulted included:

- Aboriginal women (including Elders)
- Women living in Greater Western Sydney
- Professional women
- Women working in commercial television
- Women not in employment
- Women living in public housing
- Arabic frail aged women
- Greek frail aged women
- Older, retired women
- Young women
- Rural and remote women:
 - Women primary producers and women in agricultural related business, rural and remote NSW
 - Rural women in the workforce
- Women community and social workers (Sydney and regional) and community health workers
- Members of a women's service organisation
- Women with intellectual disabilities
- Women carers for people with disabilities

The Report

- This report advises the Premier and the Minister for Women of women's perspectives on priorities for women in NSW identified by the PCW through the consultation process. It reports on gaps in the State Plan.
- The PCW asks that its report also be submitted to the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Strategic and Project Delivery Unit so that the priorities articulated by NSW women can be considered in the review of the State Plan.

First soundings

- In late 2008, the PCW conducted preliminary consultations to identify the priorities that women across NSW consider relevant to their quality of life. The key themes that emerged from these consultations were:
 - Health
 - Violence and Safety
 - Employment
 - Transport

Drilling down

- The Council held further consultations in 2009 to amplify the initial findings by asking women to consider them more explicitly.
- This time women were asked for their specific priorities and any suggestions for improvement in the four areas of:
 - Health
 - Violence and Safety
 - Employment
 - Transport



Drilling down - Health

- Maternity care services
- Mental health services
- Medical providers in regional, rural and remote areas
- Medical providers in metropolitan areas (including Western Sydney)
- Services for specific population groups
- Women-specific health care
- Preventative health services

Maternity care services

Key issues raised included:

- Lack of maternity care – many women must seek prenatal care and delivery outside of their town of residence, which may decrease the utilisation of this care.
- Need for improved maternity services at hospitals, including more midwives and special care for young mothers.

Comment

- *“Rising malpractice insurance rates, relatively impoverished populations, lack of facilities, and too few physicians for back-up arrangements may make obstetrical practice in rural places unattractive. Lack of local care means that many women must seek prenatal care and delivery outside of their town of residence. There is some evidence that an increase in distance and travel time to prenatal care decreases the utilisation of such care, leading to relatively poor outcomes.”*



Mental health services

Key issues raised included:

- Need for greater accessibility to counselling and other mental health providers, including in Western Sydney, and in rural and regional areas where there are numerous barriers to accessing treatment. Women find accessing counselling particularly difficult because of inadequate transportation and child care.
- Critical need for counselling for domestic violence victims.

Comment

- *“Mental illness impacts rural women - the prevalence of mental illness, in particular depression, in rural areas is high. Access barriers to treatment include lack of mental health providers, lack of transportation, lack of child care, poverty, and lack of health insurance. In addition, chronic depression is widespread among people aged 65 and older.”*

Medical providers in regional, rural and remote areas

Key issues raised included:

- Improved accessibility of care for patients with chronic illnesses and cancer, particularly for those who have domestic responsibilities.
- Need for specific services for older women.
- Lack of access to safe, legal pregnancy termination services. This results in women travelling long distances from rural/regional areas (sometimes to other States), in order to access these services.

Medical providers in the city area (including Western Sydney)

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Parenting support services to reduce stress levels for young women.
- Health care related to sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases, such as clinics and counselling that allow for anonymity while supporting women.



Services for specific population groups

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Access to dental care for older women.
- Specific services for older women.
- Services for Lesbian women, including access to good, affordable, lesbian-friendly GPs, and additional funding for Lesbian health programs.

Women-specific health care

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Cessation of mixed gender rooms in hospitals.
- Comprehensive health services such as Women's Health Services, that provide for all women's health needs, including sexual & reproductive health, domestic and sexual violence prevention, and quality support services such as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, counsellors, and gynaecological care.

Preventative health

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Access to and publicity regarding preventative health care (including screening for breast and ovarian cancer, and vaccinations for cervical cancer), especially in rural/regional areas.
- Health awareness programs for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women.
- Cancer awareness programs.
- Preventative consultations and education programs regarding adolescent health and sexually transmitted diseases, particularly for young women.

Drilling down - Services for victims of domestic and sexual violence

Key issues raised included:

- Education and awareness raising
- Extension of current programs by additional funding
- Service access and integration
- Services for specific population groups

Comment

- *“Sure you can leave, they said, but when you’re penniless and he controls the purse strings, how can you do that? ... They said that TV ads were needed for the women considering leaving and a checklist of what to do and how to do it would be very useful. For example, women in this position need to know in advance that if they leave they can get a police escort when they remove their possessions from the marital home.”*

Program extension

Key suggestions included:

- Additional supported accommodation for women escaping domestic violence.
- Expansion of programs to address: young victims; the housing and economic needs of victims; emergency shelter, counselling, and legal services for victims; and the health care system's response to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- Financial support to assist women and children.
- Provision of appropriate transport for victims of domestic violence.

Comment

- *“Remote communities like Menindee do not have crisis accommodation or safe houses and have to go to Broken Hill, which is limited to only three family units. Broken Hill crisis accommodation does not accommodate boys over the age of twelve to stay with their mothers.”*



State-wide service integration and support

Key suggestions raised included:

- Establishment of strong emergency protection system across the state and support for relocating victims to another area.
- Improved supervision and support for Sexual Assault Workers in remote communities.



Drilling down - Employment

- Employment conditions and family-friendly work practices
- Child care
- Discrimination and equal opportunity
- Education and training
- Services for unemployed
- Services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women



Child care and family-friendly work practices

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Accessible and affordable child care.
- Family friendly work practices.



Child care and family-friendly work practices

Key suggestions included the provision of:

- Child care and after school programs at schools.
- Appropriate care for children with disabilities.
- Improved pay for child care workers.
- On-site child care facilities.
- Family-friendly work practices (for example, by offering incentives to companies).

Comment

- *“Mothers returning to the workforce find it difficult. I know many professional women whose bosses expect them to work on their days off or request that they be available to come into work to help on large transactions as they come up... Not sure what they expect those mothers to do with their children. There needs to be a greater acceptance of working women (particularly professional women) who feel that they are seen as incompetent now that they have a child.”*

Discrimination

Key suggestions included:

- Providing incentives to employers who implement affirmative action policies and practices in their workplaces.
- Strengthening the *Anti Discrimination Act 1977*.
- Encouraging greater representation of women on boards and in executive positions.

Comment

- *“It’s one thing having laws and legislation, but it’s another to have companies/firms abide by them!”*



Drilling down - Public transport

- Accessible and affordable public transport
- More regular and reliable public transport services
- Improved security
- Respect and accessibility for people with disabilities

Accessible and affordable public transport

Key issues raised included the need for:

- Improved accessibility and facilities of public transport, particularly to meet the needs of mothers with children, women with disabilities and older women.
- Accessible and available toilets on all trains and at all stations.
- Provision to accommodate strollers of all sizes on buses and trains.

Comment

- *“The public transport system is not suited to women with young children. Train stations near me have around 20 stairs (some down and up the other side) just to reach the platform. In fact, all stations near to me (Newtown, Stanmore and Petersham) are like this. It makes it impossible for a mother with a pram, or a person in a wheelchair, to use the train. Buses are not much better with only one bus every hour or so offering access for prams/wheelchairs.”*

More regular and reliable public transport services

Key suggestions included the provision of:

- More frequent transport services in metropolitan and rural/regional areas, to allow women to undertake necessary activities such as grocery shopping and attending medical appointments.
- Increased 'after hours' public transport.
- Increased transport to hospitals and universities.
- More frequent non-peak services, to meet the needs and schedules of casual/part-time workers.

Comment

- *“All the women used public transport for grocery shopping. They had complaints that the bus that got them to Broadway, the biggest supermarket in the area, sometimes runs with 75 minute intervals during the day and this means they can’t buy frozen foods without them melting during the journey.”*

Improved security

Key suggestions included the provision of:

- Adequate shelter and increased lighting at train stations and bus stops; emergency points of call or telephones; and lockable rooms at stations.
- Security cameras at bus stops and on all train platforms and concourses.

What next?

It is recommended that:

- The key findings of the Premier's Council for Women be reflected in the revised iteration of the State Plan.
- Targeted consultations with women be undertaken as part of the consultation process for the revised State Plan.
- Specific issues raised throughout the Premier's Council for Women's consultations be addressed as part of the development of the NSW Women's Policy Framework.
- Issues raised throughout the consultations be referred to relevant Ministers.