

**WESNET's  
Strategic Plan  
2010-15**



## Introduction

WESNET's strategic plan for 2010–15 is the outcome of a planning process carried out over the first half of 2010.

Our work is underpinned by the fundamental belief that all women and their children have the right to live free from domestic and family violence and its consequences. We work within a feminist framework which promotes an understanding of domestic and family violence as gendered violence.

The way we work over the next five years will be influenced by the goals and strategies set out in this strategic plan.



Julie Oberin  
National Chairperson  
WESNET  
September 2010



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## About the Women's Service's Network Inc.

Established in 1992, the Women's Services Network (WESNET) is the peak body for Australian domestic and family violence services.

Our National Committee is comprised of twelve women who volunteer their time and expertise to further our work as a sector and in the elimination of violence against women. Drawn from every State and Territory in Australia, they are grassroots service managers, direct service workers, counsellors, trainers, peer educators, researchers, and expert advisers. These women are also Australian experts in various aspects of domestic and family violence. They are experts in policy and legislative frameworks, evaluation, and what constitutes 'good practice'. They are fully conversant with 'good practice' discourse and programs in each of their States and Territories. There is also a representative for immigrant, non-English speaking background and refugee women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and older women.

We participate in key national policy debates and consultative processes, research and develop publications, and present at national and international conferences. We host a national discussion and networking forum – Virtual WESNET – on our website.

We recognise domestic and family violence is only one form of violence against women. WESNET works with other organisations in Australia and internationally.

In recent years WESNET has played an important role nationally and internationally in advocating the elimination of all violence against women.

Our immediate past chairperson, Pauline Woodbridge, was a member of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children. The Council worked tirelessly over 2008 and 2009 to produce the Time for Action: the National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009-2021.

In March 2010 the Rudd Government announced the establishment of six national Women's Alliances, one of which concerns Violence Against Women. WESNET will be closely involved in the establishment of the National Women Against Violence Alliance and its role in implementing some of the Government's policies in response to the National Plan.

Internationally, WESNET is a founding member of the Global Women's Shelter Network. With the funding support of the Canadian Government and other sponsors, 17 countries representing all regions of the world began the process of organising so that the voice of women and their children can be present and at the centre of all initiatives to end violence. WESNET, through the Global Women's Shelter Network is on the organising committee and will be an integral part of the second World Shelter Conference to be held in Washington DC in 2012.

WESNET also attended the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York and hopes to attend more international meetings in coming years.

### Women's Activism

*"The Violence Against Women's movement was never meant to be an industry. It was only meant to be a social change movement until violence against women and their children ceased."*

WESNET National Committee 2010

## What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic violence is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (UN 1993)

Domestic and family violence can include some or all of the following<sup>1</sup>:

- **Emotional abuse** — blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine their self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement.
- **Verbal abuse** — continual 'put downs' and humiliation, either privately or publicly, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity to parent and spouse, for example accusations of sleeping around.
- **Social abuse** — systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim knows nobody, and forbidding the victim or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people — in effect, imprisonment.
- **Economic abuse** — complete control of all monies, no access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate 'allowance', using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses, or on alcohol or drugs; or making the victim totally responsible for the finances of the household, and then blaming her if there is not enough money.
- **Spiritual abuse** — denying access to ceremonies, land or family; preventing religious observance, forcing victims to do things against their religious beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence;
- **Psychological abuse** — includes: driving dangerously; abuse of pets in front of family members; making threats regarding custody or residency of any children; asserting that the police and justice system will not assist, support or believe the victim; denying the victim's reality.
- **Physical abuse** — including direct assaults on the body, use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation.
- **Sexual abuse** — any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent, causing pain during sex, assaulting genitals, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly, criticising or using sexually degrading insults.

## Some facts about domestic and family violence in Australia

Data about the levels of and incidence of violence against women and their children in Australia is limited. We know that women are more likely to talk to family or friends about the violence they are experiencing than go to the police or a support agency<sup>3</sup>. Two publications that give some indication of prevalence are the 1996 ABS publication Women's Safety Survey and the more recent ABS Personal Safety Survey 2005 that surveyed both men and women.

One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime since the age of 15.

The 2005 survey showed that across the Australian population in general, 5.8 per cent of women were physically assaulted in the 12 months prior to the survey, and 38 per cent of these women were physically assaulted by their current or previous male partner. Of the women who had experienced violence by a current partner, 10 per cent had a violence order issued against their current partner and of those women who had violence orders issued, 20 per cent reported that violence still occurred.

Many groups of women such as Indigenous women, women with disabilities, women in rural and remote areas, non-English speaking background, immigrant and refugee women, younger and older women are particularly over represented in these statistics. Indigenous

women are completely over represented in the homelessness and violence statistics and are more likely to suffer more serious injury than non-Indigenous women.

We also know that:

- women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence, often have fewer pathways to appropriate support, and often have fewer options to escape violence particularly when perpetrated by partners and/or carers.
- non-English speaking background, immigrant and refugee women are more likely to be murdered as a result of domestic violence<sup>4</sup>.
- young women are more likely to be victims of homicide and be labelled as homeless young women when in fact most of them are leaving their homes because of violence and abuse, including sexual abuse<sup>5</sup>.
- older women experience violence and abuse at a rate that is 2.5 times more than older men<sup>6</sup> and single older women affected by violence, poor and in need of affordable appropriate housing are an enormous demographic group about to need our support service sector in a huge way.<sup>7</sup>
- women in regional, rural and remote areas face increased vulnerability due to drought, stress, hardship, isolation and violence-supporting attitudes.
- almost one in four children in Australia have witnessed violence against their mothers or stepmothers.<sup>8</sup>

*Nearly one in three Australian women experience physical violence and almost one in five women experience sexual violence over their lifetime<sup>2</sup>*

## Guiding Principles and Values

Our goals and strategies within the WESNET Strategic Plan 2010-2015 are based on a strong commitment to the following guiding principles and practices:

**Domestic and family violence as a gender-based violence** – violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women.

**Domestic and family violence as a human rights issue** – faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women. Violence against women is a human rights violation.

**Woman-centred practice** – recognises that women are experts in their own lives and women using services have the right to participate in planning and decision making.

**Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage** – respecting the culture and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and understanding the importance of kinship and land.

**Recognising cultural diversity** – respecting people from all cultures and backgrounds.

**Perpetrator accountability** – perpetrators should be held accountable for their violence.

**Women's leadership** – participation in WESNET fosters and encourages women's roles in management and leadership.

**Working from an evidence base** – using data, research and evaluation to inform our work and the development of our policy positions and advice, and to provide the platform for advocacy to government and the wider community.

**A coordinated approach** – advocating and promoting the need for a coordinated and integrated response to domestic and family violence, across all government and non-government agencies which assist women and children experiencing domestic violence in any way, or who see the men who are

abusive to their families, and especially those services who work with men who use violence in their family relationships.

**Access and equity** – equitable and accessible services for all women and children escaping domestic violence, including indigenous women, women from non English speaking backgrounds, women in rural and isolated areas, lesbians, older women, young women, women with disabilities, women with mental health issues, women with difficulties with alcohol and drugs.

**Feminist principles** – Feminist philosophy guides the work that we do and the way we do it. Feminism has traditionally encouraged women's voices and celebrated their strengths and contributions to history and the community.

**Collaboration and partnership** – working with other organisations and groups to achieve positive outcomes for women and their children who are experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence.



*Violence against women cuts across the boundaries of culture, ethnicity, class, geography and religion. There is no region in the world, no country and no culture in which women live free from violence.<sup>9</sup>*

## Vision

### VISION

That all women and children live free from domestic and family violence and its consequences.

## Purpose

### PURPOSE

WESNET is a national women's peak advocacy body that facilitates and promotes policy, legislative and programmatic responses relevant to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

WESNET advances responses which:

- ensure the safety of women and children
- empower them to live free of violence, and
- improve the social, political and economic status of women.

WESNET works within a feminist framework which promotes an understanding of domestic and family violence as gendered violence.

In addition WESNET acknowledges that women and children's experiences are also intrinsically shaped by their ethnicity, culture, ability, age, sexuality and class.

### GOALS

1. Membership Services
2. Promotion of the prevention of domestic and family violence
3. Continue to strengthen our viability and relevance as a peak body
4. Contribute to and monitor policies, legislation and programs which impact on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence
5. Give issues of equity and access highest priority.

## Goals

# Achieving Our Goals

## Goal one

### 1. Membership Services

We will achieve this goal by:

- 1.1 Developing a communication and consultation strategy
- 1.2 Seeking membership feedback about what they want from WESNET as a peak body
- 1.3 Promoting feminist values of the membership
- 1.4 Providing opportunities for exchange of information and ideas between members

## Goal two

### 2. Promotion of the prevention of domestic and family violence

We will achieve this goal by:

- 2.1 Providing leadership in the area of domestic and family violence to key stakeholders and the community
- 2.2 Influencing community awareness campaigns
- 2.3 Promoting needs of our members, funding needs and service models
- 2.4 Identifying priority needs for community awareness on prevention of domestic and family violence

## Goal three

### 3. Continue to strengthen our viability and relevance as a peak body

We will achieve this goal by:

- 3.1 Developing a funding and resource strategy
- 3.2 Reviewing our governance and decision making arrangements
- 3.3 Maintaining a national secretariat with appropriate funding, capacity and expertise

## Goal four

### 4. Contribute to and monitor policies, legislation and programs that impact on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

We will achieve this goal by:

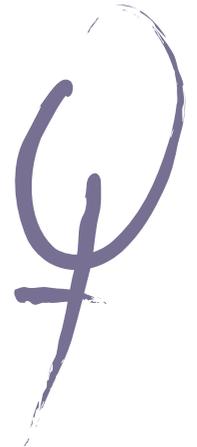
- 4.1 Identifying and regularly reviewing our key priority areas
- 4.2 Developing policy positions and papers on important and emerging issues of relevance to the sector
- 4.3 Strengthening existing and building new alliances on a national and international level to benefit members

## Goal five

### 5. Give issues of equity of access highest priority.

We will achieve this goal by:

- 5.1 Reviewing and updating our position paper about access and equity
- 5.2 Publishing and promoting our position widely to our members and others



# Contacts

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- 6 Boldy, D, M Webb, et al. (2002) *Elder Abuse in Western Australia – Report of a Survey Conducted for the Department For Community Development – Senior's Interests*, Curtin University of Technology, Division of Health Sciences: 40pp
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- 8 Crime Research Centre & Donovan Research (2001), *Young People and Domestic Violence: National Research on Young People's Attitudes to and Experiences of Domestic Violence*, Commonwealth Attorney- General's Department, Canberra. Section 1-3 available at <http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/Ncphome.nsf/Page/CEF75E88C0C5564CA256B43000E51A7?OpenDocument>
- 9 Adapted from Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (2010) *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 – Changing cultures, changing attitudes – preventing violence against women*. Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.
- 10 Weeks & Oberin (2004) *Women's Refuges, Shelters, Outreach and Support Services in Australia: from Sydney squat to complex services challenging domestic and family violence*, Office for Women, Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.

## Our Members

Our members, Australia's domestic and family violence services, are a service system of complex service delivery organisations who are specialists in assisting women experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence. Our members include:

- women's refuges/shelters
- halfway houses
- safe houses
- women's medium-term housing schemes
- information and referral services
- sexual assault services
- outreach services.
- counselling services
- advocacy services
- Indigenous services
- immigrant, NESB and refugee services
- other women's services

The models of domestic and family violence services in Australia are diverse. They range from single communal shelters to multi-building cluster models of self-contained units with counseling rooms, children's resource buildings, playgrounds, and group or training rooms, to shop fronts in busy shopping centres servicing dispersed houses throughout the community, to large purpose built facilities in remote areas, to lone outreach workers working out of other organisations. They may be a crisis phone service that also provides crisis accommodation, a community development worker, a counselor, a networker, a children's worker, or a worker in an isolated community with little support. They may specialise in certain disadvantaged groups of women and children in their community.<sup>10</sup>

*"We have stopped littering, we wear seatbelts, I don't see why we as a society cannot stop harming women and their children."*

Julie Oberin, WESNET Chair 2009

