



2023–24
**Annual
Report**

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Wesnet would like to acknowledge and pay respects to all First Nations people, as the traditional and only custodians of this country we call Australia. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the people of the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung where our main office stands. Throughout the year we have had staff working in other nations including Eora, and Ngannawal, and we would like to acknowledge those traditional owners as well. We recognise First Nations peoples' culture, wisdom, and connection to this land and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future. We recognise the loss of land and culture, acknowledging the consequences of dispossession and colonisation on First Nations peoples. We acknowledge that sovereignty over this land was never ceded. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

First Nations women have multiple roles and identities relating to their culture, community, age, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Wesnet works tirelessly for an inclusive future free from violence. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Nations women, particularly those who have experienced domestic and family violence, and those who support and advocate for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. We pay our deepest respects to those who have lost loved ones as a result of domestic and family violence. Wesnet will actively work to be informed by the experiences and advocacy of First Nations women, and to support First Nations women in their quest for safety and equality.

Acknowledgement of Victim-Survivors

Wesnet also takes this opportunity to acknowledge all victim-survivors of gender-based violence. We pay respect to those who did not survive and to their family members and friends.

Contents

Annual Report 2023–24

Chair Report	4
CEO Report	5
Our Members	6
Our National Board	7
Board Member Reports	8
Our Work	21
Our Staff	29
Statistics and Facts	30
Our Supporters	31
Safe Connections Social Impact	32
Technology Safety Summit	34
Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters	36
Building the Evidence Base	38
Tech Safety in the Pacific	39
Uber Eats and Wesnet	40
Dating Safety Guide Wins Award	41
Treasurer's Report	42
Financial Summary	43

Chair Report

A message from
Amie Carrington

As my first year as Wesnet Chair comes to an end I am immensely grateful to the women who have come before me and to the future women who will come after me to lead Wesnet and continue the important work of women's services in Australia. I would like to particularly thank the former longstanding Chair Julie Oberin AM for supporting me as I transitioned into the new role.

As we approach our 30-year anniversary we celebrate the necessary and important work of Wesnet over the last three decades, bringing together our specialist women's service sector through a united call to action across our nation to understand, prevent and respond to gender-based violence in our communities, homes and online.

Wesnet has shown adaptability and tenacity over this 30-year journey; as funding came and went with government policy, membership stayed firm, demonstrating the support and need for our work. We recognised emerging needs and built a new focus on raising specialist knowledge and support to address technology facilitated abuse in Australia. The purpose of Wesnet and the need for a cohesive national voice is very important when looking at the sector from a national perspective. The sector faced overwhelming challenges, along with its incredible achievements and innovation; we seek to articulate and amplify these nationally and internationally alongside advocates, victim survivors, First Nations leaders, national alliances and networks. We continue to listen to our members and stakeholders on the key issues they are facing, alongside place-based and innovative solutions.

I extend my heartfelt acknowledgement to our dedicated Board members and their passionate volunteer leadership, who bring their expertise leading specialist women's services in their own states and territories across Australia alongside their governance skills. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to our CEO Karen Bentley and our team, whose deep dedication

and professionalism are truly inspirational.

This year we have built on our governance capacity through increased risk management, new board record keeping processes, and the governance establishment for the 5th World Shelter Conference. We made the decision to enhance our leadership capacity for Wesnet with the creation of a Deputy CEO position. These changes are important to building on the strengths of Wesnet as a mature and well governed organisation.

We continue to make a positive impact for people experiencing violence through our services, and building our specialist sector capacity through training and our national Technology Safety Summit.

Looking forward, we are excited to be hosting the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Sydney in September 2025, bringing together the expertise of specialist women's services across the world and elevating Australian service design and delivery at an international forum. We hope you will join us at the conference and in celebrating 30 years of Wesnet representing more than 350 specialist women's services across Australia.

Amie Carrington
National Chair



I am pleased to present the 2023–24 Annual Report for Wesnet. This year has been marked by significant achievements but also by the ongoing challenges that so many women in our communities continue to face as we see devastating increases in our femicide rates and knowing that this is only the tip of the iceberg. As an organisation, we have remained focused on our core vision for the future, which is that all forms of gender-based violence are eliminated, and that all women and children live free from domestic and family violence.

Sometimes it feels as if we are shouting to the wind, or endlessly repeating ourselves to the latest iteration of new ministers and bureaucrats but this year it was pleasing to see some of our words being heard. We are more committed than ever to creating sustainable, long-term solutions, particularly as we face an uncertain future shaped by economic challenges, environmental pressures, and political factors. We are also acutely aware that colonial and patriarchal structures can divide and turn marginalised and oppressed communities against each other, as a strategy to avoid change. As you read through this report, I hope you'll see not only the results of our hard work but also the collaboration and longer-term vision of our work. It is important to remember that gender equality is a human right not an ideology. It was enshrined as a human right by the United Nations on 10 December 1948.

Key activities during the reporting period included planning and launching the Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters which is to be held in September 2025 in Sydney. This is a massive undertaking for an organisation the size of Wesnet, however we have a lot to showcase in Australia and we look forward to bringing the world to us to connect, challenge and continue the change we need to see.

At the national level, the National Action Plan and the standalone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plans were released. Alarming the murder rate increased, sparking a national cabinet meeting and the launch

CEO Report

A message from
Karen Bentley

of a rapid review by the government. Meanwhile more and more survivors of violence were seeking services, and many of our member services spoke of increasing waiting lists and sought more funding. Workforce pressures, the ability to attract and keep staff was another pressure point. The newly formed National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services was another platform to assemble and confirm the urgent need for funding for frontline services and this work will continue into future years. Wesnet is looking forward to taking over the secretariat function for this group from 2025.

Our work on technology abuse continued, with demand for our training and advice a constant. The Safety Net team had another outstanding year as you can see from the social impact on page 36 and ran an excellent fifth technology safety summit in Melbourne with the assistance of sponsorship from Telstra, Uber and Meta.

None of our work is possible without the outstanding team of staff and board members at Wesnet. A huge thank you to all our Board members and my team during 2023–24: Annabelle, Bonnie, Caroline, Diana, Jen, Joanna, Sarah, Natalie and Nicolette.

Karen Bentley
CEO



Our members

Wesnet represents more than 320 specialist women's services across Australia who are providing support to women, non-binary people and children experiencing domestic and family violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Wesnet member services are women-led, and work within an intersectional feminist framework—acknowledging that patterns of oppression (including patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism) impact uniquely on multiple identities—and deliver their services with a woman-centred, empowerment approach.

Wesnet's member services are diverse, and include women's refuges and shelters, safe houses, halfway houses and medium-term housing schemes, information and referral services, outreach and advocacy services, women's legal and court advocacy services, counselling services, state-wide peak bodies, community and health services, and sexual assault services. Our members provide support to women, non-binary people, and children from diverse

populations, and include services targeted to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, younger and older women, migrant and refugee women, the LGBTQIA+ community and women with disabilities.

The majority of Wesnet's member services are Public Benevolent Institutions and/or direct service providers. They are distributed across all states and territories and are located in cities, regions, and rural and remote areas.

Members' unique and rich on-the-ground experience has led to specialist women's services providing leadership in developing Australian best-practice domestic and family violence prevention and early intervention programs, and frontline practitioner education and support. Their collective knowledge informs research and provides the foundation on which emerging domestic violence practices and policy and legislative reforms are shaped.

Wesnet's national board is comprised of elected representatives who are skilled and experienced leaders within the women's services sector, committed to eliminating gender-based violence.

Board members are elected by member services to represent states and territories. Diversity representatives are also elected to help ensure we live our intersectionality and diversity values, as well as improving the quality and relevance of our work.

Drawing on our board survey which is run annually, we know a number of things about our board.

The current board membership has excellent experience in not-for-profit, non-government organisations, government, and peak and representative bodies.

The board has a very good mix of skills with no concerning gaps. Major strengths include in relation to domestic and family violence services and policy, legal and governance, strategic development, communications, advocacy, and in people and financial management.

Our National Board

- The board represents a range of experience across the sector, including substantial experience in crisis services, women's refuges and peak bodies; and significant experience in perpetrator programs and in research, education and policy development.
- The board is geographically diverse with members from all states and territories and from metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote service delivery locations.
- The board is broadly representative of women in the community with respect to a diverse mix of lived experience and demographic characteristics. Wesnet is highly committed to ensuring that our values continue to be embodied in board membership.

We are very grateful to our board members for their generous contribution to further the interests of Wesnet's member services, by volunteering their time, expertise and energy.

Vision

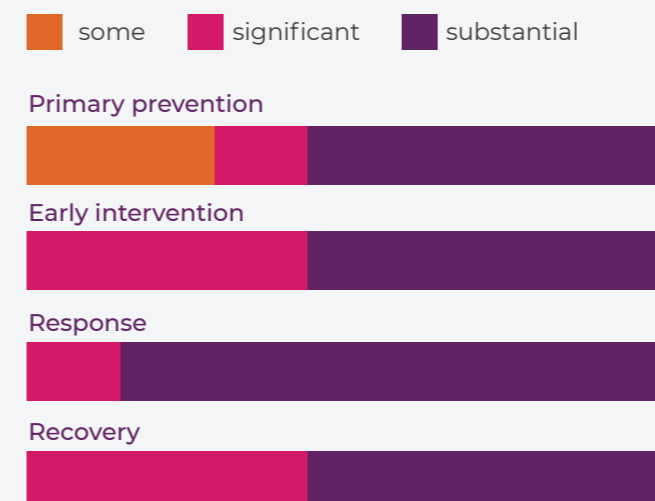
Wesnet's vision for the future is that all forms of gender-based violence are eliminated, and that all women and children live free from domestic and family violence.

Opportunities for impact

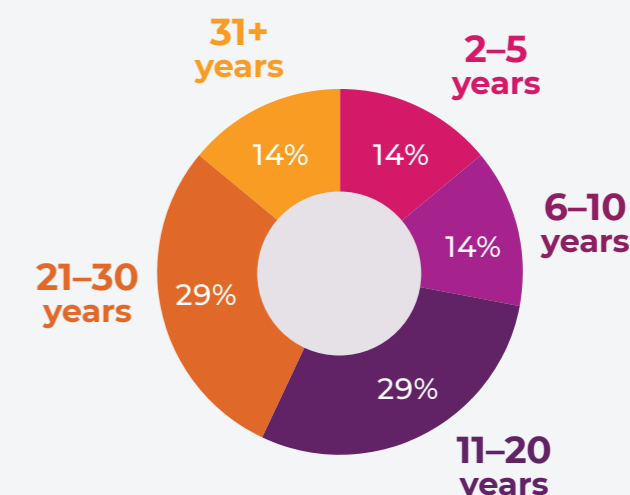
Wesnet's overarching purpose and objectives are defined in its Rules of Association. Over the next strategic planning cycle, Wesnet aims to:

- Provide support for women victim-survivors and their children,
- Strengthen and build the women's family and domestic violence sector,
- Strengthen Wesnet's position as the national leader of member services to the sector, and
- Use our specialist knowledge to achieve our purpose and maximise our capacity to eliminate family and domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

EXPERTISE ACROSS THE FOUR DOMAINS



YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN THE DFV SECTOR



Board Member Reports

Board Members

Amie Carrington

National Chair and Queensland representative

Leanne Barron

Deputy Chair and Western Australian representative

Margaret Augerinos

Treasurer and Victorian representative

Angie Piubello

Secretary and Australian Capital Territory representative

Julie Oberin AM

Diversity representative

Jo Gamble

Northern Territory representative

Delia Donovan – departed 13 December 2023

New South Wales representative

Elise Phillips – commenced 13 December 2023

New South Wales representative

Diane Burton

Tasmanian representative

Mary Leaker

South Australian representative

Jennifer Bushell

Public Officer

Victoria

Margaret Augerinos

Victorian representative and Treasurer

Margaret is the Chief Executive of the rural/regional service Centre for Non-Violence, experienced in specialist family violence service delivery to victim-survivors and including programs for men who use violence. She is also a board member of Safe & Equal, the Victorian state peak body.

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in Victoria

Women's services are integral to the delivery of specialist domestic and family violence services and programs in Victoria. While there are generalist organisations delivering specialist family violence services and programs in Victoria, there is a strong culture of feminist intersectional practice across the sector underpinned by a solid commitment to working for the safety of victim-survivors and keeping perpetrators in view. Specialist women's domestic and family violence services have been instrumental in informing and influencing government policy, systems, frameworks and standards through approaches to risk assessment and information sharing, underpinned by an evidence-based sector Code of Practice (*The Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim Survivor, Safe & Equal*).

Our sector continues to advocate for evidence-based prevention, early intervention, response and recovery programs that are informed by sector and lived experience.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet is integral to the success of specialist domestic and family violence services. It plays a key role in working to inform and influence government policy, legislation, priorities and lobbying for increased funding and capacity of frontline services. Through its key alliances and partnerships at a national and international level, Wesnet works to build member capability and visibility as well as amplify the voice and experience of its members.

Key achievements in 2023–24 include:

- Launching the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters
- Maintaining ongoing expertise and presence regarding technology safety
- Successfully convening the 2023 Tech Safety Summit
- Ongoing engagement with the Global Network of Women's Shelters
- Strong engagement with the sector and stability of memberships
- Active media engagement and social media profile
- High performing, stable and capable staff team
- Delivery of tangible and beneficial outcomes to members and victim-survivors in the Safe Connections program
- Active participation in the National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services meeting including advocacy to the Federal government

Implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* in Victoria

The National Plan and its priorities are absolutely essential in working to prevent and better respond to all forms of violence against women and children. If not for the work of Wesnet (and our state peak), the visibility of the national plan at a Victorian level would be next to non-existent. There is very little engagement or communication from the Commonwealth (or Victorian Government) about the national plan and what it means on the ground for frontline services. It remains unclear how resourcing of the national plan drills down into deliverables or resourcing at a state level.

Despite having a national plan, there needs to be increased coordination between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments as well as priorities, investment and resourcing clearly articulated with transparent communications to frontline services. A case in point is the rollout of the 500 frontline workers that took nearly two years to hit our funding and service agreements with hardly any communications unless they were initiated by the sector.

There are significant service gaps and unmet needs in our specialist family violence, sexual violence, perpetrator responses, housing affordability/supply of housing, and legal services. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to the needs and experiences of First Nations communities, LGBTQI+ and other marginalised groups including people with disabilities. Funding allocated to national plan deliverables needs to increase specialist service capacity and engage those specialists in primary prevention.

Victorian highlights

Funding of specialist programs continues to be impacted by fiscal pressures at a state level. We are starting to see some budget pressures regarding fixed term funding and steps to recoup funds where the funding body deems underperformance against targets.

In September 2023, the Victorian Government confirmed it will introduce an agreed formula to calculate community sector funding increases for 2023–24 and beyond. Under this deal, there was a 5.45% funding boost in 2023–24. The funding formula used to calculate this boost takes account of obligations imposed by Fair Work Australia (80% of the increase) and CPI (20%). The Victorian Government says the same formula will be used going forward.

The Victorian *Are You Safe At Home?* campaign developed by Safe & Equal has now moved into the national arena, with more states and territories joining the campaign in May 2024. The campaign provides clear information about what to look out for, what supports are available, and how to start a conversation if you're concerned that someone you know is experiencing abuse.

New Social Service Regulations effective from July 2024 replace the requirement for Victorian community service providers to be accredited against Victorian Health & Human Service Standards. Registration and compliance with the Social Services Regulations is required for all specialist family violence providers.



Julie Oberin AM (far left), Leanne Barron (2nd Left) and Delia Donovan (far right) speaking at Elsie Conference

Western Australia

Leanne Barron

Deputy Chair and Western Australia representative

Leanne is the Chief Executive Officer of Starick, a specialist women's family and domestic violence service operating in the southeast metropolitan corridor of Perth (Boorloo). Starick works across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, crisis response and re-establishment and recovery.

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in Western Australia

Women's specialist domestic and family violence services in Western Australia provide a range of services including refuge and outreach services, counselling and recovery services, child and youth focused work, transitional accommodation, and community education and awareness raising. Through our state peak, the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, services provide advice and lobby to improve safety for victim-survivors and strengthen service and system responses.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet's leadership in relation to technology safety and the resources and training they provide are critical to our sector, along with the practical assistance provided to victim-survivors through Uber rides and Safe Connections.

Wesnet's hosting of the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in 2025 will provide a great opportunity for Western Australian services to link with and learn from services across Australia and internationally.

Wesnet continues to provide invaluable input to national policy agenda including through its representation on a range of consultation mechanisms.

Western Australian highlights

Strong lobbying by the sector in response to the number of women murdered in this state led to crisis talks with the government formation of a high level government and sector family and domestic violence taskforce. The taskforce recommended a system reform plan with four pillars: workforce development, information sharing, risk assessment, and risk management. Work on these pillars has recently commenced with working groups reporting to an implementation oversight group and to the Minister. A Lived Experience Group is also being formed as part of the governance for the system reforms.

The Crisis talks and the rallies and marches across Australia have resulted in greater awareness and calls for action in the community.

New funding of \$72m was allocated to fund new crisis beds, support primary prevention initiatives, and to expand perpetrator programs and Safe at Home. While there was minimal initial funding for children and young people who are victim-survivors, the Australian Childhood Foundation has been engaged to map current service delivery and identify gaps.

There have also been a number of legislative reforms including: to allow electronic monitoring of perpetrators of domestic and family violence, better recognition of the patterned nature of coercive control, and changes to evidence laws to better support victim-survivors giving evidence in court.

The Centre for Womens Safety and Wellbeing has consulted with services across the state on the development of a Code of Practice and Audit Tool for refuges to support quality service delivery.

Tasmania

Di Burton

Tasmanian representative

Di is also the Salvation Army State Manager for Tasmania and Team Leader at McCombe House.

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in Tasmania

Specialist domestic and family violence services in Tasmania provide professional and specialised services to assist children, young people and adults affected by family violence. Our workers provide advice and information and individualised support plans to those requiring ongoing support. We also provide crisis and transitional accommodation for victim-survivors, along with court support when needed.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet is the leading non-government expert in Australia regarding family violence technology abuse, providing high quality training and resources. Wesnet is also a strong and effective advocate for victim-survivors and a trusted federal government advisor. The 5th Tech Safety Summit in October 2023 was a major achievement, as is the continued provision of Uber rides and safe phones which are a major support for victim-survivors.



Karen Bentley delivering Tech Safety Training to DV and other Community Services in Fiji

Implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* in Tasmania

There has been some important progress made with respect to the Offender Support Service and the Men's Referral Service. The Men's Referral Service is a men's family violence telephone counselling, information and referral service and is a central point of contact for men taking responsibility for their violent behaviour, through the *Safe at Home* program which is the Tasmanian Government's integrated criminal justice response to family violence. This program came out of the Tasmanian action plan *No to Violence*.

For victim-survivors the major areas of concern are the staffing and funding shortfalls for support services, combined with the housing shortage crisis. Impacts on the services that support victim-survivors continues to be a major issue. There are no safe housing options for victim-survivors leaving refuges, causing long term stays in refuges for victim-survivors. Turnaway data has almost doubled since last year as refuges are full with no safe exit points for victim-survivors.

Tasmania highlights

The Tasmanian Victim-Survivor Advisory Council is about to be formed: this was a commitment made by the Tasmanian Government in the *Family Violence Action Plan* for 2022–2027.

The Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance is well under way. A planning workshop was held in April and drafts of the strategic plan and governance constitution have been sent out to all interested parties.

The Tasmanian Residential Tenancy Act has proposed amendments for pets in rentals. These changes will be a very welcome support for victim-survivors, allowing them to have their pet in a rental property.

The Tasmanian Government Action Plan included a 37% increase to core funding to frontline family and sexual violence services, the introduction of electronic monitoring for high-risk family violence perpetrators, and the development of two Arch Centres. The Arch Centres are in Launceston and Hobart. These are safe places where victim-survivors can get information and support if they are impacted by sexual violence.



Jo Colautti presenting at the StopDV Conference in Tasmania

Queensland

Amie Carrington

National Chair and Queensland representative

Amie Carrington is Chief Executive Officer of the Domestic Violence Action Centre, Co-Convener of Ending Violence Against Women Queensland, and member of the Queensland Specialist Domestic Violence Services Network.

Issues impacting Queensland and the sector this year

Queensland has been progressing action to respond to the recommendations of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce reports. We have contributed to the thinking and development of reform within Queensland to improve the experience and outcomes for victims of domestic and sexual violence across the criminal justice system. Our services are struggling to meet the increased demand for services and complexity of intersecting housing crisis needs.

Queensland highlights and issues ahead

Collaboration across domestic violence, women's health, sexual violence and women's refuges in ending violence against women in Queensland has provided a united voice on key areas of reform. The Queensland Government announced a 20% increase in core funding for specialist domestic and sexual violence services. The reform environment is an exciting and rare opportunity for Queensland to lead the way in the design of legislation, the establishment of a Victims Commissioner and a statewide domestic violence services peak body, and implementation of Queensland's strategy to strengthen responses to people who use domestic and family violence.

Our domestic and sexual violence services continue to be heavily burdened with increased demand a prevalence and insufficient service delivery investment. We are unable to deliver primary prevention and early intervention services that are essential to reduce the ongoing future crisis service demand. Without sustainable workforce development and investment in specialist services we will continue to struggle to provide high quality services to people in need at the time they need it.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet continues to provide support for victim survivors and is trusted to provide information and expertise around technology facilitated abuse with a broad national reach. Wesnet provides a powerful voice and positive solutions to gender-based violence – the impact is demonstrated through the training and phones provided, and increased safety reported by clients.

Wesnet has a positive future and will continue to strengthen as the national peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services.



Leanne Barron, Karen Bentley and Amie Carrington at the 2023 Tech Safety Summit

New South Wales

Elise Philips

New South Wales representative

Elise is Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Manager of Policy, Advocacy and Research at the peak organisation Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW).

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in New South Wales

Women's specialist domestic and family violence services in New South Wales provide crucial support to women, children and young people experiencing, escaping and recovering from violence and abuse. They are under-resourced and overwhelmed by demand, often supporting many more people than they are funded to help, as they are reluctant to turn people away.

Wesnet achievements

It is vital to have a national peak body advocating for women's specialist domestic and family violence services at the federal level. There are significant federal issues that intersect with domestic and family violence including family law and supports for people on temporary and precarious visas. Yet, small specialist organisations and state based peak organisations like DVNSW are not resourced to effectively advocate at the federal level. Wesnet helps fill this gap.

Implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* in New South Wales

Further work is required in New South Wales across all four pillars of the National Plan. Consultation and development is occurring on a Primary Prevention Plan for New South Wales which is likely to be launched in 2024–2025. Significant work was undertaken in the past 12 months to prepare for the criminalisation of coercive control in New South Wales, with training provided to key stakeholders in the justice system and the domestic and family violence sector. Work has also commenced to develop

a Common Risk Assessment and Management Framework for the state, which is a valuable opportunity to build capacity for early identification and intervention. Much more investment is required to increase the capacity of frontline services responding to domestic and family violence and there is little available to support the long-term recovery of adult and child victim-survivors in New South Wales.

New South Wales highlights

A significant emergency funding package was announced by the New South Wales Government in May 2024 along with reforms to the legislation and processes related to offenders being released on bail, following some cases that were highly publicised in the media.

There were calls for a Royal Commission, however, this was not unanimously supported by the domestic and family violence sector due to fears that this would further delay the investment that frontline services require.

The first New South Wales baseline workforce survey was conducted to capture accurate data on the size, make up and development needs of the specialist domestic and family violence workforce.

Finally, consultation has commenced to inform the development of quality standards for specialist domestic and family violence services in New South Wales, which are hoped to lift practice across the sector to align with trauma-informed best practice standards.



(L to R) Delia Donovan, Amie Carrington, Karen Bentley and Mary Leaker at the National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services meeting in Meamjin in March 2024

South Australia

Mary Leaker

South Australian representative

Mary is General Manager of Embolden, South Australia's peak body for specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services. Embolden represents 23 organisations and services statewide, encompassing specialist women's domestic and family violence services, services working with men using violence, legal services and South Australia's lead sexual assault service. Four of Embolden's members are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in South Australia

Our members provide services that promote the safety and wellbeing of women and their children, and work to prevent and respond to violence against women. We lobby and advocate for women's right to respect, safety and self-determination.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet has a really critical role in our sector in representing specialist women's domestic and family violence services nationally. As the national peak body, Wesnet is able to gather insights into and advocate on issues that impact specialist domestic and family violence services nationally and support nationally collaborative advocacy. Wesnet continues to be a national leader in the area of technology-facilitated abuse.

A highlight in 2023–24 was the announcement of Wesnet as host of the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Sydney in September 2025.

Implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* in South Australia

South Australian services are doing some excellent work on the ground with women, children and others experiencing violence, particularly in the context of crisis, and with men using violence. However, there is a need for systemic reform in the state and in response to this, the South Australian Government announced in December 2023 a Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence, which has now commenced.

Embolden is advocating for reform to embed a place-based, integrated service model in South Australia with a focus on prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence in addition to crisis response.

We need earlier, holistic and culturally safe supports for families with complex needs, and we need to do much better to respond to the needs of infants, children and young people as victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in their own right.

We also need a dedicated strategy to develop the specialist domestic, family and sexual violence workforce in South Australia. Embolden's priorities for our sector are outlined in our submissions to the Royal Commission.

South Australian highlights

A definite highlight in 2023–24 was the announcement of a Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia. The Royal Commission is a vital opportunity for transformative change in our state, to ensure that anyone experiencing violence is able to access the support they need, when they need it.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Angie Piubello

Secretary and ACT representative

Angie is a Specialist Child/Youth Domestic Violence Case Worker from Beryl Women Inc.

The role of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in the Australian Capital Territory

ACT women's specialist domestic and family violence services play a pivotal role in front line response and service delivery to women and children escaping violence and abuse. As a small jurisdiction these services work closely with government and the community to continually ensure our systems hold a critical feminist lens in response to those most in need of protection and support from violence in our community. Our women's specialist domestic and family violence services have maintained a strong history in standing up for the rights of women and children with the oldest running women's refuge in the country Beryl Women Inc still standing strong for almost 50 years.

Wesnet achievements

Wesnet, as a peak body for women's specialist domestic and family services, ensures that the work of specialist feminist services in our local communities is highlighted and supported. Whether the service is in a regional or urban area, Wesnet actively listens to the needs of its members and supports the ongoing development of the workforce in critical areas such as technology safety for women and children, and advocacy to government.

For our members in the ACT, Wesnet has continued to provide expertise, education, and practical support on the ground, reducing the financial burden and workload on services. Importantly, Wesnet has assisted services in capacity building and in meeting best practice in technology safety through its tech safety training, and in supporting women and children in accessing safe travel through its Uber Rides program. Wesnet's collaboration with Telstra on the Safe Connections program has also benefited members by providing safe mobile phones that have literally kept women connected to support services and saved lives.

From a national perspective Wesnet has contributed to engagement and advocacy with the new Commissioner for Domestic and Family Violence

Michaela Cronin. Building relationships at the federal level is crucial for highlighting the essential role and value of women's specialist domestic and family violence services in safeguarding women and children across the country.

Implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* in the ACT

Consultation on the ACT government's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Strategy began in March 2024. This 10-year strategy aligns with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and focuses on four key areas: prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing.

Addressing the need for investment in Aboriginal-led organisations is crucial to tackling the disproportionately high rates of violence against Aboriginal women and children in our community. I am hopeful that the Strategy will ensure ongoing investment in combating gender-based violence, holding perpetrators accountable, and keeping the voices of victim-survivors central to its approach.

ACT highlights

Highlights of 2023–24 in the ACT include the government's investment in specific supports for children and young people impacted by violence. The Children and Young People's Safe and Strong Mobile Therapy Van delivered by Beryl Women Inc was funded for three years and provides a child-focused trauma recovery service for children and young people affected by family and domestic violence. Similar investment was made in the Australian Childhood Foundation's Heartfelt Children's Program to deliver a pilot program offering therapeutic interventions for mothers and children impacted by violence. This work is crucial in ending the cycle of violence for families and ensuring children and young people's voices are heard.

Northern Territory

Jo Gamble

Northern Territory Representative



Diversity and Inclusion

Julie Oberin AM

Diversity representative

Julie is Chief Executive Officer of Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Service.

Wesnet is committed to redressing structural oppressions that form structural barriers to full, equal and safe participation in society for everyone.

Safe Connections program workshops

During the year the Wesnet team conducted workshops with Safe Connections (SC) agency staff to expand understanding and knowledge about existing and emerging trends in technology-facilitated abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. These workshops were conducted to better support and advise SC agency workers.



First Nations Communities Workshops

Purpose: To better understand the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing tech abuse so we can identify service gaps and develop appropriate and relevant resources.

WORKSHOP

For more info: wesnet.org.au/webinars-events

Although many attended one of each, the four workshops were structured to either focus on First Nations or on CALD communities. All workshops facilitated smaller and larger group discussions, encouraging attendees to lead the conversation. Three key questions were asked:

1. What are the main forms of tech abuse you see in your CALD/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' experience?
2. What factors/barriers contribute to CALD/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors' lack of tech safety?
3. What resources or training could Wesnet develop to address these barriers? What do you need as frontline services that could help?

Responding to these questions, attendees were encouraged to provide non-identifiable client case examples.

Key findings in relation to CALD communities

The primary form of technology-facilitated abuse attendees were seeing in CALD communities was harassment, primarily online harassment through social media and other forms disseminated to family members and friends in home countries to discredit and cause harm to the survivor.

Other forms of technology-facilitated abuse were excessive use of monitoring and stalking, primarily in the form of CCTV (closed circuit television), and Air Tags, constantly demanding updates on location and photo evidence to verify location.

Multiple respondents also commented on using transportation cards as a way perpetrators monitor movement and location, as many victim-survivors do not have access to private vehicles or are not the account holders of their travel cards. Limiting access to technology was another common form of technology-facilitated abuse: many survivors were not allowed a phone or account and/or had limited or no access to devices.

When asked what resources Wesnet could develop to assist victim-survivors from CALD backgrounds, who were experiencing technology-facilitated abuse, the primary response was to develop resources in easy-read format and multiple languages.

Great importance was also placed on the need for education about domestic violence and abuse and technology-facilitated abuse in an Australian context. It was recommended that resources be developed in video format that can be easily understood with technological walkthroughs and graphics.

Key findings for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities

Damaging and limiting access to technology were the most common forms of technology-facilitated abuse attendees were seeing with respect to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients. Examples included breaking devices, stealing devices and perpetrators not allowing victim-survivors to access technology.

Another common form of technology-facilitated abuse with respect to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients was harassment, especially across social media platforms. Attendees reported victim-survivors experiencing harassment through fake accounts and by perpetrators pretending to be anonymous and impersonating family and friends to access and further harass the victim-survivor.



Multicultural Communities Workshops

Purpose: To better understand the unique experiences of CALD women experiencing tech abuse so we can identify service gaps and develop appropriate and relevant resources.

Session 1 - 13 June 2024 (11:30am - 12:30pm AEST)
Session 2 - 17 June 2024 (1:30pm - 2:30pm AEST)

WESNET The Women's Services Network

For more info: wesnet.org.au/webinars-events

Monitoring accounts and devices was also a frequent concern, and attendees provided examples of perpetrators monitoring victim-survivors' travel and shopping membership cards. Attendees also reported victim-survivors distrusting 'safe phone' programs, tech support and industry organisations.

Workshop participants emphasised lower levels of digital access and literacy in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and encouraged the Wesnet team to consider this feedback when developing training and resources. When asked what resources the Wesnet team could develop to assist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors of technology-facilitated abuse, there was a strong call for education about the role and capacity of technology, social media and location data. Many workshop participants also shared that some victim-survivors cannot access identification, such as a driver's licence, or do not have a home address, limiting access to technology and support.

Next steps

The workshops were a positive and informative experience that will assist in developing future resources and training to better support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, and those from CALD backgrounds. Wesnet will focus on translating resources into 'easy read' format, different languages and also developing training to address the gap in digital access and literacy, technology-facilitated abuse, and education and awareness. All training and resources will be contextualised to an Australian audience.

Wesnet members' targeted services

Although the 2024 Wesnet survey was still in the field at the end of the financial year, early responses indicated that Wesnet services provide services targeted to the particular needs and characteristics of the communities in which the service is based. This is consistent with best practice principles of women's specialist services to be intersectional and equitable, and to be responsive to their communities.

According to early survey results, Wesnet member organisations provide targeted support to the following people:

- 41% to children and young people
- 32% to younger women
- 28% to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children
- 28% to migrant and refugee women
- 23% to women with disabilities
- 23% to women living rurally, regionally or remotely
- 23% to women and children in regional, rural or remote Australia
- 18% to older women
- 14% provide targeted support to LGBTIQ+ people.

Targeted support is taken to mean services and programs that are specifically designed to address the needs and circumstances of the identified individuals and communities. Wesnet promotes a human rights-based approach, ensuring respect, non-discrimination and non-judgemental attitudes to all victim-survivors.

Women on temporary visas experiencing violence

Wesnet continued its membership of the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (NAG) over the course of the year. The group of experts across Australia functions to collectively advocate for policy and law changes to support women on temporary visas experiencing violence and their children to be safe. It continued to call on government to fully implement the recommendations in the NAG's 2022 Blueprint for Reform, including in response to the 2024 federal budget.

The Blueprint for Reform (the Blueprint) was developed acknowledging that Australia's migration system puts women at risk of violence, and that perpetrators use visa status as a threat to keep women in violent relationships. Visa status prevents many women and children from accessing social services, housing and healthcare, which are essential to escape violence. The underfunding of specialist domestic and family violence support services – who are often best placed to provide support – renders these women and children particularly vulnerable.

Preliminary results from the 2024 Wesnet member survey, showed that 96% of members provide services to assist women on temporary visas, and that 71% help women with visa applications under family violence protection visa provisions.

More government support is needed to ensure Wesnet services can continue this work and that no women or children requiring help are turned away due to a lack of resources.



Our Work

Australia's national peak body for domestic and family violence services

Wesnet is Australia's peak body for specialist women's domestic and family violence services. We provide strong, connected leadership for services and their workers who are supporting women and children experiencing and escaping violence. Established in 1992, Wesnet is a grassroots organisation, run by women, for the women's services sector and the women and children they support.

As a public benevolent institution, Wesnet provides relief and support to women and children experiencing domestic violence, family violence and other forms of gender-based violence. And, as a member-led and driven organisation, we provide a range of services aimed at supporting and building capacity in frontline domestic and family violence specialist services.

Policy and legislative reform

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children

The reappointment of Wesnet's CEO, Karen Bentley, as an ongoing member of the National Plan Advisory Group (NPAG), has assured Wesnet a continuing role in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32. While much of the focus is now on the states and territories to get going on implementing the action plan, Wesnet will continue advocating for a central role and recognition of domestic and family violence specialist services in the implementation of the National Plan. Over the course of the year,

members of NPAG had the opportunity to feed into a number of national policy instruments including the National Plan Performance Management Plan, the Draft Action Plan addressing gender-based violence in higher education, the rapid review, and hearing about the work of the DFVS Commissioner.

National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services

Beginning in 2022, domestic and family violence peak bodies and representative networks have been meeting on a regular basis to both share information and build strength in joint advocacy efforts. The alliance consolidated over 2023-24, confirming their name, terms of reference and forward work priorities. The alliance has been supported by the generous funding of the Paul Ramsay Foundation and in-kind secretariat support by Safe & Equal (the Victorian peak body for domestic and family specialist services) but, on expiration of the funding later this calendar year, Wesnet will take over the secretariat function.



Two action plans were released during the reporting period to support the National Plan

Key priority areas identified for the group include:

- A long-term National Partnership Agreement between state and federal governments to ensure ongoing and sustainable funding for all specialist family violence services across the country, with special consideration given to those with high demand in rural, regional, and remote areas.
- Substantial investment in frontline specialist sexual assault services to meet increasing demand and allow diversification of programs, including working with schools and other local organisations to address and respond to sexual violence.
- A comprehensive National Workforce Strategy (including a robust First Nations Workforce Strategy) that ensures strong and sustainable specialist domestic and family violence and sexual assault sectors nationwide, including in regional and remote areas. The strategy would recognise the separate requirements of each sector, consistently build sector skills and capabilities, address remuneration, enhance professional development, and support workforce health and wellbeing.
- Increased input from specialist domestic and family violence experts to the National Partnership Agreements on housing and homelessness and the forthcoming National Housing and Homelessness Plan, to reflect the reality that women and children escaping violence comprise the majority of people seeking housing and homelessness support across Australia.
- Stronger investment in First Nations specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services to support community-led responses to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who are disproportionately impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Additional investment from State and Commonwealth Governments in the specialist legal assistance sector for women affected by gender-based violence to respond to the increasing demand for assistance. This includes a dedicated funding stream for women's legal services in the longer term to respond to gender-based violence as part of the National Legal Assistance Partnership.

Other input to the national policy agenda

Policy submissions

As part of being the national peak body, Wesnet makes submissions on a range of issues relevant to our members, to the safety of women and children escaping violence, and to gender equality more generally. Over the course of 2023–24 Wesnet made submissions to government and/or Parliament on a range of topics as listed below.

- Independent Review of Government Disaster Funding
- Development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan
- Commonwealth Covid-19 Response Inquiry
- Inquiry into Issues relating to Menopause and Perimenopause
- Pre-budget Submission for the 2024-25 Federal Budget
- Covid-19 Royal Commission Terms of Reference
- Inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence in Australia.

These are all available on Wesnet's website www.wesnet.org.au.

Wesnet also endorsed Women's Legal Services Australia's submission to the Crimes Amendment (Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response to

Sexual Violence) Bill 2024, provided comments on the Voluntary Code for Online Dating Services and lent our support to Rainbow Health Australia to ask government to ensure that LGBTIQ+ Australians, especially trans and gender diverse people, be meaningfully included in ongoing consultation and reform in relation to family, domestic and sexual violence.

Advice and consultations

In recognition of Wesnet's expertise, we continued to be invited to consultation activities and approached for advice and input. In 2023–24 this included:

- National Plan Advisory Group (NPAG)
- Consultation session with Minister Andrew Giles, on measures to support visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Advisory Group
- Artificial Intelligence Safety Standards roundtable convened by CSIRO and Choice Magazine
- Technology Facilitated Sexual Violence roundtable with eSafety and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner
- Presented at the Elsie Conference
- Presented to Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) in Victoria
- Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) Advisory Board

- Communications Alliance regarding review of telecommunications guidelines on domestic and family violence
- New South Wales Crime Commission investigation into GPS trackers
- Presented at the United States Tech Summit on dating safety
- Multiple presentations at the Asian Network of Women's Shelter conference on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in Taiwan
- Co-hosted two national workshops on technology-facilitated coercive control with Monash University
- University of NSW Policy Advisory Group on child sexual abuse/domestic violence research project.
- University College of London Delphi Study full day workshop.

Research and evidence

Another of Wesnet's key priorities is contributing to the evidence-base. This supports our members by helping to ensure that their work is better understood by the wider community, as well as contributing to the knowledge underpinning the design and implementation of best practice policies and programs. Wesnet responds to a large volume of research queries on an ad hoc basis, and we promote participation in research projects where appropriate. Due to the large number of requests that we receive, and our own and our members' limited resources, we remain selective in those we actively participate in.

This year, Wesnet continued to work with researchers on six external studies. Pleasingly three of these were completed during the year:

- **Technology-Facilitated Sexual Harassment: Perpetration, Responses and Prevention**— Dr Asher Flynn, Associate Professor Anastasia Powell, Ms Karen Bentley – *funded by ANROWS*

The report was published in April this year. See feature 'Building the evidence-base' for further details.



Wesnet was honoured to attend the 2023 Asian Conference of Women's Shelter focussing on technology abuse

- **Preventing coercive control for migrant and refugee women**—Associate Professor Marie Segrave, Dr Stef Vasil, Ela Stewart, Dr Siru Tan, Dr Fatemah Roohavzah, Dr Ellen Reeves, (Wesnet was on the Advisory Group) – *funded by Respect Victoria*

The report was published in December last year. See feature 'Building the evidence-base' for further details.

- **Technology-facilitated coercive control: Mapping women's diverse pathways to safety and justice**—Dr Asher Flynn, Associate Professor Anastasia Powell, Ms Karen Bentley – *funded by the Australian Institute of Criminology*

This project has been completed, with the final report and journal article submitted in December 2023. We look forward to being able to promote the findings once the report and article are published sometime in late 2024 or early 2025.

Three other projects are ongoing.

- **Can CCTV provide safety and security for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence?**—Dr Diarmaid Harkin, Associate Professor Mary Iliadis, Professor Marilyn McMahon, Ms Karen Bentley – *funded by the Australian Institute of Criminology*

This study will be the first to facilitate the development of national guidance and practice around the use of CCTV for domestic and family violence organisations and contribute to enhancing the safety and security of victim-survivors. The primary research objective is to raise national standards around the use of CCTV and develop clear guidance for domestic and family violence organisations. The project is expected to be finalised towards the end of 2024.

- **Building Knowledge and Support Services For Women Experiencing Technology-Facilitated Domestic Violence in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu**—Dr Diarmaid Harkin, Associate Professor Mary Iliadis, Professor Matthew Clarke, Dr Delanie Woodlock, Ms Karen Bentley – *Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program, Department of Foreign Affairs*

This project builds capacity of domestic and family violence practitioners, community organisations and law enforcement to identify, respond to and support women and children who are experiencing or at risk of technology-facilitated domestic violence in Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu. The collaboration between Wesnet and Deakin University provides a critical opportunity for training and knowledge-sharing around the technological aspects of domestic violence. The ultimate key aim is to optimise long-term support services for victim-survivors by addressing frontline responses, national policy frameworks, law enforcement strategy, and engagement with technology companies.

- **Accessing the family violence provision: enhancing migrant women's safety**—Associate Professor Marie Segrave, Professor Jane Maree Maher, InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, Wesnet and Harmony Alliance – *funded by ARC Linkage Grant.*

This is an Australian Research Council Linkage project: funded as a collaborative research project between Monash University, Wesnet, Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change, and InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence. This project will build the evidence base needed to detail and analyse specific issues impacting migrant women without permanent residency or citizenship, with a focus on how best to support FVP applications and to enhance their success.

Wesnet is also one of 32 partner organisations that are a part of the **ARC Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW)**. This Centre aims to transform our understanding of the problem by examining the structural drivers that cause and compound violence against women, and pioneering new, evidence-based approaches to radically improve policy and practice across Australia and the Indo-Pacific. The Centre mobilises survivor-centric and Indigenous methodologies, interdisciplinary collaborations, and Indo-Pacific partnerships to deliver scalable approaches to eliminate violence against women across the legal, security, economic, health, and political systems of Australia and the region.

Programs and Services

Safety Net Australia

Wesnet is Australia's non-government expert at the intersection of technology and violence against women. Wesnet established and runs Safety Net Australia, a core service that both protects and empowers Australian women. The service protects women from abusers who utilise technology to surveil, monitor, stalk, invade privacy with the goals of coercion and harm manifesting as physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse, while at the same time ensuring that women can remain on technology. Established in 2011, Safety Net Australia, builds on the US Safety Net project established in 2001 by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV).

Safe Connections/Safer Technology for Women

Since 2014, Telstra has donated brand-new smartphones and pre-paid credit to Wesnet to give to women experiencing domestic and family violence through our network of frontline agencies. In 2016, as part of the Women's Safety Package, the Australian Government funded Wesnet to expand and manage the program under the Safer Technology for Women program.

Australian government funding and continued generous donations of smartphones and prepaid credit from Telstra have seen over 45,000 phones be provided to women in need. Importantly, a critical component of the project is the training and resources that Wesnet provides to frontline workers so they can support women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. The training covers all the ways that smartphones can be misused by perpetrators, how to help women be safer on technology, document abuse that later may help them hold their abusers accountable, and how workers can safely provide the phones to women impacted by

gender-based violence. Wesnet ensures that frontline agencies are provided with the up-to-date information and capability necessary to undertake proper risk assessment and keep women and children safe. It is critically important that women are able to access phones and technology to help, not hinder, their safety and wellbeing.

In the 12 months from to June 2024 a total of 6,144 new smartphones were given to women by frontline practitioners trained to assist them in setting up and using their new devices safely. Demand has finally returned to pre-pandemic levels for the first time, and this demand was able to be met. During the year 1,084 women requested top-up credit to help them stay safely connected, an increase of 14% on the previous year. The total number of Safe Connections agencies at 30 June 2024 was 282. Thirty-six new agencies were onboarded over the course of the financial year.



Excitement at Wesnet HQ with the arrival of more Telstra Safe Connections phones. Thanks Mark Sulikowski

Another core aspect of our work is helping women and specialist services avoid and manage technology abuse more generally. The total number of calls received for the year to the 1800WESNET line was 5,623: 3,014 calls between January and June 2024 compared to 2,609 calls in the previous six months. We also made 2,786 outgoing calls which included calls made to survivors and their caseworkers as co-advice appointments and follow-up support.

Wesnet handled a total of 353 tech abuse cases during the year, of which 49 were complex. The amount of complex tech abuse cases has increased by 50 per cent from those investigated last year. Since 2020 the tech abuse queries received have been much more complex and varied, involving many forms of tech abuse and requiring a higher level of investigation by our Technology Safety Specialists.

Communicating with our Safe Connections agencies is key to the success of the program, and we do this in a number of ways, including direct emails and phone calls, as well as training and webinars. We also have a secure website portal with over 4,500 frontline workers, which increased over 29% percent over the course of the year. Newsletters were sent bi-monthly focussing not just on issues directly associated with the program, but on technology safety more broadly. Of course, communication is a two-way street, and we rely on and value our Safe Connections agencies to keep us in touch with the issues that are most impacting women's safety at the ground level.

A big thank you to all our Safe Connections agencies across the country and the dedicated team members in the Telstra Safe Team for their time and commitment to providing safe phones to women who are in need of a new device. It is the risk and safety planning of the workers in these agencies that makes these phones "safe".

Technology safety resources

The Safety Net Australia team also develops and publishes technology safety resources for women, practitioners and their clients on techsafety.org.au. Resources include the Women's Safety and Privacy Toolkit, Technology Safety for Agencies, App Safety Centre, Women's Legal Guides, and printable resources for services and practitioners. The techsafety.org.au website was visited by around 10,000 visitors a month.

This year we reviewed our Safety Planning Booklet along with developing seven new resources:

- Survivors' guide to the cloud
- 'Leave the meeting' resource in relation to artificial intelligence and Zoom meetings
- Tinder online dating safety guide
- Survivor's guide to location tracking
- Further reading resource: Harris, B. & Woodlock, D. Technology and domestic and family violence: victimisation, perpetration and responses (2023).
- What to do if you're being tracked by an Apple AirTag
- Plain English Leave safe, stay safe technology-facilitated abuse booklet.

Uber Rides

Our Uber-partnered Wesnet Rides program distributed 1,528 Uber rides to victim-survivors to help them travel to essential appointments, including domestic and family violence support, medical, police, and legal services in 2023–24. This means 7,284 rides have been provided through the Uber Rides program since 2019, enabling thousands of women and their children to travel when they otherwise would have difficulty. We are very grateful to Uber for their ongoing financial support of the Wesnet rideshare program.

Events, webinars and professional development

Technology safety

Our technology safety specialists delivered 53 webinars on technology safety during the year; 36 to our Safe Connections agencies, and a further 17 on a wide range of topics including the latest on stalkerware, working with children and young people and tech-abuse, understanding stalkerware, smartphones and safety, and social media and survivors. In total we trained 2,671 practitioners and participants in 2023–24. Since 2015 we've delivered training to 18,859 participants at 591 training events.

We also hosted the 5th Technology Safety Summit on 16–17 October 2023 in Melbourne. Read more about the event on pages 38–39.

Other webinars and training

Member webinars were held during the year. Intended to be repeated at regular intervals, a new webinar focussing on member benefits was held in January 2024. The webinar involved the participation of most Wesnet staff and covered a diverse range of member services including training and Uber rides, as well as providing members with an overview of the policy landscape. Members met Wesnet staff and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

Later, in March, Wesnet convened a Safe Connections/ Wesnet members-only briefing for the Australian domestic and family violence sector on keeping women safe in a digital world. Karen Bentley hosted the webinar and provided insights into the particular issues domestic and family violence survivors might face being online. Mia Garlick, Meta's Director of Policy for Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Japan and Korea, talked about tools and features built into Facebook and Instagram that promote privacy and safety. The webinar provided domestic and family violence practitioners with an up-to-date look at the security and privacy features of Facebook and Instagram, two of the most commonly used social media platforms in Australia today.

Other events

Wesnet is regularly invited to present at various events, both in respect of technology safety and in relation to women's safety more generally. This year, Wesnet CEO and trainers presented at events including:

- United States Tech Summit on Dating Safety
- Asian Network of Women's Shelter conference in Taiwan on technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- Elsie conference
- National workshops on tech-facilitated coercive control with Monash University.



Partnerships and collaborative ventures

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA)

Facing difficulty in achieving quorum at AWAVA meetings, Wesnet – in continuing to undertake AWAVA’s secretariat function – surveyed AWAVA Advisory Group members in August 2023 regarding the future of AWAVA. The survey findings made clear that, despite all the goodwill in the world, members were facing too many barriers to actively participate in AWAVA including, for some, dual membership with the funded National Women’s Safety Alliance.

Wesnet instead focussed on publishing the AWAVA Round Up each fortnight and on keeping the group communications channels open to effect group activity such as AWAVA’s endorsement of Women’s Legal Services Australia’s submission on the exposure draft of the Crimes Amendment (Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Violence) Bill 2024.

Over the course of the year, 23 editions of Round Up were published with an average circulation of around 2,000 readers.

Late in the financial year, the government commenced an open tender process for the six national women’s alliances, including an alliance for gender-based violence. This presented a crossroads for Wesnet and its ongoing commitment to AWAVA. After serious consideration, the Wesnet board decided

against taking a lead role in re-tendering for the gender-based violence theme, and agreed that it would be in the best interests of the sector to finally retire AWAVA, to help ensure clear and uncluttered pathways for existing and emerging alliances.

While Wesnet will continue producing Round Up, it will be published under a Wesnet banner, commencing early in the new financial year. We will also work to archive the AWAVA website and all the marvellous resources contained within it, and to making it available publicly through the Wesnet website.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who were a part of AWAVA between 2010 and 2021, and acknowledge the amazing legacy of submissions and policy work that remains relevant to this day, as well as the truly collaborative and synergistic model that AWAVA achieved, amplifying voices from across the sector.

Global Coalition Against Stalkerware (CAS)

Wesnet continued to be an active member of the global Coalition Against Stalkerware, which brings together a range of cybersecurity and non-government organisations to address the growing threat of non-consensual tracking of victim-survivors via digital devices. This year we continued to regularly attend Asia-Pacific regional and global online CAS meetings. Wesnet has also been involved in frequent and regular communication with other global CAS partners discussing issues involving stalkerware and other monitoring and tracking technologies.

Australian Federal Police and the CyberPasifika program

One of our major projects this year has been with the Australian Federal Police as part of the Cyber Pasifika Program. Together with the Team in Canberra, Wesnet has developed and customised training units designed to bring awareness and skills to police officers across the Pacific region in relation to cyber abuse as a form of domestic violence. Several webinars and training resources have been developed as part of the project.

Other partners and projects

As a small organisation we draw strength from partnering with a range of other organisations. This enables us to target our work and our resources, and to join forces with other experts, to amplify knowledge and results. In 2023-24 we continued our long-standing strong and ongoing relationships with major technology companies such as Telstra, Meta, Match Group, Uber, and Apple to end violence and abuse on their platforms and within their workplaces. We have also been working with the Western Australian Department of Justice on the Leave Safe, Stay Safe (LSSS) program. The LSSS program is a collaborative project between Wesnet, the Western Australian Department of Justice, Relationships Australia Western Australia, and Regional Alliance West. Each service works together to provide women leaving prison with casework support, information, referrals, technology safety advice and a new phone if they need one. Wesnet will be providing the phones and technology safety training to the support workers assisting women leaving prison.

We worked with several government departments during the year including the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and the Attorney-General’s Department.

Global Network of Women’s Shelters

We remain strong and foundational members of the Global Network of Women’s Shelters and were proud to be a part of the official launch to the global helplines project Lila.help during the year. The Lila.help website is a directory of vetted helplines that women worldwide can reach out to safely. It helps provide women with a safe number to call with a trusted agency at the other end of the line.

Our Staff

WESNET’s staff

Karen Bentley
Chief Executive Officer

Wesnet Team

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bonnie P | Caroline W |
| Diana H | Sarah B |
| Jennifer Bushell | Annabelle H |
| Joanna C* | Nicolette Hughes |
| Natalie M | |

*Left during the year

Wesnet team members enjoy a dinner after another highly successful Tech Summit



Statistics and Facts

2,671

frontline workers trained in tech safety during 2023–24

6,144

Safe Connections phones were given to women during 2023–24

55 webinars delivered in total – 36 to Safe Connections agencies and another 17 on tech abuse topics

That's a total of **18,625**

frontline workers, police, magistrates, customer services, call centre staff, trained since 2015

1,084

prepaid credit top-ups were requested by survivors

1,528

free Uber rides taken by women in the 12 months to June 2024

97.8%

of training attendees in our Safe Connections felt more confident that they could improve the safety of their clients following Core Unit 1 training, and

96.3% following Core Unit 2

To the end of June, **44,248**

smartphones and pre-paid credit, donated by Telstra have been safely given to women and children via our network

382

cases supporting women experiencing technology abuse

4,500

frontline workers registered on our online portal for the Safe Connections Program

5,623

calls received to our 1800WESNET number

Organisations we have worked with and or who supported our work during 2023–24

- All our amazing members and Safe Connections Agencies (too many to list)
- Agileware
- Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)
- Apple
- BeSydney
- Coalition Against Stalkerware
- Curtin University
- Deakin University
- DFVS Commissioner
- Economic Abuse Reference Group
- Garden of Hope (Taiwan)
- NWEK Japan
- Global Network of Women's Shelters
- ICSM Australasia
- International Convention Centre Sydney
- Monash University
- National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services
- National Network to End Domestic Violence (USA)
- NSW Crime Commission
- Office for Women
- Office of the eSafety Commission
- RSD Audit
- StopNCII (UK)
- UK Refuge
- Women's Shelter Canada

Our Supporters

Donors and funders

Key agencies and partners in 2023–24

- Department of Social Services
- Department of Justice, Western Australia
- Telstra
- Uber
- Match Group & Tinder Aus
- Meta
- Australian Federal Police

Individual Donors

List of all financial donors that donated between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024 in alphabetical order.

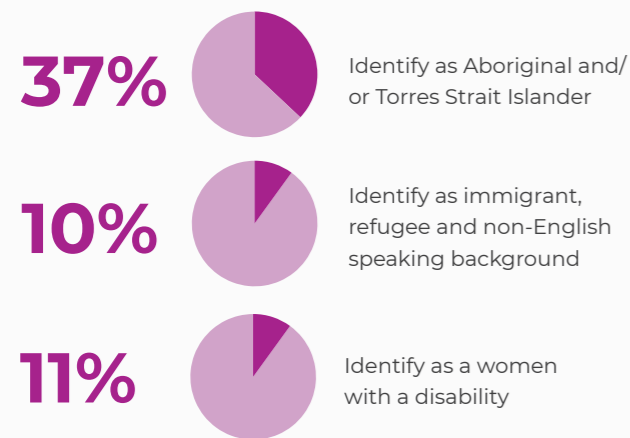
- Joseph Alibrandi
- Jacqueline Bateman
- John Caley
- Reuben Gardner
- Anna Lam
- Jacq Miguel
- Brooklyn Moore

Other donations were received, but the donors asked not to be named in our Annual Report.

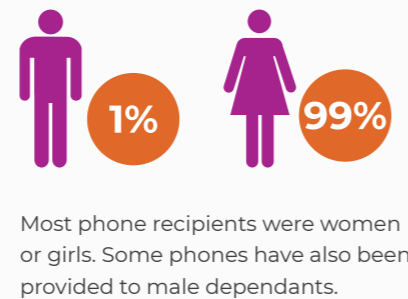
Safe Connections Social Impact

Up to 30 June 2024

Demographics of Victim-Survivors Recipients

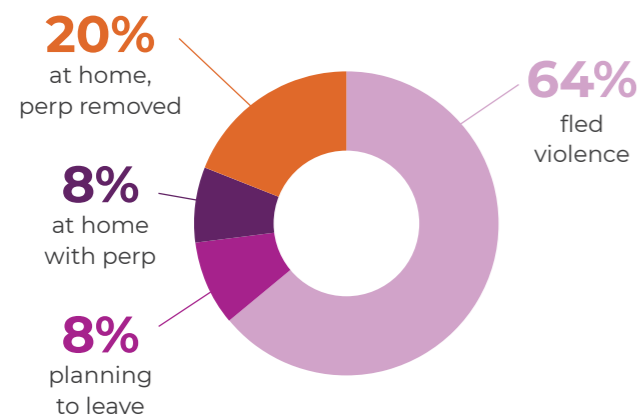


GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS



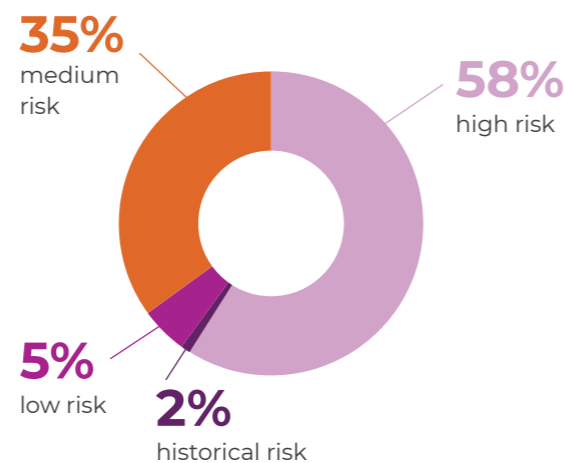
Leaving status

Where the client is in relation to leaving violence when they receive a phone



Client risk level

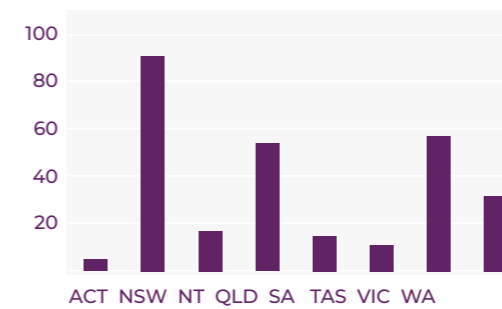
Frontline worker assessment of the client's risk level



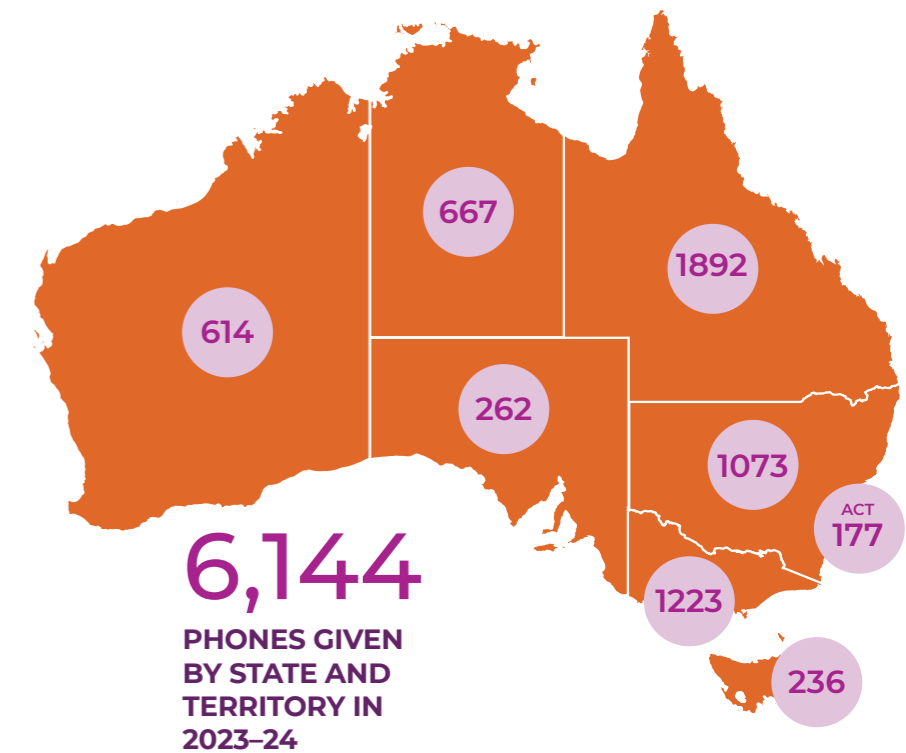
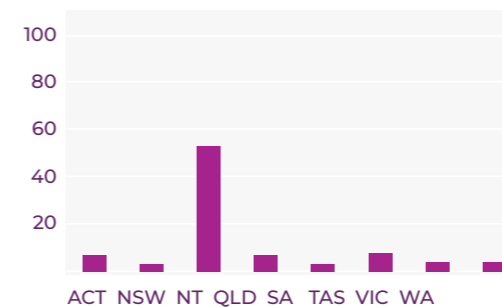
44,248

PHONES GIVEN TO WOMEN TO JUNE 2024

FRONTLINE AGENCIES AT 30 JUNE 2024

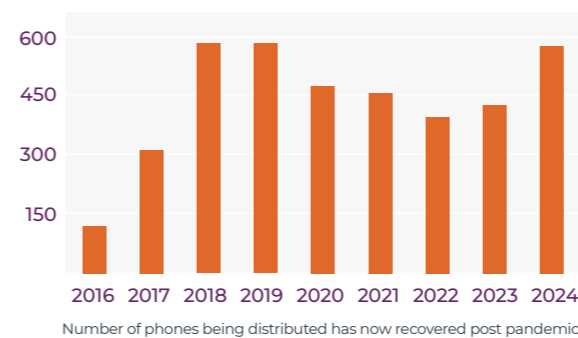


PHONES PROVIDED PER 10,000 FEMALE POPULATION



6,144
PHONES GIVEN BY STATE AND TERRITORY IN 2023-24

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PHONES GIVEN PER MONTH



1,650
workers trained in Safe Connection Agencies

4,407
workers with access to online resources

282
frontline agencies providing phones to women

97.8%
of our training attendees feel their clients are significantly safer

Technology Safety Summit

Wesnet's fifth Technology Safety Summit, held on 16–17 October 2023 in Melbourne, was an unqualified success.

Selling the full complement of tickets, there were 120 delegates and 26 speakers over 20 sessions.

Keynote speakers were Jacqui Barker, Dayle Stevens OAM (Telstra) and Amani Haydar. There was also a broad range of other experts and leaders in their field, from corporate Australia, academia and from both the tech and domestic and family violence sectors.

Organisations and institutions that presented included Monash and Deakin Universities, e-Safety Commission, Redfern Legal Centre, Equality Institute, Telstra, Google, Tinder, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Uber and Meta.

The panel *Prioritising safety and privacy* was particularly well received, featuring Christy Ditchburn, Sustainability Principal, Telstra; Angela MacMillan, Group Customer Advocate, Commonwealth Bank; Nicole Ashcroft, Head of Safety, Uber; & Mia Garlick, Regional Director, Policy for Japan, Korea Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Meta.

As well as hosting the summit, Wesnet contributed by sharing our highly respected in-house expertise. Our tech safety experts Joanna Colautti (who has since left Wesnet) and Sarah Biordi presented sessions, including on spyware, dating safety and location tracking.

Our wonderful former National Chair Julie Oberin AM opened the conference, and our new current National Chair Amie Carrington made closing remarks. Karen Bentley, CEO, shepherded the conference throughout its course, with the very able assistance of other Wesnet staff.



The Wesnet team and former national chair Julie Oberin AM (far right)



The Tech Safety Summit 2023



Current chair Amie Carrington with former chair Julie

Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters

In March 2024 Wesnet was delighted to announce that together with the Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS), Australia will be hosting the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters (5WCWS) in Sydney from 15-18 September 2025.

This will be the first time the conference will be held in the Southern Hemisphere.

Launched in New York at the 68th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68)—the UN's largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's empowerment—and locally in Sydney at the Elsie Conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first women's refuge in Australia—5WCWS will be the world's largest conference by and for women's shelters and those working to end gender-based violence.

More than 1,000 people are expected to attend from over 100 countries.

This conference has a strong history, having been held around the globe four times previously, in the USA, Canada, Netherlands and Taiwan. Attendees have included shelter and refuge workers and leaders from

around the world from government, non-government, corporate sector and academics.

At the time of the launch Karen Bentley, CEO, said, "The 5WCWS will give a massive boost to the common goal: to end all violence against women globally. Women's shelters and women's specialist services have been recognised as crucial to ending violence against women and girls and other forms of gender-based violence.

"The global exchange at these world conferences offers a unique opportunity to share knowledge and collaborate on a worldwide systematic approach to combating violence against women and their children and to increase the safety, independence and strength of women worldwide.

"We are so excited to be able to host this continuing dialogue on a global scale from the past four world conferences".

Spanning over four days, 5WCWS will offer leading keynote speakers, concurrent sessions, workshops, an exhibition, pre- and post-study tours plus opportunities to collaborate.

Wesnet looks forward to warmly welcoming delegates from around the world to 5WCWS.



Wesnet board members (L to R) Elise Phillips, Leanne Barron and Julie Oberin AM at the Elsie Conference where Wesnet announced the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters 2025.



Board member Margaret Augerinos launches the 5th World Conference at CSW68 in New York.

Building the Evidence-base

One of Wesnet’s strategic priorities is to support and strengthen the women’s specialist domestic and family violence sector through evidence-based practice, research, and collaboration.

In 2023–24, Wesnet contributed to two significant research projects that were completed and published, offering valuable insights to inform policy and practice.

Technology-Facilitated Sexual Harassment: Perpetration, Responses, and Prevention

Led by Dr. Asher Flynn (Monash University) and Professor Anastasia Powell (RMIT University), this research, funded by ANROWS, focused on technology-facilitated sexual harassment (WTFSH) in Australian workplaces. The study involved 20 in-depth interviews with industry stakeholders, a national survey with over 3,300 adults, and focus groups with young adults. Key findings included:

- One in seven Australian adults reported engaging in WTFSH.
- Men were more likely to report perpetrating WTFSH, and male-dominated workplaces had higher rates of occurrence.
- Sexist attitudes and the endorsement of sexual harassment myths were strong predictors of WTFSH.
- Gender-competent leadership in the workplace is crucial to addressing the issue effectively.

These results emphasize the need for targeted policies and gender-sensitive leadership to combat WTFSH.

Preventing Coercive Control for Migrant and Refugee Women

This research, funded by Respect Victoria, was led by Monash University and InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, with Wesnet as an advisory

partner. It explored coercive control among migrant and refugee women in Victoria, focusing on both the state of existing knowledge and community perspectives. The study involved diverse stakeholders, including men and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Five key findings emerged:

1. The category of “migrant and refugee” is diverse, and prevention efforts should avoid stigmatizing specific groups.
2. Participants had varied understandings of domestic and family violence (DFV), with the term “coercive control” not resonating universally.
3. Primary prevention and early intervention must be integrated, as they cannot be treated as separate practices.
4. Men’s engagement and leadership are vital for effective prevention.
5. Structural inequality must be addressed in prevention work, as it underpins many forms of violence.

While the research was exploratory, it highlights critical areas for future prevention strategies and underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches to address coercive control in migrant and refugee communities.

These studies contribute to building the evidence base and improving strategies for responding to domestic and family violence in Australia.

Tech Safety in the Pacific

In June 2024 two of our Techsafety team went to Palau with the CyberPasifika team from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and trained-the-trainer on cyber-enabled tech abuse.

The five-day skills development training is a Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police initiative that is managed and delivered by the AFP, to leverage existing Pacific capability through a ‘by the Pacific, for the Pacific’ approach.

Facilitators from the Fiji Police Force, Tonga Police, New Zealand Police, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Australian Federal Police Cybercrime presented to 29 Pacific Police Officers. For the first time, Wesnet was invited to deliver a full-day workshop on cyber enabled abuse and scams.

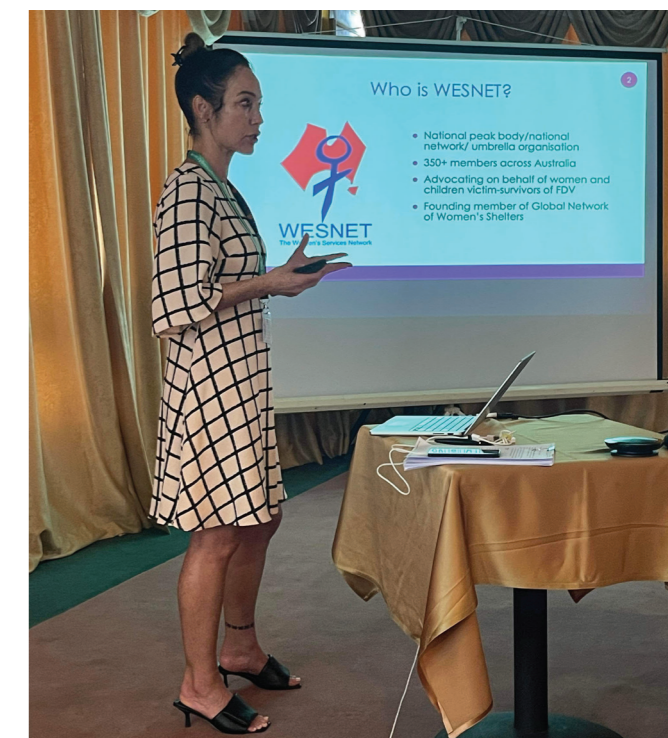
The Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police noted that, “With the support of valued strategic partners, these programs were able to deliver a significant capability

uplift, while also providing an opportunity to build police-to-police networks across jurisdictions. These connections allow for knowledge sharing and cooperation in crime prevention and cybercrime investigations activities”.

This is one of many collaborations Wesnet is involved in to share knowledge about technology and gender-based violence.



Pacific Police Officers in Palau



Wesnet's tech safety specialist Sarah delivering training

Uber Eats and Wesnet

In an exciting collaboration with Uber Eats and Share the Dignity, Wesnet played a key role in the recent campaign aimed at addressing period poverty.

During the campaign that ran from mid-October to the end of 2023, Uber committed to donating one period product for every equivalent product sold via the Uber Eats app.

This resulted in the equivalent value of over \$300,000 or 71,000 period items!



Over \$300,000 of period products were donated

This will provide vital assistance to women at-risk and affected by domestic and family violence in Australia, by providing access to period products at no cost.

Uber noted that the "collaboration between Uber and Wesnet signifies a robust alliance [and the] ongoing collaboration is a testament to the shared dedication of Karen, Wesnet, and Uber in addressing the multifaceted issues surrounding domestic and family violence".



Uber Eats, Share the Dignity and Wesnet worked together to address period poverty

Dating Safety Guide wins award

Earlier this year the Dating Safety Guide won a gold award at CommsCon, Australia's biggest event for the PR and communications industry.

Wesnet and Tinder Australia worked together to create the Dating Safety Guide to provide guidance to survivors and the general population on the safety features available in the Tinder Dating App.

According to a Tinder survey, 79% of Australian dating app users reported that safety features were very important for their overall dating experience, but 1 in 3 admitted they weren't fully aware of these features.

By reminding users of Tinder's Community Guidelines, describing how to use its in-app safety features, and highlighting the recently improved reporting process, the Dating Safety Guide helps inform daters in Australia about the dos and don'ts of dating safely.

The comprehensive guide aims to help Australians get the most out of their dating experiences while remaining vigilant online and offline.



Treasurer's Report

The last financial year had an increase in income and expenses, a welcome event for for Wesnet, with revenue of \$2,000,244 compared to \$1,446,882 the previous financial year.

This was mainly reflecting the doubling of the funding grant from the Australian Department of Social Services for our highly successful Safer Technology for Women Program as well as small increases across grant, donation, fees and charges and membership revenue.

We continued to diversify our revenue streams with more sponsorship and other income sources. Membership revenue, donations and other fees and charges remained steady. Our expenses remained proportional to our revenue.

Wesnet ended the year with an overall surplus of \$281,903. Our assets at 30 June 2024 were \$2,739,280, with liabilities of \$1,320,584. Most of these liabilities relate to payments in advance for work to be carried

out in the next financial year and associated end of financial year liabilities. Our equity at 30 June 2024 was \$1,418,696, which puts us in a resilient cashflow position ahead of the Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters in September 2025.

The 2023-24 audit was an unqualified audit, and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank RSD Audit Pty Ltd and Karen Bentley, Diana H and Wendy Thomas for their work during the year and for taking the finances through the audit.

Margaret Augerinos
Treasurer



Financial Summary

Below is a summary of our audited financial statements. A full copy of the 2023-24 Financial Statements is available on request or from the ACNC website. The audit of our financial records was completed in October 2024 by RSD Audit Pty Ltd.

	2024 \$	2023 \$
STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS		
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Net cash provided by operating activities	1,034,685	146,666
Net cashflows used in investing and financing activities	(19,873)	(15,563)
Net increase in cash held	1,014,812	131,103
Cash on hand at the end of financial year	2,483,393	1,468,581
INCOME STATEMENT		
Revenue	2,000,244	1,446,882
Expenses	(1,718,341)	1,225,655
Net current year surplus	281,903	221,227
BALANCE SHEET		
ASSETS		
Current Assets	2,532,433	1,583,448
Non-Current Assets	206,847	229,981
Total Assets	2,739,280	1,813,429
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities	1,129,567	452,581
Non-current Liabilities	191,017	224,056
Total Liabilities	1,320,584	676,637
Net Assets	1,418,696	1,136,792
Total Equity	1,418,696	1,136,792



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