



Annual Report

2024-25

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, Ngunnawal, Woiworung and Bundjalung, 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 respects to those who did not survive and to their family members and friends.



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Chair and CEO Report

Amie Carrington and Karen Bentley

We opened the 2024–25 financial year amidst a Government-instigated rapid review of best practice, evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence, following an alarming increase in the number of murdered women in the early part of 2024.

In September 2024, the Domestic Family Violence Commissioner Michaela Cronin tabled her first annual report on the state of the implementation of the national plan to end violence against women and children in parliament. Both reports echoed much of what Wesnet has been advocating on behalf of our members and the sector more broadly.

Indeed, the past year has seen significant reforms across most of Australia as governments and communities work to realise the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. From coercive control legislation and Aboriginal-led prevention initiatives to new housing and service investments, progress is being made, but the challenges remain profound: increasing demand, housing shortages, workforce pressures, and the urgent need for tailored supports for children and young people continue to stretch frontline services beyond capacity.

Another 60 women died during 2024-25, and countless more women and children experienced violence. In fact, the statistics show increases in demand for services and police call-outs. More worryingly, in some places we are losing ground in the equality and elimination of oppression. This was made particularly stark by the address to the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women that Karen was able to attend in New York in March. The UN Secretary General, António Guterres said: "Women's rights are under siege. The poison of patriarchy is back – and it is back with a vengeance: Slamming the brakes on action; tearing-up progress; and mutating into new and dangerous forms." He called on those of us who care about equality for women and girls to stand up and take action.

Wesnet has remained a strong and trusted national voice throughout this period of change. We have continued to lead sector responses to technology-facilitated abuse, build capacity through our Technology Safety Summit, and provide collective advocacy to amplify the expertise of specialist women's services at a national level. In addition we were pleased to take on the role of secretariat to the National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services, to serve on the National Plan Advisory group and provide advice through many other meetings and forums to both government and corporate Australia. The Safe Connections program celebrated its 10th anniversary, marking a significant milestone of providing 50,000 smartphones to

survivors since its inception and the first generous donation of handsets from Telstra.

In addition to our business as usual, our work took on a more international twist than usual.

This year, preparations for the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters (5WCWS) ensured Wesnet stays grounded in the realities of frontline service delivery, while also shaping national and international dialogue.

The Conference was held in September in Sydney and brought together more than 1,200 delegates from over 60 countries and featured 204 inspiring speakers sharing global insights, research, and strategies to end gender-based violence. Read more about the 5WCWS on pages 30–37.

This year also marked the 30th birthday of Wesnet, and preparations are underway to celebrate this milestone in Canberra in early 2026.

We want to thank our Board and the Wesnet team for their dedication and professionalism. Together, we will continue to strengthen our sector, support specialist services, and amplify the voices of women and children across Australia.

We would like to particularly thank three Board members who have reached the end of their terms: Julie Oberin AM, Margaret Augerinos and Angie Piubello.



Karen Bentley
CEO

Amie Carrington
National Chair

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.

Our National Board

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.

- 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.

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

Elise Phillips

New South Wales representative

Diane Burton – retired November 2024

Tasmanian representative

Mary Leaker

South Australian representative

Jennifer Bushell

Public Officer

Board Member Reports

Australian Capital Territory

ANGIE PIUBELLO

ACT representative and Secretary

Angie works in the ACT in the beautiful country of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri People with Beryl Women Inc in the role of specialist child/youth domestic violence case worker.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

Since the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, the ACT Government—working in partnership with the domestic violence sector—has taken positive steps to create meaningful change for women and children impacted by domestic violence.

A key priority has been the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy—a 10-year plan aligned with the National Plan’s focus on prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery. Alongside this, a common Risk Assessment Framework promotes coordinated responses across services. Notably, Action 8 of the First Action Plan 2023–27 recognises children and young people as victim-survivors which has led to the ACT funding programs for children and young people that deliver culturally safe, trauma-informed support focused on early intervention and recovery.

Under Action 10 of the First Action Plan, improving access to both short- and long-term housing for women and children experiencing violence is a recognised priority. However, despite increased government investment, the demand for crisis and specialist domestic violence accommodation continues to exceed supply, with many women and children still being turned away from services due to limited availability.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

The 2024–25 ACT Budget allocated over \$12 million to strengthen frontline domestic, family, and sexual violence services, with a particular focus on addressing coercive control. An additional \$6 million over three years will support community-controlled organisations delivering culturally safe programs that promote healing and recovery for Aboriginal families. Funding Aboriginal led organisations ensures that programs and services are community-driven and grounded in self-determination.

This year, the 50th anniversary of Beryl Women Inc. marked a significant milestone in the history of the refuge movement in the ACT. As Australia’s oldest continuously operating women’s refuge, Beryl Women Inc. stands as a powerful example of feminist solidarity and the enduring value of specialist women’s domestic violence services.



Saretta Fielding creating a new artwork at the 5WCWS.

Board Member Reports

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

Domestic violence has shifted from being largely regarded as a “private family matter” to a widely recognised public health, social justice, and human rights issue. This fundamental change has driven significant developments in policy, funding, and service provision across the ACT, enabling a more coordinated and systemic response to domestic and family violence. There is now a deeper understanding that children and young people experience significant impacts from domestic and family violence, affecting their health, wellbeing, and long-term recovery. That they require tailored interventions and culturally safe spaces for healing and recovery.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

1. National Leadership and Advocacy

Wesnet has been Australia’s national peak body for specialist women’s services working to end domestic, family, and sexual violence. It has successfully elevated the voices of frontline services and survivors, influencing national policy and funding decisions over many years.

2. Focus on Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Wesnet pioneered awareness and responses to technology-facilitated abuse, including online stalking, harassment, and coercive control through digital means. This focus has put Australia at the forefront internationally in recognizing and tackling this emerging form of violence against women and children.

3. Support for Specialist Services

By connecting and supporting a national network of specialist women’s services, Wesnet has strengthened the sector’s ability to respond to evolving technology-facilitated abuse, ensuring services are equipped to

meet changing challenges and survivor needs. Their Technology Safety Summit, offered to the broader sector, further demonstrates Wesnet’s leadership and commitment to the sector’s ongoing development and sustainability.

4. Promoting a Feminist and Intersectional Approach

Wesnet’s AWAVA program was pivotal in the Blueprint for Reform (2022). AWAVA, in collaboration with the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, released the “Blueprint for Reform” to address barriers faced by women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence. The blueprint outlines recommendations to improve access to safety, support, and justice for these women, including reforms to the migration system and expanded access to social services. This work was significant in bringing about the critical migration reforms currently being implemented by the Australian Government.

Why these achievements matter

Wesnet’s work has not only improved support and safety for countless women and children but has also helped transform public understanding and government responses to domestic, family, and sexual violence across Australia. Its forward-looking focus on new forms of abuse and its commitment to inclusive, survivor-centered practice ensures its ongoing relevance and impact.



The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, giving a Ministerial address at the 5WCWS.

New South Wales

ELISE PHILLIPS

New South Wales representative

Elise Phillips is the Deputy CEO of DV NSW and is a registered psychologist with 13 years experience in leadership roles in the non-government sector.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

Much of the funding and services in NSW focus on the response pillar of the National Plan, though significant gaps remain, particularly in regional and rural areas.

In September 2024 the NSW Government launched Pathways to Prevention, the NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2028. Dedicated funding for grassroots, community-led and Aboriginal-led prevention initiatives has been provided alongside efforts within education, workplaces and sports clubs. Recurrent funding for prevention work beyond the 4 years of the plan will be vital to prevent violence in the long term.

The early intervention and recovery and healing pillars of the National Plan require further attention and investment in NSW if we are to achieve the stated goal of ending violence in a generation.



5WCWS Delegates listening to a keynote.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

- The first year of coercive control as a criminal offence.
- The launch of the primary prevention strategy with some funding for community led prevention initiatives.
- All funding for core and cluster refuges allocated with some refuges opening while others were in the planning and building phase.

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

The sector has grown significantly. As awareness of domestic and family violence has increased and stigma around helpseeking has reduced, the demand for support has increased alongside the number and breadth of services available.

The sector has also become more professional, evidence based and regulated. In the early years it was driven by volunteers and often governed by a collective. The feminist underpinnings remain for many service providers, however, there has been a move away from volunteers, with employees often required to have tertiary qualifications, and organisations required to meet practice guidelines as set by funders.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

- Providing a mechanism for collective advocacy for services that support women and children right across Australia.
- Remaining flexible and targeting efforts towards gaps such as advice and training on technology facilitated abuse and how to make women safer when using technology.

Board Member Reports

Northern Territory

JO GAMBLE

Northern Territory representative

Jo Gamble has been the CEO of the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre for the past 18 years. She has lived and worked in the Katherine region for the past 20 years, with a passion and commitment to equality and empowering women. She holds a vision for the region to work towards strengthening families.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

The NT continues to work within the 10 year (2018-2028) DFSV reduction Framework: Safe, Respected and Free from Violence which is aligned with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. The current action plan (2022 - 2025) is focusing on taking stock, evaluating and building on what works. Four key areas have guided this work being; primary prevention, early intervention, accountability; response and recovery and systemic enablers and reform.

Areas needing attention relate to the disproportionate domestic violence rates amongst Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander women and children, progress in this area seems to be slow resulting in working towards more culturally safe, community led approaches. Safe housing and crisis accommodation also needs attention, as there is a lack of transitional and long term housing creating a barrier for women and their children attempting to start a new life independent of violence. Another key area needing attention is perpetrator accountability where behavior change programs need to be scaled up. Data collection is another major gap which continues to be inconsistent and often has a lot of gaps.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

- *Sharing and Strengthening our Practice* – a Northern Territory Domestic Family Sexual Violence Conference in the Northern Territory.
- An announcement of a 1.2 million grant for Aboriginal-led DFSV prevention initiatives.
- Introduction of the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to NT Legislative Assembly.
- The release of the DFSV workforce and sector development plan, with an investment commitment of about 1 million per year to build a skilled, culturally safe workforce.
- The retraction of \$9 million infrastructure money for additional crisis and transitional housing in both Katherine and Darwin by the Northern Territory Government.



What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

Over the last three decades there has been more reporting of domestic violence, there is more recognition of DFSV as a public concern. There has been a greater focus on collaboration between NTG and NGO's to work through the intersections of DFSV. There have been legislative reforms such as strengthening the Domestic and Family Violence Acts placing accountability on perpetrators.

In the last three decades services have improved through collaboration, integrated and coordinated responses and cross agency partnerships between NTG departments and NGO's.

There has been a greater focus on prevention and early intervention focusing on changing social norms, gender inequality and community attitudes that drive violence.

A focus on increasing leadership of Aboriginal community controlled organisations in designing and delivering culturally grounded responses. There is a stronger emphasis on cultural safety, trauma informed care and healing centered practice acknowledging the intergenerational impacts of colonisation and systemic discrimination.

The professionalisation of the workforce has changed over three decades from a mostly volunteer workforce to include qualified social workers, counsellors, legal advocates and Aboriginal support workers with training in trauma informed and culturally safe practice. With vicarious trauma being recognised and more widely understood.

Technology, safety and new forms of abuse have been a big change. Technology-facilitated abuse such as image-based violence, online stalking and financial exploitation has emerged as a new form of harm. Services now have a focus on digital safety as part of case management.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

The development of the Tech Safety and Safe Connections programs by Wesnet is an invaluable contribution to the sector. These initiatives have enhanced awareness and equipped frontline workers with the tools and confidence to support victim-survivors more holistically, particularly in navigating the complex intersections between technology and abuse.

I also believe the involvement with World Shelter Conferences is another wonderful achievement by Wesnet. I think Wesnet's involvement in international conferences is invaluable, as it allows the organisation to both share and gain knowledge on a global scale. By participating, Wesnet supports Australia's domestic violence sector to stay informed on emerging trends and innovative solutions, while also sharing our expertise and insights with partners overseas.



5WCWS Delegates having lunch.

Board Member Reports

Queensland

AMIE CARRINGTON

Queensland representative and National Chair

Amie Carrington is Chief Executive Officer of Domestic Violence Action Centre, and Co-Convenor of Ending Violence Against Women Queensland.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

The National Partnership Agreement has been a valuable and important collaborative commissioning strategy between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments that has contributed towards goals within the National Plan.

Queensland has been represented on roundtables and consultations held by the National Domestic and Family Violence Commissioner. This has been an important contribution to the dialogue.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

Coercive control legislation, increased DFV specialist workers co-located in police stations and the 20% funding uplift for DFV services have been important achievements.

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

Increased professionalisation and standardisation of common risk and safety frameworks, conversations about emerging best practice and evidence for these have been really important along with an increased broader social understanding of the whole of Government and social role in ending GBV.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

Wesnet has remained focused and true to our purpose and objectives and is a trusted advisor on specialist DFV matters at a national level. Wesnet has increased our international reputation and collaborations through the work towards hosting the Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters.



5WCWS delegates waiting for a keynote to begin.



Dr. Shellie Morris AO and 5WCWS delegates choir performing at the closing ceremony.

South Australia

MARY LEAKER

South Australian representative

Mary Leaker is the Chief Executive Officer of Embolden. Between 2018 and 2021, she led a whole-of-government project to improve how SA public sector agencies prevent, identify and respond to violence against women, in partnership with Our Watch and White Ribbon Australia.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

South Australian specialist services continue to deliver critical supports to people experiencing and using violence statewide. There are a range of areas in need of attention, and we are looking to the outcomes of SA's Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence to strengthen strategy, governance, and investment to improve how we prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. Key areas of need include greater capacity to intervene earlier, flexibility to meet the diverse needs of victim-survivors, and systemic reforms to respond to children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. And we need to support the capacity and capability of our workforce.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

A key highlight is SA's Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence, which commenced on 1 July 2024. The Royal Commission will provide South Australia with a blueprint for transformative change. South Australia has also made legislative changes to expand stalking and harassment offences to better reflect the use of technology. Additionally, South Australia is proud to be one of three jurisdictions

(with the Northern Territory and Victoria) partnering in the Safety Measures Program. This is a multi-year initiative that aims to drive improvements in how we understand and measure domestic and family violence service demand, capacity and impact.

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

Some of the key changes in our sector in the last 30 years include:

- legislative reforms in the area of domestic, family and sexual violence;
- shifts in community understanding of gender-based violence;
- significant increases in the numbers of people seeking help from specialist DFV services; and
- developments in services targeted to people using violence.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

Wesnet has shown extraordinary organisational resilience as an unfunded national peak body. A key achievement is Wesnet's leadership in the area of technology-facilitated abuse, which has strengthened the knowledge of the specialist DFV sector nationally of this fast-evolving issue.



Prof. Fiona Vera Gray and Olena Shevchenko speaking at the 5WCWS.

Board Member Reports

Victoria

MARGARET AUGERINOS

Victorian representative and Treasurer

Margaret is Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Non-Violence, as well as a board member of Safe and Equal, the Victorian state peak body for domestic and family violence specialist services. She has experience in specialist family violence service delivery, including for victim-survivors and programs for men who use violence.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction?
What areas are in most need of attention?

The Victorian sector is very aware of the National Plan, however the direct engagement by the federal government with our sector is lacking. The most obvious engagement with the National Plan has been the increase in funding for frontline workers and investment in crisis and emergency housing infrastructure. Whilst this investment barely scratches the surface in terms of need, the sector is appreciative of this increased investment. Whilst the 10 action areas in the National Plan are of equal importance, there remains significant unmet need and demand that is placing unsustainable stress on frontline services.

What were the highlights of 24–25 in your jurisdiction?

The Victorian sector, through our state peak Safe & Equal has continued to build evidence and collect data on demand across our frontline services. Since 2021 the sector has contributed data to support the building of an evidence base and demonstrating the levels of demand. The most recent report released noted that victim survivors are waiting too long for the help they need (up to 30 days for case management and longer for other services), are presenting with higher levels of family violence risk, and continue to face complicated barriers to accessing support.

This project has also supported Safe & Equal to launch a new initiative Safety Measures in partnership with Aboriginal Peak Organisations in the Northern Territory, Elizabeth Morgan House, Embolden South Australia, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council and Northern Territory Council of Social Services. Funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, Safety Measures will develop and test approaches for measuring the need, demand, supply, capacity and impact of specialist domestic and family violence services, using the data collected to tell a more nuanced story of what people experiencing family violence need from specialist services.

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

Having state, territory and federal governments agree on the drivers of gender-based violence means for the first time we have coordinated approaches to prevention, response and recovery. These approaches consistently focus on ensuring the safety of victim survivors including children and keeping perpetrators in view and accountable. These approaches have also ensured our system is starting to work together to deliver coordinated and integrated responses. In addition, it is pleasing to see the important work being undertaken to support primary prevention.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

I am so proud of the work that Wesnet, as a primarily unfunded peak, has achieved over the last 30 years. This is no doubt due to not only the great staff team that Wesnet has had over the years, but also a committed and stable Board that has enabled Wesnet to grow and develop its reach and influence.

Specifically, Wesnet should be proud of the role it has had in engaging in developing and supporting national plans, establishing the first women's safety alliance (AWAVA), the establishment of Australia's first technology safety project (Safety Net Australia), its support in developing the Global Network of Women's Shelters and the newly formed national alliance of peak family violence organisations. Finally, it is a huge achievement to be hosting the Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters.

Western Australia

LEANNE BARRON

Western Australian representative and Deputy Chair

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.

How is the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children progressing in your jurisdiction? What areas are in most need of attention?

We are progressing commitments across all areas in Western Australia.

An ongoing issue is the lack of housing options for women and children, meaning refuges are consistently full; greater attention is needed to transitional and exit housing.

Recovery needs further attention, including what recovery services look like and the time frames for services to provide support.

Services for children and young people require higher emphasis across all areas.

What were the highlights of 24-25 in your jurisdiction?

Legislation

Legislative changes have included:

- amendments to the Restraining order Act to better recognise the patterned nature of coercive control and,
- enabling the use of electronic monitoring on repeat and high risk FDV perpetrators

System Reform Plan

Work on the joint government and no-government System Reform Plan has continued and includes workforce initiatives, redevelopment of the common risk assessment, safe accommodation and perpetrator focused initiatives.

Improving service responses for children and young people

The announcement of child and young people specific initiatives in December 2024 is seen to reflect a greater awareness of impacts of FDV on children and young people, and the need for targeted service responses. The new initiatives included 3 new Senior Counsellor positions; a new specialist therapeutic service; development of a children and young people's risk and needs assessment tool; a new children and young people's Central Support Service; and two Aboriginal-led healing services.

What do you think are the biggest changes to have happened in the sector over the last three decades?

- Greater recognition of children and young people as victim survivors; progress is slow but it is happening – largely driven by services and growing evidence base
- Greater focus on perpetrator accountability
- Increased work in the prevention space
- Recovery getting increased attention although not sufficiently funded and not always clearly defined.

Wesnet will shortly be celebrating its 30th birthday. What do you think are its biggest achievements, and why?

- Profiling women's specialist services; our expertise
- Leading work on tech facilitated abuse, and upskilling the sector and raising awareness in the community
- The Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters in Sydney
- Maintaining a national and global presence.

Diversity and Inclusion

JULIE OBERIN AM

Diversity representative

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

Wesnet continues to not only be committed to the principles of celebrating diversity but to work towards an authentic understanding and practice of intersectionality.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how different aspects of a person's identity—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—intersect to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. Crenshaw introduced the concept to highlight how Black women face overlapping systems of oppression that cannot be understood through one-dimensional categories. For example, racial justice movements might ignore gender, while feminist movements might ignore race—leaving Black women marginalised in both. Intersectionality emphasises that identities do not exist in isolation and must be examined together to fully understand social inequalities and to create more inclusive policies and activism.

Drawing on Crenshaws work, intersectional feminism is embedded in the Victorian Code of Practice published by Safe and Equal and is expressed as follows:

“The theory of intersectionality has developed to examine how multiple forms of power, privilege and oppression overlap, or intersect, in people’s lives in mutually reinforcing ways to produce power hierarchies, structural inequalities and systemic marginalisation.^[1] These multiple inequalities are rooted in oppressive constructs such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersex discrimination.^[2] Individuals and groups may experience some or many of these forms of oppression in their lived experiences, restricting their access to resources, power and participation in society. Conversely, privileges such as whiteness, masculinity, being able-bodied and heterosexual can also intersect and amplify a person’s access to social power and multiple advantages.”

Wesnet has committed to a number of strategies to ensure that the concept of intersectionality is front and centre in the work we do. One of these strategies is to have Diversity Representatives on the Board to ensure a focus on one or more of these intersecting structures of

power, privilege and oppression. These include, but are not limited to, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, culture, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status and migration status. It is more than focusing on identity in a depoliticised way that doesn't centre the oppressions that are in place such as racism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, and ageism.

What we know

Violence against women in Australia remains a pervasive issue that cuts across all segments of society, yet it disproportionately affects women from diverse backgrounds. While one in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15, the rates are significantly higher for certain groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Indigenous women are particularly at risk, being thirty-four times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Indigenous women. This statistic reflects the intersection of systemic inequality, intergenerational trauma, and racism that shapes their experiences. Similarly, migrant and refugee women may face unique barriers when seeking help—such as language difficulties, uncertain visa status, fear of deportation, or lack of trust in authorities. These factors often prevent them from reporting abuse or accessing support services.

Women with disabilities are also more likely to experience violence, often from carers or family members, and are less likely to be believed or have access to accessible appropriate support. They are also more likely to experience more violence from more perpetrators than women without disabilities. Hidden disabilities are pervasive and underrecognised and often inappropriately responded to.

In addition, LGBTQ+ women may experience violence in same-sex relationships, from others, and face discrimination when accessing mainstream services.

Addressing violence against women in Australia requires an inclusive and intersectional approach. One-size-fits-all solutions risk marginalising those who are already vulnerable. Culturally appropriate services, trauma-informed care, and greater community engagement are essential. Policies must be developed in consultation with affected communities to ensure they are relevant, respectful, and effective. “Nothing about us, without us.”



Julie Oberin AM at the 5WCWS

Ending violence against women in Australia is not just a matter of law enforcement, it is a human rights issue that demands systemic change. Recognising and responding to the diverse realities of women's lives is critical to achieving safety, justice, and equality for all.

Violence against women in Australia is perpetrated by individuals from diverse backgrounds, cutting across age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education levels. While intimate or former intimate partners are the most common perpetrators, violence also occurs in familial, social, and institutional contexts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionately high rates of violence, often from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. Migrant and refugee women may face abuse exacerbated by language barriers or visa dependence. Perpetrators can include respected community members, professionals, or strangers, highlighting that violence against women is not confined to any single demographic, but is a widespread societal issue requiring systemic change.

Violence against older women in Australia is a pressing yet often overlooked issue. Data show that around **1 in 6 older Australians (aged 65+) experienced elder abuse in the past year**, and women are more likely than men to be victims. The abuse spans psychological, financial, physical, and sexual forms, and in many cases the perpetrator is a family member — a child or partner — trusted by the older woman. Contributing factors include ageism, isolation, dependency, disability, and reluctance to disclose. Addressing this requires age- and gender-sensitive responses, increased awareness, better support services, and improved data to inform policy and practice.

A snapshot of our work

During the year, Wesnet worked with SSI (Settlement Services International) on the development of resources and training to address tech-safety and tech-based abuse in the context of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This involved providing consultation on specialised resource content, client support services and training material, and training SSI staff on technology-facilitated abuse. Wesnet also provided post development resources to better support SSI coordinators in the future.

While occurring in the financial year not technically covered by this report, it would be remiss to not mention the achievements of the recently held 5WCWS.

The Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters (5WCWS) held in Sydney in September 2025 had approximately 1200 delegates from more than 60 countries. The planning that went into the conference took more than two years in the making and recognising and promoting intersectionality was a key objective of Wesnet when developing the program. We didn't just want 'diversity' represented here and there throughout the conference. We wanted to embed intersectionality throughout the entire conference, from its keynotes, the plenary speakers and workshops, the panels, the delegates, the training and workshops and the study tours. We wanted to have a strong focus on First Nations people across the globe, experiences of migrants and displaced people, impact on older women, younger women, children, and particularly the girl child. We ensured we had disability front and centre, including what are often hidden disabilities as well as LGBTIQ+ representation and issues. We also had a strong focus on rural and remote communities and low resourced services and communities. We made a concerted effort to cover as many forms of gender-based violence as we could including domestic and family violence, sexual violence, image based abuse, FGM/Cutting, Early and Forced Marriage/child marriage, dowry abuse, trafficking, reproductive coercion, financial abuse and coercive control.

The conference was a wonderful, joyous event where delegates told us they felt seen, appreciated, validated and energized to continue the fight for transformational social change, even in the current backlash and environment when hard fought for rights are being eroded. The conference inspired a sense of belonging to a movement that is certainly still alive and well, with a new sense of the importance of political and social activism. The conference created a truly great gathering of women and other delegates from an incredible diversity of backgrounds and experience, and I was honoured to be a key part of it.

[1] African American Policy Forum (n.d.); Chen, J. (2017); Crenshaw, K. (1989); 'Intersectionality' (n.d).

[2] Family Safety Victoria (2018a).

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.

Advice and consultations

In recognition of Wesnet's expertise, we continued to be invited to consultation activities and approached for advice and input. In 2024–25 this included:

- Our CEO sitting on the National Plan Advisory Group (NPAG)
- University of NSW Policy Advisory Group on child sexual abuse/domestic violence research project.
- CEO on the Expert Group which will inform the development of a supplement to the [Handbook on Legislation for Violence against Women](#) that will focus specifically on technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG) and which will be informed by existing international and regional legal and policy frameworks addressing TFVAWG.
- Membership of the National Women's Safety Alliance Policy & Advocacy Advisory Committee
- Member Economic Abuse Reference Group
- Member Domestic Family Violence – Child Support Project Advisory Group
- Member ABS Personal Safety Advisory Group
- Advice to the National Emergency Warning System project
- Member RMIT Social Equity Research Centre.
- ACCAN advisory group.
- Attending various conferences both nationally and internationally.
- Various safety roundtable and other forums hosted by technology companies and government.



Jackson Katz Ph.D signing his book at the 5WCWS.

Research and evidence

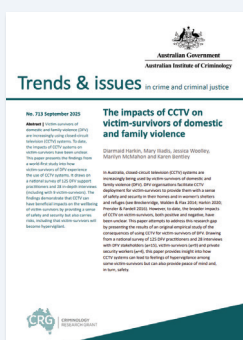
Wesnet is strongly committed to contributing to and sharing the evidence-base. This supports our members by helping to ensure that their work is better understood by the wider community, as well as contributing to the knowledge underpinning the design and implementation of best practice policies and programs.

This year we continued our research partnership into technology-facilitated abuse, as we put our third national study of the use of technology in domestic and family violence into the field. The first national survey was conducted in 2015, and then again in

2020, making the forthcoming survey part of a rich decade-long evidence base led by Wesnet. All three surveys focus on capturing domestic and family workers' experience and knowledge of ways they see perpetrators using technology.

The findings from these past surveys have been used extensively, including informing training for the sector, shaping policy and advocacy for victim-survivors. The research is being led by Professor Donna Chung from Curtin University, in collaboration with Dr Delaine Woodlock from the University of New South Wales, and Wesnet.

The impacts of CCTV on victim-survivors of domestic and family violence



Dr Diarmaid Harkin, Associate Professor Mary Studdy, Professor Marilyn McMahon, Karen Bentley – funded by the Australian Institute of Criminology

Wesnet, in collaboration with Deakin University, undertook research into the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV)

systems by victim-survivors of domestic and family violence (DFV). Victim-survivors were increasingly using CCTV, yet the impacts of these systems had remained unclear.

This study presented the findings from a world-first investigation into how victim-survivors of DFV experienced the use of CCTV systems. It drew on a national survey of 125 DFV support practitioners and 28 in-depth interviews, including nine with victim-survivors.

The findings showed that CCTV could have beneficial impacts on the wellbeing of victim-survivors by providing a sense of safety and security. However, it also carried risks, including heightened stress and hypervigilance among some victim-survivors.

Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on responses to technology-facilitated coercive control

Anastasia Powell, Asher Flynn, Lisa Wheildon, Karen Bentley – Monash University (Australian Institute of Criminology CRG Research Program)

Wesnet, in collaboration with Monash University, conducted research into the use of technology in domestic and family violence and produced a report outlining its findings.

The research examined how perpetrators increasingly used advancements in communication and surveillance technologies to extend their abusive tactics. There had been growing concern about how these technologies enabled and amplified coercive controlling behaviours by abusive partners.

The study explored the experiences of victim-survivors and the challenges support services faced in responding to these harms during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. The findings highlighted ongoing gaps in responses to victim-survivors of technology-facilitated coercive control and outlined key implications for future policy and practice.



Our Work

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).

Key features of the program include:

- Educational Resources and Training: Safety Net Australia provides training and resources to frontline domestic and family violence workers. This training equips frontline services to identify and address technology-facilitated abuse, develop responsive and tailored safety planning around technology for victim-survivors, and offer advice on technology safety, more broadly.
- Material Support: Through the Safe Connections program, Wesnet distributes free smartphones, prepaid credit, and resources to survivors of domestic and family violence. Through the Uber Rides Program, Wesnet provides “free rides” to survivors of DFV so that they may travel to their destination safely, or order food and groceries via Uber Eats, when they need it most.
- Collaboration: The program works closely with technology companies, government, and community organisations to improve the safety and privacy of survivors. Wesnet provides expert advice to agencies, police, and the government on technology-facilitated abuse and gender-based violence.

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, Women’s Legal Guides, and printable resources for services and practitioners. This year 11 resources were updated or developed, including:
- A Guide to Staying Safe On Meta (by Facebook and Wesnet) (new)
- Survivor’s Guide to Smart Home Tech: Internet of Things handout (new)
- Technology and Sexual Assault handout (new)
- Survivor’s Guide to Cameras: Misuse and Strategic Use handout (new)
- Safety Considerations for Parenting and Visitation Apps (new)
- Checking Devices for Rooting and Jailbreaking (new)
- Internet Browser and Privacy Tips (updated)
- Increasing Privacy and Security when using Google (updated)
- Wi-Fi Safety and Privacy (updated)
- Public Wi-Fi Security Tips (updated)
- Password Safety (updated)



Uber Rides

In 2024–25, our Uber-partnered Wesnet Rides program provided 2,423 Uber rides to victim-survivors to help them travel to essential appointments, including domestic and family violence support, medical, police, and legal services. Since 2019, a total of 9,266 rides have been provided through the Uber Rides program, enabling thousands of women and their children to travel when they otherwise would have difficulty. A huge thank you to Uber for their ongoing financial support of the Wesnet rideshare program.



Wesnet Technology Safety Specialist Sarah Biordi, speaking to participants of Cyber Pasifika workshops in Brisbane in August 2024.

Safe Connections/Safer Technology for Women

In the 12 months from July 24 – June 25, a total of 6,993 new smartphones were provided to women through the program, with demand for devices continuing to increase across Australia both in metro and regional/remote areas. Over the same period, 1,080 women requested top-up credit—\$180 of pre-paid credit that provides women with free calls and texts within Australia and remains valid for 6 months. To extend the network of agencies involved in the Safe Connections program, an additional 18 agencies were onboarded making the total number of Safe Connections agencies at 30 June 2025, 297.

The total number of calls received for the year to 1800Wesnet (1800 937 638) was 6,108 compared to the 5,623 in the previous year. We also made 2,135 outgoing calls which included calls made to survivors and their caseworkers for co-advice appointments and follow-up support, though Wesnet discontinued its direct tech abuse support to survivors and their caseworkers with the launch of the eSafety Commissioner’s tech abuse hotline, in March 2025.

Since 2020 the tech abuse queries Wesnet has 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. Wesnet handled a total of 314 tech abuse cases during the year, of which 59 were complex.

Communicating with our Safe Connections agencies remains key to the success of the program, and we continue to do this in a number of ways, including direct emails and phone calls as well as through webinars and training, delivered both in person and online. Wesnet’s secure website, “the portal”, continues to provide access and resources to more than 5,219 frontline workers, which increased over 15.9% 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 news and technology safety resources that might impact the sector, more broadly.

Knowledge and Learning

One of the key roles of Wesnet as a peak body is to share knowledge and provide learning opportunities for both the DFV sector and the survivors they support.

Tech Safety

Our Technology Safety Specialists delivered 51 webinars on technology safety during the year; 32 to our Safe Connections agencies, and a further 19 on a wide range of topics including the latest on stalkerware, working with children and young people, smartphones and safety, connected cars and social media and survivors. In total we trained 3,620 practitioners and participants in 2024–25 and since 2011 we’ve delivered training to 22,473 participants at 669 training events. We also hosted the 6th Technology Safety Summit on 9-11 October 2024 in Melbourne. Read more about the event on page 29.

A new webinar focussing on member benefits was held in March 2025. 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. This year, Wesnet’s CEO and Technology Safety Specialists also attended or presented at many events including:

- US Tech Summit
- StopNCII event in New York as part of CSW69
- Cyber Safety Pasifika - Brisbane
- Associated Country Women of the World, South Pacific Area Conference



Wesnet CEO Karen Bentley and Treasure Margaret Augerinos presenting a parallel event in New York as part of CSW69.

Our Work



Wesnet CEO, Karen Bentley and SA Representative Mary Leaker attending the Stop DV Conference in Adelaide in November 2024.

- STOP DV Conference
- Primary Care Pathways to Safety: Technology-Facilitated Abuse and Domestic Violence
- Resolution Institute Conference: eSafety in Family Law
- ACON x Wesnet Technology Safety Awareness: Consultation Workshop with Practitioners → ANROWS Conference

Based on the success of the Technology Safety Workshops offered to frontline workers as part of the 6th Technology Safety Summit, Wesnet hosted 2 half day in-person events in both Perth and Melbourne to build on delegates' pre-existing knowledge of technology-facilitated abuse and apply their skills and insight in a practical and responsive environment. Since 2024, we have also participated in the Leaving Safe, Staying Safe (LSSS) program—a program designed to educate, protect and support women leaving prison with a history of DFV through the provision of a new device and education around online safety, after release.

Tech Safety in the Pacific

Wesnet's commitment to knowledge-sharing and advocacy also extends beyond Australia. In the last 12 months, Wesnet has provided training to both government agencies and federal law enforcement on technology-facilitated abuse and safety across the Pacific. In 2024, as part of a project facilitated by Deakin University and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Wesnet delivered training under the *Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program* in Tonga and Vanuatu as well as being invited to join the Australian Federal Police's *Cyber Safety Pasifika (CSP)* project, to run half-day workshops in the Cook Islands and Fiji to enhance policing capabilities and international cooperation in cybercrime investigations.

Partnerships and collaborative ventures

Working with big tech

As a small organisation we aim to advocate for safety by design and to bring a violence against women lens to big tech by partnering with a range of organisations. This enables us to target our work and our resources, and to join forces with other experts, to amplify knowledge and results. In 2024–25 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. Wesnet has continued to work with Match Group to enhance user safety and experiences with online dating. Together with Tinder Australia, Wesnet consulted around Tinder's online consent course as part of their School of Swipe. Wesnet also consulted with Tinder Australia to support and provide input to their Verified QT initiative, promoting user authenticity to further enhance safety and trust. Wesnet co-hosted a roundtable discussion with Match Group and Tinder bringing together Australian NGOs to learn more about the company's efforts in favor of user safety and discuss safe dating practices.

Other partners and projects

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.



Deakin University and Wesnet presented workshops on the topic of Tech Safety in Tonga, for the 'Technology-facilitated abuse in the Pacific' project.



Members of the NADFVSS met in Canberra in June 2025. A traditional smoking ceremony was held by the hosts at Yerrabee on Ngunnawal country.

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 new name - the National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services (NADFVSS) along with terms of reference and forward work priorities. The NADFVSS was initially 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). As of this year, Wesnet took over the Secretariat function of the group.

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.

Our Staff

Wesnet's staff grew over the course of the year.

Karen Bentley
Chief Executive Officer

Wesnet Team

Annabelle H

Avril C

Bonnie P

Brianna W

Caroline W

Catherine Plunkett

Diana H

Jennifer Bushell

Madeleine Clark

Natalie Morris

Nicolette Hughes

Rebecca D*

Sarah B

*Left during the year



Statistics and Facts

1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

3,620

frontline workers trained in tech safety during 2024–25

That's a total of

22,473

frontline workers, police, magistrates, customer services call centre staff trained and others at 669 training events since 2011

6,108

calls received to our 1800Wesnet number

98.6%

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%

following Core Unit 2

5,219

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

5

policy submissions to government departments

51

webinars delivered in total – 32 to Safe Connections agencies and another 19 webinars on technology abuse topics for a range of audiences

314

cases supporting women experiencing technology abuse

2,423

free Uber rides taken by women in the 12 months to June 2025

6,993

Safe Connections phones were given to women during 2024–25

1,080

prepaid credit top-ups were provided to survivors during the year

To the end of June,

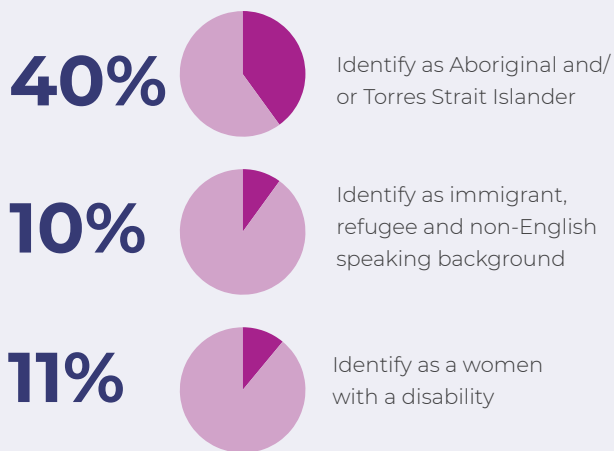
51,241

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

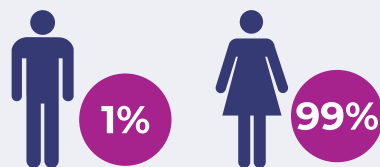
Our Social Impact

Up to 30 June 2025

Demographics of Victim-Survivors Recipients



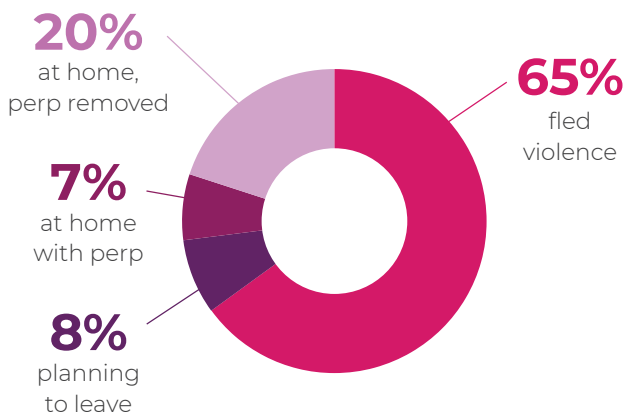
GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS



Most phone recipients were women or girls. Some phones have also been provided to male dependants.

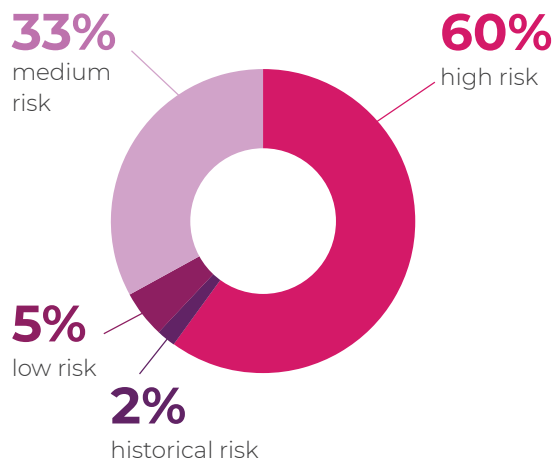
Leaving status

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



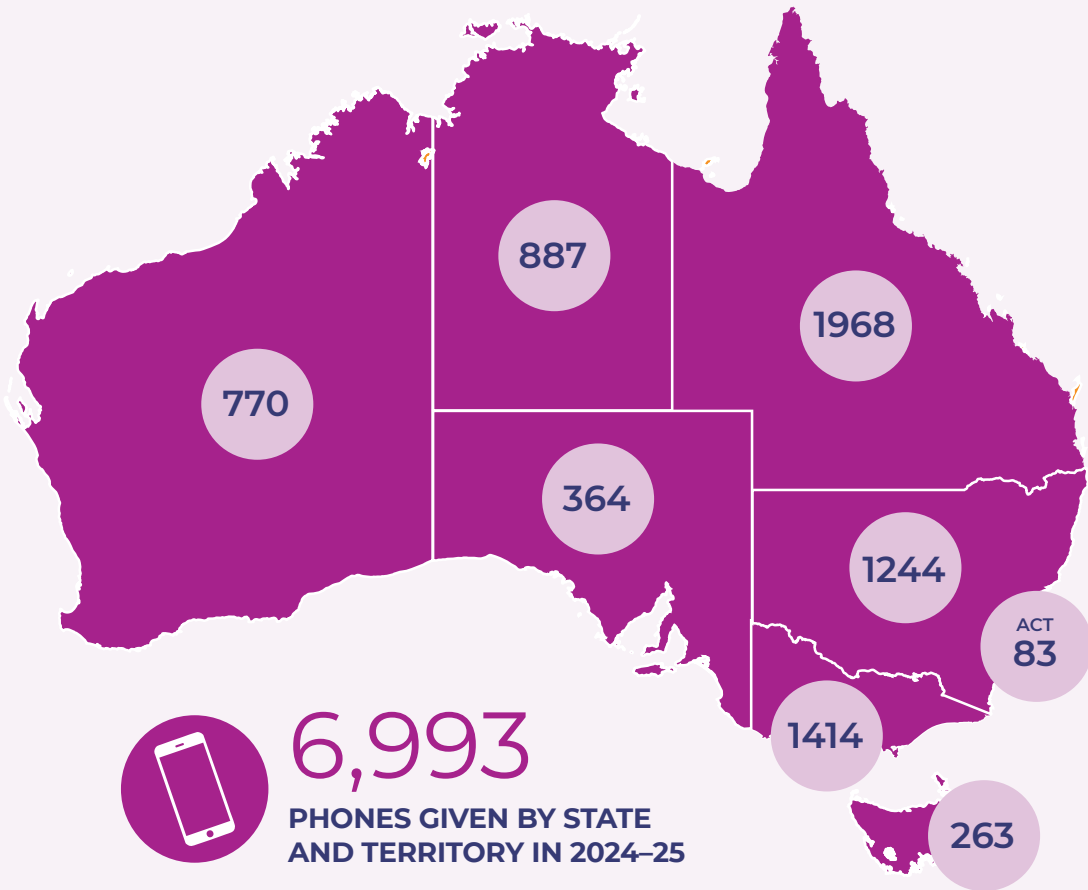
Client risk level

Frontline worker assessment of the client's risk level



51,241

PHONES GIVEN TO WOMEN TO JUNE 2025



6,993

PHONES GIVEN BY STATE AND TERRITORY IN 2024-25



1,952

workers trained in Safe Connection Agencies



98.6%

were more confident that they could improve the safety of their clients after attending the Core Unit 1 Webinar.



5,219

workers with access to online resources



297

frontline agencies providing phones to women

Ten years of Safe Connections

In 2025, Wesnet proudly celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Safe Connections Program, a pioneering initiative that has transformed the lives of thousands of women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse in Australia.

Launched in partnership with Telstra on 24 November 2014, the program was created in response to the alarming rise in technology-facilitated abuse, where people using violence were found to be using smartphones, social media, location tracking, and spyware to stalk, harass, and control their victims. Wesnet started to advocate to government and tech companies in Australia that technology, specifically smartphones, could become an easy tool of abuse to perpetrate violence against women as early as 2010 through its Safety Net Australia Program. In 2014, after meeting with the Telstra Digital Inclusion team, Telstra made a generous donation of 5,000 brand new android smartphones (and pre-paid credit), and the Safe Connections program was designed to provide women escaping violence with a new and secure smartphone, a “safe connection” to their community, services, and support in a time of crisis. The first Safe Connection’s Phone was given to a woman in March 2015.

In its early implementation, the program was managed by staff who volunteered their time and was shared

between the Wesnet Secretariat and our State/Territory Representatives to distribute the Safe Connections phones to services within their primary membership base. The Smartphones were provided with \$30 in prepaid credit and some basic technology safety tips.

In March 2016, the Australian Government allocated \$2.5 million from the Women’s Safety Package to expand the program, enabling the establishment of a small team at Wesnet to centrally manage the distribution of phones, and more importantly, to provide training to the frontline agencies about smartphone safety. At the same time, Telstra committed to donating up to 20,000 handsets and pre-paid credit. Together, the government funding and the generous donation of Telstra not only allowed more services to be onboarded as Safe Connections agencies, but enabled Wesnet to provide much needed training to domestic and family violence practitioners across Australia to help their clients recognise and mitigate risk from technology-facilitated abuse.

2010–2011

- Wesnet identifies a significant threat to women’s safety posed by abusers misuse of technology
- Wesnet establish its Safety Net Australia program

2012–2013

- Wesnet employed a technology safety trainer (approved and licenced by the US NNEDV) to adapt and deliver Safety Net curriculum to Australian DFV services

2014–2015

- Safe Connections Program Launched in partnership with Telstra. Telstra donates 5,000 phones, prepaid recharge credit to Wesnet for survivors
- Safety Net Australia program is Awarded Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award
- In 2015 the first Safe Connections phones given to women

2015–2016

- Australian Government allocates \$2.5 million funding and Telstra commits to provide 20,000 phones to the Safe Connections program
- Awarded Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award for Telstra Safe Connections Project
- KPMG evaluation concluded that Safe Connections was contributing to decrease in women’s vulnerability to violence



Wesnet CEO Karen Bentley with former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, CEO of Telstra Andy Penn, former Minister for Women Michaelia Cash.

Wesnet worked with Telstra to improve the experience and safety of survivors when activating a phone. Telstra negotiated an ID exemption with ACMA for women affected by or escaping violence. This meant that those women who had their ID documents withheld, destroyed or who had been forced to leave it behind, were now able to activate a new phone whilst they obtained a new ID. Simultaneously, Telstra established an internal team of operators dedicated to the program who were initially trained by Wesnet to be sensitive to the experience of survivors and the impact of abuse and trauma on victims. Telstra also recognised the ongoing financial burden of DFV and, beyond the initial credit provided with the phone, offered survivors a

further credit top-up amount, once this had expired. From 3 x \$30 credit top-ups to the current amount of 1 x \$180 credit top-up per customer per financial year, Telstra's support has been unwavering and has evolved with the program, remaining receptive to the feedback and consideration of survivors, the risks they face, and the evolving complexity of their needs.

With the addition of Technology Safety Specialists to its team, Wesnet was also able to offer direct and specific advice to caseworkers supporting their clients on a case-by-case basis. Evolving into a co-advice format, the program understood the need for casework management and ongoing support for clients from frontline workers, but answered the call for specialist

2017–2018

- 5,787 Safe Connections phones provided to women over the lifetime of the Safe Connections program
- Curtin University evaluation concluded that Safe Connections is an empowering program that is contributing to the safety of women who have experienced family and domestic violence

2018–2019

- 2,400+ calls a year to 1800WESNET
- 7,320 smartphones given to women with \$30 prepaid credit
- 276 Agencies providing phones to women
- A period of short term funding extensions for the program begins.
- The ID exemption period is increased from 30 to 90 days for Safe Connections phones

2019–2020

- Wesnet reaches milestone of providing Tech Safety Training to 10,000 workers
- The Covid pandemic lead to a surge in domestic and family violence cases involving the misuse of technology but a corresponding decrease in face-to-face service delivery
- Wesnet hits the milestone of 20K phones provided to women over the lifetime of the Safe Connections program

2020–2021

- 4038 calls to 1800wesnet
- 5882 smartphones phones given out
- 276 Agencies providing phones to women
- 335 prepaid credit top-ups were provided to survivors

Ten years of Safe Connections

(CONT.)

advice through an intersectional lens.

During COVID-19, instances of technology-facilitated abuse, however, escalated quickly. While Wesnet rose to meet the influx of calls from survivors requesting help, the scale, complexity, and prevalence of tech abuse was noticed beyond Wesnet's small and passionate team. With the launch of the eSafety Commissioner's Tech Abuse Hotline and Support Service Enquiry Form in early 2025, Wesnet refocused its expertise on diversifying the training it was providing to upskill and support the specialist women's services sector and its staff, being its national peak body, as demand required.

In order to keep pace with the speed and innovation of technology and the harms that have emerged across an ever-changing and ever-evolving digital landscape, Wesnet has continually updated its program delivery and public-facing resources. From advice around new forms of spyware and location tracking to the misuse of platforms by abusers, Safe Connections has remained agile, collegial, and ahead of the curve. Celebrated for its work, the program received an Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award in 2016, acknowledging the Safe Connections Project and its impact within the community sector. In 2018, an independent evaluation by Curtin University found that Safe Connections was highly effective, empowering, and an outstanding example of multi-sectoral collaboration.

Over the past decade, the Safe Connections Program

has grown to become one of the most successful partnerships of its kind globally. Through a network of over 5,000 trained frontline workers across hundreds of agencies, the program has distributed over 50,000 smartphones to women in crisis—each phone representing not just a device, but a lifeline, a symbol of freedom, security, and hope.

As we mark 10 years of Safe Connections, Wesnet is deeply proud of what has been achieved. This milestone is a testament to the strength of partnerships, the resilience of survivors, and the dedication of workers on the frontlines of domestic violence services.

Wesnet would like to thank Telstra and the Australian Government for their continued support and the frontline agencies who make this work possible..



Safe Connections phones being dispatched to agencies.

2021–2022

- 4,003 calls to 1800wesnet
- 5,074 smartphones given to women
- 231 Agencies providing phones to women
- 335 prepaid credit top-ups were provided to survivors

2022–2023

- 4,730 calls to 1800wesnet
- 249 Agencies providing phones to women
- 949 prepaid credit top-ups were provided to survivors
- Australian Government increases and provides 4 year funding.

2023–2024

- 6,144 smartphones given to women
- 282 Agencies providing phones to women
- 1,084 prepaid credit top-ups were provided to survivors
- Topup amount is increased to \$180

2024–2025

- Wesnet hits the milestone of 50K phones provided to the Safe Connections program by Telstra
- 52 208 phones given to women by 30 June 2025

Technology Safety Summit



In October, Wesnet hosted its 6th Technology Safety Summit, Australia's only national conference dedicated to technology and violence against women, in Naarm (Melbourne). Held from 9 to 11 October, the Summit brought together more than 180 delegates, 35 speakers and over 25 sessions across three days.

Experts attended from corporate Australia, universities, technology companies, government, legal services and the domestic and family violence sector. Presenters included Telstra, Our Watch, Women's Legal Services in Western Australia and Victoria, RMIT, UNSW, University of Canberra, Macquarie University, Body Safety Australia, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, Uber, Meta, Westpac, Settlement Services International, Full Stop Australia, Match Group and Nansen.

The Summit opened with a welcome from Wesnet National Chair Amie Carrington, followed by Teresa Corbin, Telstra's Chief Customer Advocate, who spoke about the responsibility of telecommunications companies in preventing technology-facilitated abuse. This was followed by a powerful keynote address from Dr Emma Fulu from the Equality Institute titled *Technology Facilitated Abuse: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, which explored how technology can be both empowering and harmful depending on how it is used. Wesnet CEO Karen Bentley, Knowledge and Learning lead Bonnie Pockley and Technology Safety Specialists Sarah Biordi and Annabelle Harrison, explored what technology safety means in the modern world and how technology continues to be used to perpetrate violence against women and gave a practical overview of cyber security best practices for frontline services. Professor Nicola Henry presented her findings on perpetrators of image based sexual abuse, while Jay Jones and Deanne Carson from Body Safety Australia discussed the online radicalisation of boys and how deepfake content is showing up in classrooms.

A particular highlight of the Tech Summit programs is the corporate and technology leaders panel. This year it panellists included Christy Ditchburn from Telstra, Nicole Ashcroft from Uber and Tiffany Lewin from Westpac. They shared how large companies are working to prevent harm, embed safety into product design and support customers experiencing abuse.

Both days featured a series of engaging breakout sessions. Digital forensic specialists Rose McDonald

and Andrew Collins from Nansen gave insights into identifying and preserving digital evidence. From Wesnet, Annabelle Harrison and Bonnie Pockley presented a practical session on cyber security for frontline services, Joanna Colautti spoke about technology abuse experienced by children, while Sarah Biordi explored the emerging risks of smart connected vehicles. Dr Alexandra Phelan, from Monash University, examined gendered narratives and hostile beliefs online, and Monica Andersson and Dr Astrid Perry from Settlement Services International highlighted the technology safety challenges faced by migrant and refugee women.

Samantha McGuffie and Trish Pierson from Our Watch facilitated an interactive workshop on preventing violence before it occurs. Following this, Rebecca Ballard and Suzie Nesbitt from Women's Legal Services Victoria joined Dr Monica Cass from Women's Legal Services Western Australia to discuss how technology facilitated abuse is addressed across different legal jurisdictions.

The Summit concluded with a conversation between Karen Bentley, CEO of Wesnet and Dr Yoel Roth, Vice President of Trust and Safety at Match Group, who reflected on global trends in online safety, digital platform responsibility and the future of trust and safety work. Amie Carrington officially closed the event and acknowledged the contributions of speakers, delegates, sponsors and the Wesnet team.

For the first time, the Summit included a dedicated third day Tech Safety Workshop attended by 100 frontline workers. This intensive session focused on real world case studies, practical tools and survivor centred approaches to responding to technology-facilitated abuse. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and confirmed the value of hands-on training in this area.

Wesnet extends sincere thanks to all supporters, especially our sponsors: Telstra as Platinum sponsor, Match Group and Uber as Silver sponsors and Meta as Bronze sponsor.

5th World Conference of Women's Shelters

#5WCWS

Wesnet was honoured to co-host the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters (5WCWS) in Sydney from 15–18 September, the world's largest Conference by and for those working at the grassroots to end gender-based violence.

With over 1,200 delegates from over 60 countries and featured 200+ inspiring speakers sharing global insights, research, and strategies to end gender-based violence, the event was a resounding success.

Held in the Southern Hemisphere for the first time, the Conference showcased Australia's leadership in the sector and strengthened connections across

our global movement. It was powerful to see our members present their work and to hear how communities around the world are driving change and supporting survivors.

5WCWS was co-hosted with:



What delegates thought about 5WCWS:

98% of delegates rated overall satisfaction 4–5 out of 5 (very good to excellent)

84% of delegates rated their satisfaction of quality and content of keynote presentations 4–5 out of 5 (very good to excellent)

88% of delegates said they would attend 6WCWS!

Top three motivators for attending the Conference:

- To increase knowledge and awareness of the issues faced around the world
- Professional development
- Networking opportunity

Scan or click on the QR Code to visit the Wesnet shop:



Scan or click on the QR Code to watch the Conference highlights video:



WHO attended 5WCWS



1,208 delegates



Countries: **61** Australia 48%
52% overseas






Scholarships offered: **78** complimentary registrations
35 travel scholarships



84% of onsite attendees had never attended a World Conference of Women Shelter before

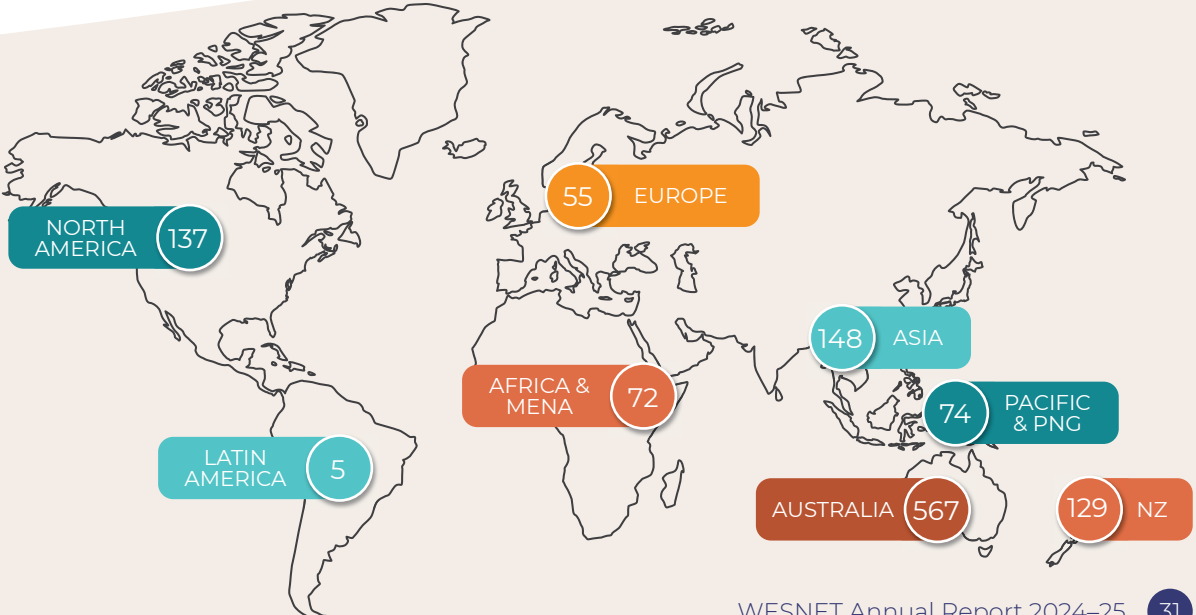
Gender breakdown:
Delegate by gender

-  **77%** Female
-  **6%** Male
-  **17%** Non-binary/other/
prefer not to say

Sector breakdown:
Top 3 sectors

- 38%** NGO/
Specialist
- 27%** DFV/Sexual
Assault
- 15%** NGO/
Other

Regional breakdown of registrations



5th World Conference of Women's Shelters

#5WCWS

Program

The comprehensive program included 12 keynotes and 204 concurrent speakers covering a wide range of topics including:

- Oppression – Anti-oppression and inclusion strategies
- Barriers – Breaking down the barriers and transformational change
- Justice – Justice and rights
- Knowledge – Knowledge and research
- All Forms – Recognising all forms of gender-based violence, challenges and strategies
- Sustainability – Resourcing and sustainability
- Safety/Wellbeing – Safety, wellbeing, recovery and healing
- Tech – Technology
- Continuum – The continuum of approaches
- Together – Working together

12 Plenaries

66 Countries

204 Speakers

Keynote speakers

- Emma Fulu (Emcee) - Australia
- Prof. Kyllie Cripps - Australia
- Jenny Holmes - Australia
- Bandana Rana - Nepal
- Prof. Fiona Vera Gray - United Kingdom
- Dr Shellie Morris AO - Australia
- Olena Shevchenko - Ukraine
- Natasha Stott Despoja AO - Australia
- Aleid van den Brink - Netherlands
- Heidi La Paglia Reid - Australia
- Dr Hannah Tonkin - Australia
- Cecilia McKenzie - Australia
- Jackson Katz, Ph.D - USA
- Hon Tanya Plibersek MP - Australia
- Amie Carrington - Australia
- Arman Abrahamzadeh OAM - Australia
- Julie Oberin AM - Australia
- Lula Dembele - Australia
- Dr Ann O'Neill AO - Australia
- Maha Abdo OAM - Australia



Pre and post Conference workshops

- Holding our stories, strengthening our shelters: Indigenous women leading change in safety, healing, and knowledge sharing – presented and Sponsored by WAGEC
- Unpacking technology-facilitated abuse in the context of domestic and family violence – NNEDV, Wesnet
- Advanced topics in technology-facilitated abuse – Wesnet, NNEDV, Nansen
- Recovery, healing and advocacy for victim-survivors: Australia's specialist sexual violence sector – NASASV



Amazing and Inspiring. It lit the fire again and made me connected more to the cause, to the why we work in this sector.



5th World Conference of Women's Shelters

#5WCWS

This was the BEST conference I have ever attended. Got so much out of it, met incredible women and got the fire back in my belly around feminism and its history and impact. LOVED IT!

"The atmosphere at the conference was amazing!"



This was a really fantastic conference with some keynote and session speakers that were absolutely inspiring. I really enjoyed myself and took a lot away from this powerful conference.





Thank you to Telstra for sponsoring our Conference dinner at Watersedge on beautiful Sydney harbour on a stunning evening.



“ Fabulous venue, fabulous speakers very well arranged and support throughout was amazing. ”

5th World Conference of Women's Shelters

#5WCWS

Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to all our member organisations who attended, presented, and supported the event. Your contributions made the conference a true reflection of global solidarity and collective action.

Also, a special thanks goes out to all our Conference sponsors, supporters and exhibitors whose support made this exceptional world Conference possible.

Thank you to our sponsors and supporters

MAJOR FINANCIAL SUPPORTER



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

PLATINUM

Uber

PLATINUM

Meta

DINNER



WELCOME RECEPTION

CommBank
Next Chapter

BRONZE

iG
MatchGroup

FIRST NATIONS



CONFERENCE APP



ONSITE PRINTED PROGRAM



SUPPORTERS

business
events
sydney

BUSINESS EVENTS
AUSTRALIA



We thank our exhibitors

- Saretta Art and Design Pop Up Store
- Wesnet Inc.
- Global Network of Women's Shelters
- Department of Social Services
- CommBank Next Chapter
- The Office of the eSafety Commissioner
- Restorative Pathways (formerly Ruby's Place)
- Asian Network of Women's Shelters and The Garden of Hope Foundation
- SDP Inc.
- Lifeline/DV Alert



“Attending the 5WCWS has been such a meaningful experience – hearing powerful voices, sharing knowledge, and standing in solidarity with changemakers from across the globe. It’s truly inspired by the energy and commitment at the 5WCWS. Every session is a reminder of why we must continue this important work.”



Thank you to the 5WCWS organizers for hosting such a meaningful and well-coordinated conference. The sessions were insightful, and the opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing were invaluable. I deeply appreciate your hard work and dedication in making this event a success.

“It has been an amazing conference, it’s still very nearby in my thoughts and in my heart. The organisation and the atmosphere were excellent thanks to your work and the work of the whole Wesnet team. Thank you so much.”

Thank you to our volunteers

We extend a great appreciation to all the volunteers who worked at the 5th World Conference of Women’s Shelters. Thank you for all your hard work to ensure the Conference ran as smoothly as possible.



Treasurer's Report

The last financial year had an increase in income and expenses with revenue of \$3,378,579 compared to \$2,000,244 the previous financial year.

The last financial year had an increase in income and expenses with revenue of \$3,378,579 compared to \$2,000,244 the previous financial year. This mainly reflects a change in accounting treatment of grant revenue to recognise income on receipt this year; an increase in sponsorship and funding we received to run the 5WCWS; and an increase in donations. Otherwise, grant funding, membership revenue, and other fees and charges remained steady.

Our expenses (\$2,206,264) increased slightly compared to the previous year, due to the additional cost of preparing for a global conference.

Wesnet ended the year with an overall surplus of \$1,172,315. Our assets at 30 June 2025 were \$4,250,049, with liabilities of \$1,659,038. Most of these liabilities relate to contract liabilities and trade and other payables for work to be carried out in the next financial

year as well as employee benefits and lease liabilities associated with normal operations. Our equity at 30 June 2025 was \$2,591,011, which put us in a resilient cashflow position ahead of the Fifth World Conference of Women's Shelters in September 2025.

The 2024-25 audit was an unqualified audit, and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank RSD Audit Pty Ltd, Karen Bentley, Diana H on the Wesnet team, and Jody Pickering and Jacqui Finley from Allan Tax Accounting for their work during the year and for taking the finances through the audit.



Margaret Augerinos

Treasurer



Financial Summary

2024–25

Below is a summary of our audited financial statements. A full copy of the 2024–25 Financial Statements is available on request or from the ACNC website. The audit of our financial records was completed in October 2025 by RSD Audit Pty Ltd.

| | 2025 \$ | 2024 \$ |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS | | |
| CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES | | |
| Net cash provided by operating activities | 1,185,329 | 1,034,685 |
| Net cashflows used in investing and financing activities | (16,305) | (19,873) |
| Net increase in cash held | 1,169,024 | 1,014,812 |
| Cash on hand at the end of financial year | 3,652,417 | 2,483,393 |
| INCOME STATEMENT | | |
| Revenue | 3,378,579 | 2,000,244 |
| Expenses | (2,206,264) | (1,718,341) |
| Net current year surplus | 1,172,315 | 281,903 |
| BALANCE SHEET | | |
| ASSETS | | |
| Current Assets | 4,092,537 | 2,532,433 |
| Non-Current Assets | 157,512 | 206,847 |
| Total Assets | 4,250,049 | 2,739,280 |
| LIABILITIES | | |
| Current Liabilities | 1,501,704 | 1,129,567 |
| Non-current Liabilities | 157,332 | 191,017 |
| Total Liabilities | 1,659,038 | 1,320,584 |
| Net Assets | 2,591,011 | 1,418,696 |
| Total Equity | 2,591,011 | 1,418,696 |

Our Supporters

Donors and funders

KEY AGENCIES AND PARTNERS IN 2024–25

- Department of Social Services
- Department of Justice, Western Australia
- Telstra
- Uber
- Match Group & Tinder Australia
- Australian Federal Police
- Meta
- Global Network of Women's Shelters
- Deakin University

ORGANISATIONS WE HAVE WORKED WITH DURING 2024–25

- 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

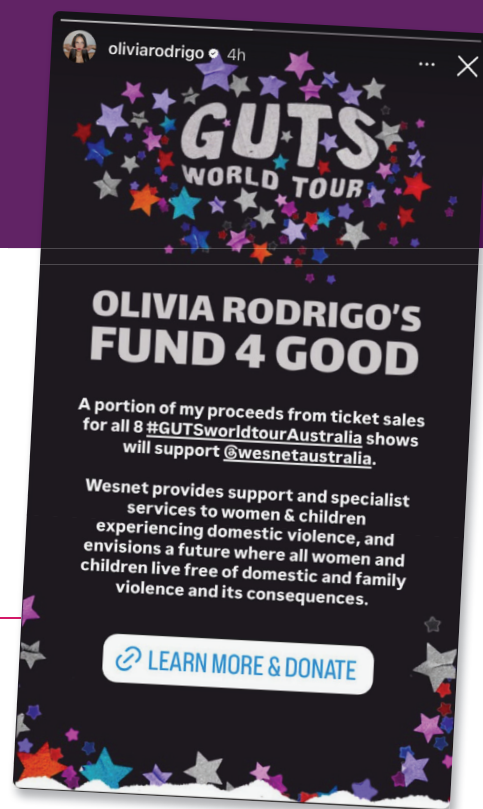
INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Very special thanks to Olivia Rodrigez who donated to Wesnet a portion of the proceeds from ticket sales of her GUTS World Tour.

Financial donors (in alphabetical order) that donated between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025:

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
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| Bahlmann, Chris | Eves, Anna | Mckee, Desiree | Roddick, Joel |
| Balter, Seva | Farraway, Felicity | Mcmaster, Nadine | Rowan, Sarah |
| Bevan, Erin | Fisher, Ben | Mcquisten, Fiona | Sareen, Puneet |
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| Caley, John | Handley Business Solutions | Paplinski, Emilia | Stanton, Katie |
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| Day, Madi | | Robertshaw, Antony | Young, Kesi |

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





WESNET

The Women's Services Network

Wesnet (Women's Services Network)

GPO Box 1579 Canberra City, ACT, 2601, Australia

1800Wesnet (National Toll Free: 1800 937 638)

ABN: 16 068 548 631 | ACN: ACT A 02400

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