

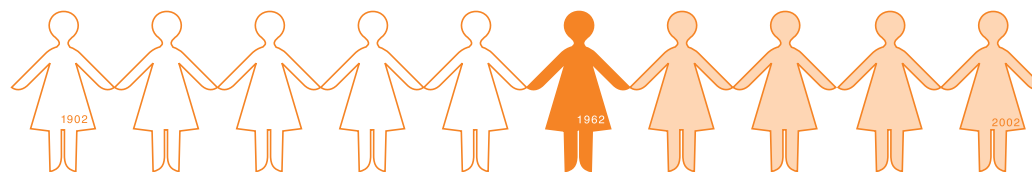


NSW GOVERNMENT

**ACTION PLAN FOR  
RURAL AND REGIONAL WOMEN**

2002–2004

equality families justice education violence work safety power leadership training communities health



100 YEARS OF SUFFRAGE

**NSW GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN FOR  
RURAL AND REGIONAL WOMEN**



**This booklet provides an overview of  
NSW Government plans and actions  
for Rural women.**

**The information in the booklet  
is taken from the  
NSW Government Action Plan  
for Women 2002-2004**

## Introduction

**Almost thirty per cent of women in New South Wales live outside the main urban areas of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, in rural and remote areas.<sup>1</sup> These rural areas include regional centres, small towns, villages and places where there is a low population and primary production and mining are the key types of employment. Within rural areas are remote communities that are characterised by low population and limited access to larger service centres and transport routes.<sup>2</sup>**

The women and men who live in rural NSW are spread across eleven regions covering an area of more than 800,000 square kilometres (Table 1).<sup>3</sup> While there is much variety in the geography, climate, economies and composition of these regions, the sheer distance between towns and centres is one of the key factors affecting the life experience of people in rural NSW. In many cases the issues of concern may be the same for women in metropolitan, rural and remote communities, but the ways of responding to them depend on how services can be delivered across such distances and to relatively small groups of people. Many communities, particularly those that are small, isolated or remote have difficulties accessing services and facilities.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, for many rural residents rural living offers lifestyle benefits such as environmental quality, community support networks and crime and community safety.

## A profile of rural New South Wales

The distribution of women and men in the populations of rural and metropolitan NSW is almost equal, with a fractionally higher proportion of men in rural areas than metropolitan

areas. There are almost identical numbers of women and men in rural areas, as shown in Table 2.

On the basis of age, as a proportion of the total population, the rural areas of NSW had a higher proportion of older people aged over 65 years (15.2 per cent) than the metropolitan areas (13.4 per cent) and than the NSW average (13.1 per cent).<sup>5</sup> In the case of older people in NSW generally, the proportion of women is greater than that of men, with 56.3 per cent of this population being women.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Distribution of NSW population by region**

Region	Population	Proportion of NSW population
Sydney	3,997,321	62.7
Hunter	563,587	8.8
Illawarra	381,898	6.0
Richmond Tweed	213,264	3.3
Mid North Coast	275,274	4.3
Northern	172,862	2.7
North Western	115,777	1.8
Central West	170,180	2.7
South Eastern	200,000	3.1
Murrumbidgee	147,180	2.3
Murray	108,701	1.7
Far West	25,085	0.4
<b>Total NSW</b>	<b>6,371,745<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001), *Selected Social and Housing Characteristics, Australia*, Cat. No. 2015.0, ABS, Canberra

<sup>1</sup> Total includes 1,604 persons classified as off-shore and migratory.

**Table 2: Composition of population in rural and metropolitan New South Wales, 2001**

**All population groups**

	WOMEN		MEN		TOTAL POPULATION	
	No.	%	No	%	No	%
Rural	954,152	29.6	948,183	30.1	1,902,335	29.9
Metropolitan	2,272,148	70.4	2,197,262	69.9	4,469,410	70.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,226,300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,145,445</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6,371,745</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001), *Selected Social and Housing Characteristics*, Australia, Cat. No. 2015.0, ABS, Canberra

**Table 3: Gender composition of rural and metropolitan populations, NSW, 2001**

	RURAL		METROPOLITAN		TOTAL NSW	
	No.	%	No	%	No	%
Women	954,152	50.2	2,272,148	50.8	3,226,300	50.6
Men	948,183	49.8	2,197,262	49.2	3,145,445	49.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,902,335</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,145,445</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6,371,745</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001), *Selected Social and Housing Characteristics*, Australia, Cat. No. 2015.0, ABS, Canberra

Rural NSW contributes approximately 30 per cent of the State's economy from a primarily agricultural base.<sup>7</sup> The farm sector — for so long the backbone of the rural economy — has experienced major stress over the last 20 years and continues to undergo long term adjustment.<sup>8</sup> In many small towns, traditional services have been lost and populations have declined.<sup>9</sup> Women on the land, representing 32 per cent of Australia's farm workforce<sup>10</sup>, contend with drought, flood, declining commodity prices, low profitability, and the consequences of past high interest rates and rising debt alongside their male counterparts. They also contribute to the positive trends of diversification in agriculture as well as introducing new businesses and industries to their towns and regions.

Rural NSW accounts for around 22 per cent of the State's workforce, and there is wide variation between regions in participation, unemployment and employment growth. The Northern, Far West, North Western and Central West statistical regions have an unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent, which is lower than the overall State unemployment rate of 5.4 per cent. Other areas are experiencing high unemployment and a limited range of job opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

## Our Commitments

In 1999, the Government released a statement of commitment to rural social justice which included commitments to promoting opportunities for jobs and economic growth, developing rural infrastructure and protecting the natural environment. It also contained commitments to better service delivery to rural areas, including in relation to health, family support, education and training, safety and social housing, and to meeting the needs of specific groups. These included Aboriginal people, older people and people with disabilities, women and people from culturally diverse backgrounds in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

In 2001, the Government further developed its commitment to strengthening rural communities with the statement *Staying in Town: A new focus for government services and resources in country NSW*.<sup>13</sup> This statement focused on promoting:

- ❖ better access to services — for example, by providing a single point for government information and over the counter transactions in rural areas;
- ❖ the integration of the specialist, face-to-face services provided by various government agencies in rural areas;
- ❖ the retention of government jobs in rural and regional locations; and
- ❖ government working in partnership with local communities, in accordance with their specific needs, to develop sustainable social, cultural and economic activities.

The **Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC)** is the major advisory body to Government on rural and regional issues. The Council was formed in 1996 as an independent, community advisory body comprising representatives from a broad range of community interests.

The RCCC makes recommendations to the State Government about ways in which the Government and rural and regional communities can work together to strengthen the capacity of communities to respond to local issues.

The RCCC also undertakes specific projects in relation to particular issues.

The role of the RCCC is to:

- ❖ Advise on the broad impact of specific government initiatives, policies and services on rural and regional communities;
- ❖ Advise on opportunities for government initiatives which advance the social, economic and environmental development of rural and regional NSW;
- ❖ Advise on regional communities' access to information on government initiatives, services and programs being delivered to rural and regional NSW; and
- ❖ Advocate changes which improve the quality of life for rural and regional communities.

There are 14 members on the RCCC. Currently, the Chair and six other members are women. More information can be found at the website: [www.premiers.nsw.gov.au/rccc/index.htm](http://www.premiers.nsw.gov.au/rccc/index.htm)

Within the context of the above measures, which are of direct benefit to rural women, the NSW Government has made the following commitments which specifically target rural women. The NSW Government will:

- ❖ Act on the recommendations in the action plan for NSW women in agriculture and resource management: *Making a Difference*.
- ❖ Promote the Women's Information and Referral Service's free call service to rural women to improve access to information

for women living in isolated areas of the state.

- ❖ Maintain the commitment to the *Country Web* project. This newsletter is produced three times a year and is distributed free of charge to 20 000 rural subscribers.
- ❖ Support the documentation of women's histories and domestic collections in museums in rural NSW.
- ❖ Continue to fund projects through the *Women's Grants Program*, including projects for rural women.
- ❖ Enhance funding for the *Women's Safehouse* project in Brewarrina, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Bourke and Wilcannia. The project helps women in remote regions who are victims of domestic violence and addresses a major service gap in the Orana Far West region.
- ❖ Develop regional media campaigns highlighting the problem of violence against older women and effective prevention strategies.
- ❖ Maintain funding for the *Women in Business Mentor Program* which has proven very successful in producing commercial success and professional outcomes for both mentors and mentorees.
- ❖ Develop a series of free forums for women in small business, covering subjects such as Structuring for Growth; Achieving the Transition from Sole Traders to Employer; Electronic Commerce; and Expanding Your Customer Base through Exporting.
- ❖ Undertake a survey of home-based business in NSW to obtain information on the nature of these businesses. Latest data shows that 63 per cent of women small business operators in NSW operate home based businesses, and that women are increasing as a proportion of NSW home based small business operators.<sup>14</sup>

- ❖ Set up a professional, rural women's group to help women involved in decision-making roles in their community and provide advice and a source of mentors.
- ❖ Implement a number of key recommendations from the *State Plan for Women in Sport and Recreation 1999–2002* including the *NSW Sports Administration Scholarship Program* and the coaching and career development program.
- ❖ Maintain the current formal clinical networks between rural and metropolitan Area Health Services and continue to develop these networks to ensure greater access to health professionals in rural areas.
- ❖ Continue to fund appropriate and effective sexual assault services across the state and continue the development of other long term strategies to ensure an equitable and sustainable allocation of women's health funds to area health services and non-government organisations.
- ❖ Provide funding to regional and metropolitan older women's groups to develop innovative *Healthy Ageing Programs* for their communities.
- ❖ Develop a comprehensive state-wide service plan to improve promotion of healthy body image, prevention of disordered eating and early intervention and treatment for people with eating disorders and their families.
- ❖ Provide funds to increase the number of Aboriginal nursing staff in rural and remote Aboriginal communities to further improve quality of health.
- ❖ Expand the *Hospital in the Home* program to rural areas such as Lismore, Tweed Heads, Broken Hill, Bega and Albury to provide for patients who choose to receive their medical treatment at home.
- ❖ Introduce a \$3 million Locum Relief Plan to enable country

doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to undertake continuing professional education and to plan holiday leave, without compromising patient care.

- ◆ Introduce new health services, including neo-natal and intensive care services at Coffs Harbour, clinical and aged care services at Taree and paediatric and obstetrics services at Armidale.
- ◆ Build an additional 34 hospitals in small towns, allowing co-location of a number of related services such as medical, aged care services and baby health clinics.
- ◆ Expand community health in rural areas with the construction of 12 new community health centres and polyclinics including Lithgow, Murwillumbah and West Wyalong.
- ◆ Rebuild Hickman House at the Illawarra Regional Hospital an estimated total cost of \$73.3 million, providing an obstetrics ward, neo-natal intensive care, cardiology and gastroenterology medical wards, cardiac and urological diagnostic services, day surgery ambulatory care, and academic/teaching facilities.
- ◆ Introduce *Women's Health on Wheels*, a mobile service targeting rural and remote communities across the mid north coast of NSW.

## Women, Families and Communities

Achieving quality of life for the population of New South Wales means balancing social, economic and environmental progress.<sup>15</sup> It has been widely accepted that the best way to solve social, economic and environmental problems, or to make progress, is by using 'community-wide' solutions.<sup>16</sup>

Women's lives are multifaceted and constantly changing. For example women's increased participation in paid work impacts on their social role as a carer of children or older family members. To help manage their multiple roles, women rely on community services such as child care, nursing homes and residential care services. Government agencies that have information about such interrelationships in women's lives are more likely accurately to estimate the impact of their decisions about changing services or community resources.

Women are one half of rural communities but their contribution to sustaining and strengthening these communities often goes unrecognised. While still carrying the bulk of household domestic work and the care of children and other family members, women are involved in informal and formal voluntary work, paid work at all levels, agricultural production and business. Women in rural communities have been described as the 'glue' holding families together and their 'people' skills have been relied upon for building social cohesion within their communities.<sup>17</sup>

### FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

The *New South Wales Social Justice Directions Statement* provides some principles for government agencies to improve the way communities work for women and men. The principles suggest:

- ◆ giving a fair share – distributing resources fairly and giving people fairer access to the economic resources and services that they need to have a good quality of life;
- ◆ getting a fair go – recognising and promoting individual and group rights; and
- ◆ having a fair say – giving people accurate information

and involving people with government in decisions affecting their lives.

The government, including the Department for Women, puts the principles into action by:

- ◆ promoting more inclusive communities (for example, working on Aboriginal reconciliation and meeting the needs of a diverse community);
- ◆ planning and delivering services for families and communities (for example, integrated and innovative service delivery and strategies, and preventive care);
- ◆ creating environments where everyone can take an active role (for example, encouraging public debate, dialogue and consultation, and devolved decision-making).<sup>18</sup>

Various government departments are developing specialist knowledge about community building and are using the expertise to initiate community solutions. For example the Premier's Department offers a *Strengthening Communities* program and the Department of Housing coordinates a *Priority Regional Communities* program. Planning NSW funds the *Regional Urban Assistance Program* for communities undergoing change and related stress.

## Government initiatives for rural women in their communities

### SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Family structures in NSW are changing as are the roles within families. Women, however, continue to be primary carers in families. In recent years the government has recognised that supporting families during children's younger years provides long term benefits for women and their families.

The *Families First* program is a support network for families of children aged 0 to 8 years. The program relies on government departments working together to deliver appropriate services. The program is coordinated by the Cabinet Office and is delivered by Area Health Services, the Departments of Ageing, Disability and Homecare, Community Services, Education and Training, Housing and funded non-government organisations.

*Families First* targets families with very young children, identifying which services a child needs and helping families connect with the services early in a child's life to prevent long term problems. It also enhances parenting skills.

Activities coordinated under *Families First* fall into four areas:

- ◆ supporting parents expecting or caring for a new baby;
- ◆ supporting parents caring for infants or young children;
- ◆ assisting families needing extra support; and
- ◆ strengthening the connections between families and communities.

The Department of Community Services contributed \$12.9 million to the program in 2001/2002 to support existing local services networks. From 1999 to 2003 \$54.2 million has been allocated to the strategy. Since 1999, 110 new services have been set up in areas including the Far North Coast, Mid North Coast, Hunter and Orana Far West to complement existing services. 400 volunteers have been trained to work with families and 308 children attend *Families First* supported playgroups.

The new services include: 22 volunteer home visiting services, 38 family worker projects, 26 supported playgroups, four parenting educators, two parenting centres, one parenting resource service, thirteen *Schools as Communities* centres, three community development projects and a toy library.

Specific services available to rural women under the program include:

- ◆ professional family workers in the Hunter and Dubbo;
- ◆ four Aboriginal family workers and one multicultural family worker in the Hunter region;
- ◆ access to professional services including referrals through school based programs (*Schools as communities centres*) in Windale, Cessnock and Anna Bay;
- ◆ volunteer home visitors to assist first time parents, young parents and families with special needs in Muswellbrook, Raymond Terrace and Cessnock;
- ◆ and a Home Start service in Mudgee and Rylstone.<sup>19</sup>

In 2002–2003 new services are planned for areas including the Southern Highlands, Central Coast and Central West.

### SUPPORTING CARERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Informal carers are becoming increasingly important to the community and government. The government recognises that carers help elderly people and people with disabilities live independently in the community, avoiding premature and/or inappropriate admission into residential care facilities.

The responsibility for caring for family members falls disproportionately on women. Of all carers in NSW, 57 per cent are women. There are 162 200 primary carers in NSW and 73 per cent of primary carers are women. Women take responsibility for 71 per cent of all primary care and are more likely than men to take primary responsibility for parents (96 per cent) and children (75 per cent).

To understand carers' needs better, the *Reaching Isolated Carers* research project commenced in 2002. The two-year research

project, funded by the Australian Research Council Linkages Project, is being carried out by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales in partnership with the Departments for Women, Health, Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care and Carers NSW.

The project will identify carers across NSW who may not be aware of, or using, government services available to them. Case studies will be undertaken in Shellharbour and Murrumbidgee. In particular, the project will provide benefits to the most disadvantaged carers who are socially or geographically isolated in their role as carers. As the majority of primary carers are women, this project will benefit women by linking women to services (such as respite care) that influence their quality of life, health and capacity to continue effectively in the caring role.

### SUPPORTING WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The government has undertaken a number of initiatives to support women making a contribution to the development of their communities. Some have been undertaken in rural communities.

In 2001–2002 a Partnership Project managed by *Shopfront* at the University of Technology Sydney and funded by the Department for Women in 1999, was completed. The \$100,000 project analysed what women can bring to sustainable development and how best to do that. Women generally have limited opportunities to be involved in the development and planning of their communities, yet carry significant responsibility for the sustainability of their families and community. This project involved women in Dareton, Nowra and Miller.

In Dareton, a partnership was established between the Dareton Aboriginal Women's Network (*DAWN*), the Department for

Women and UTS Shopfront. The Dareton Aboriginal Women's Network develops proposals for economic and cultural development projects, raises issues impacting on the well being of Aboriginal women in the community, and identifies pathways to enterprise development, training and building sustainable outcomes for women and the community.

The Department for Women allocated \$7,000 for a twelve-month training and mentoring program for members of DAWN to build on their skills and knowledge in organisational management and leadership. Through continued work in partnership, it is expected that outcomes of the project will include:

- ◆ increased confidence among and refining the skills of Aboriginal women to manage their own projects and organisations;
- ◆ skill development in arts and cultural production; and
- ◆ enhanced capacity for representation in local decision-making, planning and program development

Women in Ulladulla on the South Coast are giving their opinions about future government plans for Ulladulla at community forums. The forums are part of the *Ulladulla Women's Vision for Economic and Cultural Development* project, which commenced in March 2002 with \$64,600 funding through the Premier's Department Regional Service Delivery Plan. The program is auspiced by the Illawarra/South East Regional Coordination Management Group. The Department of State and Regional Development is the lead agency in partnership with the Department for Women.

A new partnership project in the Clarence Valley was funded by the Department for Women in November 2001. \$100,000 is being managed by Clarence Valley Community Programs Inc., coordinators of a number of small projects to help young women

become community leaders, develop a leadership model, provide mentoring and tackle new ways of providing pre-employment opportunities for women in this north coast area. The *Young Women's Project* focuses on women aged between 12 and 18 years in Clarence Valley local Aboriginal communities. A group of older women across seven communities will be trained to lead small groups of young women through an educative process covering leadership, community development and employment issues. This project will draw on the partnership principles developed by the Department for Women and UTS Shopfront.

To build on the Department for Women's social and economic renewal work in Kempsey since 1999, Guri Wa Ngundagar Aboriginal Corporation (GWNAC) received \$20,000 in the 2001 *Women's Grants Program* to work in partnership with Aboriginal community organisations and Aboriginal women to develop and pilot an appropriate training program. The work will be carried out by an indigenous grants project officer from the Department for Women located in Kempsey. A mentoring program, women's network and/or other support structures will be developed to further support Aboriginal women.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Annual community grant programs are opportunities for women to gain funding for local projects which they have designed, are willing to lead or implement and which address their concerns about their communities. A range of government agencies provide grants annually to projects targeting women. These and other agencies also provide resources in the form of information and in-kind support. Some of the community resources accessed by women are discussed below.

Burnside Family Support Service Coffs Harbour is offering a playgroups support program for women in isolated areas,

funded by the Department for Women (\$19,983). Women will be trained as mentors to run supported playgroups in isolated areas. An accredited Vocational Training and Accreditation Board group work facilitator will provide the course and women will then go on to manage the program locally, linking in with local services to create a service to meet their needs. Eight women have completed the mentor training and three playgroups are now functioning independently.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has a community grants program that has funded projects targeting women. For example, in the financial year 2001–2002, a one-off sum of \$40,163 was allocated to a program specifically targeting Aboriginal girls between the ages of 11 and 15 years in the Walgett district.

The NSW Government established the *Strengthening Communities Unit* in the Premier's Department to work closely with other NSW Government agencies, such as the Community Relations Commission, the Department for Women, and with local and Commonwealth governments, community, business and professional groups. Its role is to lead and facilitate major projects related to strengthening communities. In 2001/2002 the Unit coordinated a number of initiatives to help communities, including rural communities, deal with local challenges and needs. Some of the projects that are particularly relevant to rural women's needs are described below.

The Communitybuilders website is an interactive clearing house where the users contribute content and ongoing development because they publish their stories and tips to the site. Users include everyone involved or interested in making their communities more dynamic, healthy and successful, ranging from community members of all ages, different community organisations, community workers, and all levels of government and business. The

Premier's Department coordinates this site as a joint government and community project in partnership with a wide range of people involved in community building. The address is [www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au](http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au).

*Community Solutions and Crime Prevention Strategy* committees have been formed in Nowra, Brewarrina and Kempsey. The committees involve government agencies, local councils, community groups and police, and are focusing on service arrangements between government and non-government domestic and family violence service providers, improving physical amenities and public spaces, and initiating community leadership and mentoring programs.

\$490,000 has been allocated to *Strengthening Local Communities Strategy* projects in Windale, Booragul-Bolton Point, Moree, Wentworth, Port Kembla, Mangrove Mountain, Boggabilla and Crookwell. Projects in these areas are targeting community health, family support, children's services, local domestic violence services, and creating new employment opportunities (including new social enterprises), and reviewing the use of existing youth arts, sport and community services.

#### **PROVIDING PUBLIC HOUSING FOR WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

The Department of Housing provides public housing throughout the state. Sixty per cent of public households are headed by women, making women a key client of the Department of Housing. 10,562 applicants were allocated public housing in 1999/2000, up from 9,217 in the previous year. In 61 per cent of new households, a woman holds the lease. Twenty seven per cent of all new tenants each year are women sole parents. Approximately 15 per cent are single women, 11 per cent of whom are elderly.<sup>20</sup> In 1999/2000, the Department of

Housing spent more than \$550 million in providing support to over 400,000 people in need.<sup>21</sup>

The Office of Community Housing within the Department of Housing funds long term affordable housing for people on low incomes by providing funds and resources to not-for-profit organisations to be direct housing providers. The office leases properties to housing providers who rent them to people on low incomes and other people unable to access appropriate housing in the private market. The office also provides recurrent grants to housing providers for the same purpose.

The *Crisis Accommodation Program*, coordinated by the Office of Community Housing in the Department of Housing, is of particular importance to women during periods of considerable upheaval, such as domestic violence or during bouts of homelessness.

In 2001/2002, 46 properties (or 40 per cent of the total 2001/2002 Program supply) were allocated to community based housing and/or support providers who specialise in providing services for women. These included 17 properties in rural and regional New South Wales.

#### **TAKING INFORMATION TO WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

In June and July 2002, twenty Government agencies and more than ten community based organisations offered community education events through the North Coast, New England and Northern Tablelands and North West regions of NSW. The project (*Women on Wheels 2*) was initiated and co-ordinated by the Department for Women. It followed *Women on Wheels 1* in 2001, which visited 23 remote towns and cities in western NSW. In 2002, some 140 events were held in approximately 60 towns. Most events provided information about government and community services. In addition, a number of events

#### **Preventing homelessness for rural women and children experiencing domestic violence**

Domestic violence is a frequent cause of homelessness for women. An innovative research project is examining what prevents women and their children from staying in their residence and ways of housing the perpetrator of the violence elsewhere to help women and their children who want to, to stay safely in their home. The project was funded in early 2002 by the Department of Community Services (\$88,660), and other government partners include the Attorney-General's Department and the Department for Women.

An investigation will be carried out in two rural locations to determine the range of services and support possibilities required by women wanting to control their housing circumstances. Information will be gathered from women who have attempted to remain in the shared accommodation, workers, counsellors and other specialist with experience of domestic violence service delivery. This project challenges past expectations and practices that women should leave the shared residence, frequently leading to dislocation, distress and disruption to work and family education commitments. The research is being performed by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Centre for Gender Related Violence Studies University of NSW.

provided skills development workshops around confidence, participation and leadership, while others acted as a catalyst for business and professional women to network. Sponsorship was provided by the public and private sectors.

The objectives of *Women on Wheels* tours in 2001 and 2002 were to:

- ◆ listen to the women of New South Wales and consult to gain an understanding of local issues affecting women and their families;
- ◆ distribute information and promote government services to women in the targeted communities; and
- ◆ act as a catalyst for action for local communities.

The outcomes of the tours included building partnerships and capacity at a local level, establishing networks to feed into future activities, progressing the reconciliation process amongst women, as well as making government policies (such as *Working together for stronger rural communities*) relevant to women.

#### TAKING GOVERNMENT SERVICES TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Since July 2001, *Government Access Centres* have been established in small regional communities of 1,500 to 6,000 people. The centres improve access to government information and transaction services in these communities. Consultations were conducted to identify community needs and the most common transaction services requested by residents. As women are greater users of government provided community services, the centres are very relevant to women's needs.

Evaluations indicated a high level of usage and acceptance of the centres in pilot locations and overwhelming community support for locally based *Government Access Centres*. The pilot centres are well used by their local communities. In Oberon and Kyogle for example, the total number of enquiries dealt with by centre staff were slightly more than the total population of the local government area. In Gilgandra the number of inquiries was over double the total population of the Shire. In Dorrigo the total number of inquiries was three times the population.

#### SUPPORTING WOMEN VOLUNTEERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

The NSW government recognises and values the extraordinary effort and contribution of women who are volunteers. Volunteers are involved directly or indirectly in almost all community based, government funded programs. When designing new programs and services, the government has to factor in the work of volunteers as a number of programs would not operate without their involvement. For example, the *Families First* program trains volunteers to carry out home visits to families of new children.

*V is for Volunteers* is a community based project being managed by the Mudgee Shire Council Volunteers Committee. The project, funded under the annual *Women's Grants Program* for \$29,154, will help organisations to identify potential volunteers in the shire's isolated communities and link the volunteers to local organisations. A central electronic service will be a key outcome, linking volunteers and members of volunteer organisations to agencies that provide skills training. The database will include the skills, training, services, and memberships these organisations offer.

#### MEETING WOMEN'S NEEDS FOR INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Information about government and community services is another important resource for women. There has been a limited amount of research, however, on how women seek and use information. The *Women's Information Needs Project* investigated women's information needs and information seeking behaviours, particularly about government provided information. The project was funded by the Commonwealth/State/Territories Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women's Activities Trust Fund and managed by the Department for Women.

The findings of the project point out possible and preferred information pathways for women wanting government information. The project particularly focused on information gathered from disadvantaged women, including Aboriginal women, women from rural and regional areas, Maori women, women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and women from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This research informs the two arms of information services at the Department for Women — the *Women's Information and Referral Service* and the *Women's Gateway*.

Women seeking information about government services are able to make a free phone call to the *Women's Information and Referral Service* at the Department for Women. Its primary purpose is to refer women to appropriate government departments and non-government organisations for information and assistance. Prior to the establishment of the information and referral service, there was no central contact point for women needing information on a range of issues. The Service operates five days per week from 9am to 5pm and has a free call 1800 number, a Teletypewriter (TTY) phone line and special conference facilities to access the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). The service is free, culturally sensitive and confidential. During 2001 WIRS received 11,128 enquiries covering a wide spectrum of topics, including legal, health and accommodation issues.

Online information about services for women is the core business of the *Women's Gateway*, an initiative of the NSW Department for Women, funded by the NSW Department of Information and Technology Management (\$128,000). Launched in 2001, the Department for Women continues to maintain and develop the site. The cost of maintaining the Gateway is approximately \$35,000 per year. In its first year of operation, the Women's

Gateway received a commendation for best practice in eGovernment at the 2001 NSW Premier's Public Sector Awards. The Gateway helps to enhance the information and referral services already provided to NSW women by the Department as well as provide a place to share information on events and other news items. It also offers a pool of valuable information, referral and research tools to government and community organisations.

The *Women's Gateway* includes:

- ❖ a directory of 3,000 or so NSW women's services and organisations,
- ❖ a capacity to do keyword searches for information from government, community and private websites on topics of interest to women;
- ❖ Frequently Asked Questions on topics of interest to women, with links to websites with detailed answers;
- ❖ a job vacancies page, featuring online resources to assist women to find employment;
- ❖ a News page, featuring current news items of interest to women; and
- ❖ an Events page, listing the details of coming events of interest to women.

The Women's Gateway attracted nearly 50,000 users in its first year. The community has posted 90 news and 251 events items via the Gateway. The user feedback has been very positive. The Gateway rates very highly for ease of use and likelihood that users will return. The site complements the Department's own Women's Information and Referral Service a 9–5 weekday service by providing its resource 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Gateway can be accessed at [www.womens.gateway.nsw.gov.au](http://www.womens.gateway.nsw.gov.au).

In 2001 work started to extend the *Women's Gateway* portal

through a *Women's Lives Online* project. The Department for Women and the Office of Information Technology are using life events, such as pregnancy and separation, as a new way to find, organise and provide information, services and e-transactions.

The Department of Fair Trading also provides free information to women on a range of topics, for example on tenancy advice and financial counselling services provided by community organisations. In 2001/2002 the Department of Fair Trading provided \$1.54 million for financial counselling services and \$4.2 million for the tenant's advice and advocacy program. Approximately 62 per cent of this program's customers are women.

The Department of Agriculture continues to support and promote *Country Care Link*, a service run by the Sisters of Charity, which provides a state-wide toll free number 1800 806 160, confidential counselling and a legal advice service for rural people.

### IMPROVING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Women participate at a lower level in personal computer use, computer studies and employment in the information technology and communications sector. For example, only 41 per cent of women are internet users compared with 46 per cent of men. Women are estimated to hold only 20 per cent of jobs in the information technology and communications industry.<sup>22</sup>

As income increased, particularly beyond \$40,000, so did the likelihood of adult computer and internet use. Location also affects technology uptake. 47 per cent of women living in metropolitan areas use computers or access the Internet compared with 37 per cent of women living outside metropolitan areas.<sup>23</sup>

The *Hands On* Information and Communication Technology project was offered to older women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as part of the *Seniors Online Strategy*. \$50,000 was provided for the project through the Department for Women's 2001/2002 Women's Grants Program. *Hands On* increases seniors' access to and use of IT in rural and regional NSW. Older people are the least likely group in society to own a computer or be connected to the Internet. Only 30 per cent of people aged 55 years and over own a home computer and while statistics indicate that older people are the fastest growing age group among internet users, their numbers are still low. The Local Community Services Association was the project sponsor and worked in partnership with over 30 organisations to deliver the program.

The Armidale Development Corporation, in partnership with New England Institute of TAFE, the University of New England, women's organisations across the region and the New England Women Linking in New Communities (NEWLinC) obtained \$99,840 under the 2000 Women's Grants Program to establish a virtual community and training forum for rural and regional women. The project provided training in basic IT tools including email, discussion boards, on-line forums and chat to improve access to information and services and conduct of skills workshops in networking and build 'virtual communities' among rural/remote women using communications software on the web. As well as training women in rural and regional areas to use the internet, the NewLinC project has focused on e-business needs, identified aspects of IT women need to know more about, and set about establishing a network to provide these services.

The website [www.newlinc.com.au](http://www.newlinc.com.au), launched in March 2002, facilitates development of business ideas leading to greater economic opportunities for women in the New England region,

their families and their local communities through the information and discussion boards provided. A new non-profit organisation supporting women's online learning, Networking Women's Learning (NewLinC), has grown out of the project and was launched in March 2002.

With growing interest in and access to information technology, the internet is becoming an important means for women in rural and remote areas of NSW to access and share information. The *Rural Women's Network* site [www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn) provides useful links, monthly updates, media releases, and a calendar of events and resources to rural women, organisations and networks. In the 12-month period to June 2002, the RWN site recorded 130,000 hits and hosted 26,700 user sessions, an increase on the previous period. The site is continuously refined to meet the information needs of rural women.

#### VALUING WOMEN'S ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

The Ministry for the Arts provides direct and indirect supports for contemporary women artists, through grants, awards and ensuring the documentation of women's histories and domestic collections in museums.

Outcomes of the cultural grants program and awards in 2001/2002 for rural areas include:

- ❖ the Bega Valley Historical Society received \$8,620 for the refurbishment of a textile display requiring researching and documenting textiles, which were largely works by women.
- ❖ \$2,000 was provided to Manning Regional Gallery for their project *100 Years of Australian Women's Suffrage*. Coinciding with the Centenary of Federation, the project will profile two women from each decade over the last

100 years who have contributed to the development of the Greater Taree region, NSW or Australia. The project will produce essays written by a team of five local writers. Ten artists from the Mid North Coast will create artistic responses to the lives of the women they selected.

- ❖ A \$12,000 grant was given to the Bega Valley Regional Gallery for the exhibition *Now a River Went out of Eden*. This exhibition features a new body of work by Ruth Maddison, a series of black and white photographs showing the complexity of issues relating to young people living in small, isolated rural communities. Grants like this are valuable professional development opportunities for women artists.
- ❖ The NSW Film and Television Office offers Industry and Audience Development Grants. In 2001/2002 Women in Film and Television NSW received \$7,000 for the WOW Film Festival and Regional tour. This visited Sydney and 5 regional centres (Taree, Lismore, Armidale, Wagga Wagga, and Newcastle).

Other awards include the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales annual International Women's Day Awards at Meroogal, Nowra. Meroogal is a financial sponsor and works in conjunction with the International Women's Day Committee. Over half the recipients of the awards are older women. The Older Women's Network assists in running the event in a voluntary capacity. Over 130 people attended the presentation where 33 awards were presented to Shoalhaven women for diverse work, and included a special presentation to women involved in the battle to control the summer bushfires.

The Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales also sponsors the Meroogal Women's Arts Prize. The award is for women artists of the south coast region and is open to women over the age of 18. The prize is awarded and exhibited initially in

Nowra, it then tours to a range of South Coast locations and to a Sydney venue. In the South Coast region unemployment is high and many women are trying to make a living from art and craft. Prizes such as the Women's Arts Prize are an opportunity for women to display their work, helping to raise the profile of art and craft in the local community and providing potential new markets for the artists.

## Violence and Safety

The prevalence of violence against women has been well documented.<sup>24</sup> Violence affects women everywhere. For women in rural communities, particularly small and remote communities, one of the critical issues is accessing help when they need it. The NSW Government acknowledges its responsibility to address the issue of violence against women throughout the State and has implemented a wide range of initiatives over many years. The types of approaches include legislative and policy responses, services provided and/or funded by government to assist victims of violence, interagency and other coordinating mechanisms to ensure the responses work together smoothly, and community education campaigns and other types of prevention programs.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY INITIATIVES

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) is conducting a project to investigate the factors preventing women from choosing to stay in their own homes after experiencing domestic violence and to consider what strategies and interventions would assist women and their children to make this choice safely (see feature above). The research will address the key recommendations from the *Partnerships against Domestic Violence* report *Home Safe Home: The link between domestic violence and women's homelessness*.

### ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICY INITIATIVES

The Attorney General's Department and the Department of Community Services are conducting a pilot project in Wellington and Bega to enhance access to mainstream services for Aboriginal women who are experiencing violence. The issue was first raised at an Aboriginal women's conference at Lake Burrendong and the project aims to assist Aboriginal women to articulate their difficulties in accessing the services and work with services to review their policies and procedures and provide appropriate training to staff to ensure equitable service delivery.

### POLICE PROGRAMS

NSW Police provides a state-wide *Domestic Violence Liaison Officer Program* with 160 liaison officers based across the state's 80 Local Area Commands. The Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLOs) provide strong support to domestic violence victims in their interaction with police and at court in Apprehended Violence Order matters. They act as a central focus for community issues and concerns, provide information and intelligence to their colleagues about domestic violence and help to raise other officers' awareness of its impact of domestic violence.

## Support services

### SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT SERVICES

NSW Health allocates approximately \$9 million annually to provide Sexual Assault Services for adults and children across the State, including 38 services in rural areas. The services provide information, counselling, support, and testing and treatment services for victims of sexual assault. Services also offer group-work programs, court support work and education for health and

other professionals and the community in general. The services also assist victims' families and friends as appropriate.

Sexual Assault Services also conduct a variety of locally relevant projects and promotional campaigns. The New England service is conducting the *Bridge Project*, designed to improve access by Aboriginal communities in Tamworth, Gunnedah and Qurindi and to work with people in the local communities to encourage earlier intervention.

### VICTIM SERVICES

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) provides a Witness Assistance Service (WAS) for victims of violent crimes that are under prosecution, located at Head Office and each of the ten regional offices. The Service provides information about rights, entitlements, the legal service and support services, assessment, referrals, liaison with lawyers, advocacy regarding special needs and circumstances, support during conferences, court preparation and debriefing to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, along with vulnerable victims and members of special needs groups.

The WAS has an indigenous-identified position to provide specialist support to Aboriginal victims of violent crime, many of whom are women and children. The officer works closely with Aboriginal communities to ensure appropriate information, referral and support are available to Aboriginal victims of crime who are going to court. Although the position is based in Sydney, it has a State-wide focus, requiring the officer to travel to regional centres to assist personally in relevant matters and provide advice to other WAS officers.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

Area Health Services provide a range of domestic violence support services. For example, Illawarra Area Health Service provides support groups in Bulli, Nowra, Warilla and Wollongong.

The Attorney General's Department conducted a pilot project at Tamworth in 2001, which established a Domestic Violence Project Officer position at a police station to provide follow-up information, support and referrals to victims of domestic violence identified by the police as 'high risk' or who are making a first report. \$60,000 was provided by the Commonwealth/State *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative to fund this position. Although a culture of interagency networking and referral exists in Tamworth, prior to the establishment of this position there were no strategic mechanisms in place to ensure that domestic violence victims seen by the police were provided with subsequent support by other agencies. This project shifted the responsibility for initiating follow-up support from the victim to a service provider. The project is currently being evaluated.

The Attorney General's Department has employed a project officer at Dubbo to develop a model for an integrated service response to domestic violence by the criminal justice system and support agencies in a rural setting. \$80,000 has been provided under *Partnerships* for this project, which has established a 24 hour on-call domestic violence service that provides for a crisis worker to accompany police to a domestic violence incident and to provide information and referral to women and children. Training is also being provided to service providers regarding the range of issues facing women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### SUPPORT SERVICES TARGETING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The Department for Women conducted projects in Far West NSW that provided rural crisis intervention to Aboriginal women in situations of domestic violence at Broken Hill, Menindee and Wilcannia. \$200,000 was provided by *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* to employ two project workers who provided direct assistance to 110 women, conducted community education and developed a model of best practice to address violence within Aboriginal communities. As a result of the project, Aboriginal women in the communities have reported they are now able to talk openly about violence. Three young women from Menindee who participated in the core domestic violence training made a video on violence, featuring interviews with members of the local Aboriginal community. The Far West Area Health Service has subsequently employed three workers to continue the Menindee project.

The Department of Community Services provides \$150,000 annually to run the *Orana Far West Safe Women's Safehouse Project* that will provide cultural and client specific support services for Aboriginal women escaping domestic violence. Women will be able to access culturally sensitive short term safe accommodation to escape domestic violence brought about by their partner's alcohol consumption and the project also provides a Women's Centre where women can meet for mutual support and to access emotional support programs. To date, training has been provided and the infrastructure established.

### INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

The Department of Community Services provides a 1800 Domestic Violence Line to provide information about domestic violence and assist women in crisis situations. The Department

for Women provides a *Women's Information and Referral Service*, on the toll free number 1800 817 227. The service provides information and referrals to women on a range of issues. Approximately eight percent of calls are in relation to domestic violence.

The Mid North Coast Area Health Service has funded the Manning/Great Lakes Domestic Violence Monitoring Committee to develop a local domestic violence website as an information tool for local women and service providers. The site records an average of 21 hits per week.

### Funding programs

PlanningNSW provides funding for projects through Area Assistance Schemes. Current rural projects related to violence against women include:

- ◆ \$30,000 over three years to Kempsey Women's and Children's Services to fund south-east Asian Domestic Violence Project Worker. The worker will work with community leaders to establish a reference group, implement support groups, educate women about their rights, increase access to existing services and develop sustainable initiatives;
- ◆ \$6,000 to South Lakes Family Refuge to provide appropriate training for volunteer carers in the refuge and to provide life skills training for residents; and

The *Women's Grants Program*, funded by the Department for Women, provides one million dollars annually to fund innovative projects that benefit women. Each year, a proportion of this funding goes to projects related to violence against women.

Rural projects funded in the last two years have included:

- ◆ \$30,000 to the AIDS Council of NSW to conduct community

awareness strategies and produce resources around lesbian domestic violence in Lismore and Wollongong;

- ◆ \$20,000 to the Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre to produce a video on Local Court defended hearings for AVOs, designed to be culturally appropriate for Aboriginal women;
- ◆ \$75,000 to the Goulburn Family Support Service to undertake a *Women's Safety Plan* project which assisted women to draw up personal safety plans;
- ◆ \$25,063 to the University of Newcastle to conduct the *Caravan Project for Women escaping Domestic Violence*, which provided a personal development outreach program to women living in caravan parks in the Lower Hunter. The project included group work on conflict resolution skills, relaxation methods, anger and stress management skills and improving knowledge of learning opportunities;
- ◆ \$15,650 to Arts Mid North Coast to conduct the *Garri Darri Doobay: With Strong Women* project, a five-day residential camp for 10 indigenous women in the Coffs Harbour LGA to assist them to deal with issues of addiction and domestic violence through writing and performance-based activities, linked to indigenous cultural heritage; and
- ◆ \$56,858 to Police and Community Youth Clubs to conduct the *Outta the Lounge Room – Young Women's Safety Project*, to assist young women in communities including the Shoalhaven to develop strategies to enhance their personal safety, using peer education and cultural development activities.

### PREVENTION PROGRAMS

In addition to developing appropriate responses for women in violent situations, the government also recognises the need to develop prevention initiatives.

The Attorney General's Department provides a *Regional Violence Prevention Specialist Program* to promote effective prevention strategies and improve access to services at a regional level by establishing partnerships with and coordination between regional stakeholders. The *Program* employs 18 Regional Violence Prevention Specialists, located in each of the NSW Health regions, whose role is to:

- ◆ enhance linkages within and between government and non-government agencies;
- ◆ conduct community education and training; and
- ◆ develop programs aimed at reducing and preventing violence against women.

The Specialists' work is informed by Regional Reference Groups, which aim to identify ways of addressing regional service delivery issues. In 2000/01, each Specialist developed a two-year regional activity plan, reflecting regional priorities. Each Specialist has a budget of \$10,000 to conduct projects that address domestic violence, sexual assault and violence in public places, targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities, older women, children and young women, women living in rural and remote areas, homeless women or lesbians, population groups identified by the *NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women*.

The projects currently in operation or conducted to date in rural areas include:

- ◆ the *Linking Women with Safety Project*, aimed at increasing and formalising Aboriginal women's networks in the shires of Bogan, Warren, Gilgandra, Coonamble and Coonabarabran;

- ❖ the *Prevention of Violence against Aboriginal Women* project, which resulted in the recruitment of two domestic violence outreach workers for Taree and Foster;
- ❖ cross-cultural domestic violence training for community workers in Lightning Ridge, Moree and Dubbo to enhance non-English speaking background women's access to services in rural and remote areas;
- ❖ a forum for accommodation services in New England to address issues of sexual assault for women with disabilities;
- ❖ a community awareness campaign around violence against women with disabilities in the Central West;
- ❖ a youth theatre program, *Control*, performed in schools in the Hunter;
- ❖ the *Crookwell Women's Health and Safety Project*, in which a number of communities made quilts on the theme of violence against women;
- ❖ the *Small Towns Project*, supporting local violence prevention groups in rural and remote communities in the Central West;
- ❖ information sessions for rural women in remote communities in the Far West to improve their access to services;
- ❖ the *Stir it Up Project*, a lesbian speakers' series in the Illawarra, examining issues of violence against lesbians.
- ❖ *Lesbians Initiating Positive Strategies*, providing training and information to non-lesbian workers in the Northern Rivers around issues of violence against lesbians;
- ❖ participation in *Stop Domestic Violence Day*, *Reclaim the Night* and *YWCA Week Without Violence* activities throughout the State.

## Domestic violence prevention

NSW Health provides routine screening for domestic violence for women attending antenatal and early childhood services, drug and alcohol and mental health services. The project aims to increase disclosure of domestic violence to health workers, to enable staff to respond appropriately to disclosures, to improve support and referral pathways for women who disclose and to prevent its onset in some cases by educating women who are screened about its nature and effects. A pilot was conducted in 2000 in South East Sydney and Macquarie Area Health Services and it is currently operational at 17 sites within the Mid Western, New England, Mid North Coast, South East Sydney and Hunter Area Health Services. To date, more than 500 staff have been trained and the program will be progressively implemented across the State by December 2004.

\$81,887 was provided to Big hART by the Department for Women, the Attorney General's Department and *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* to conduct the *Domestic Violence Prevention Film Project* in 11 communities in northern and north west NSW. The project worked with young women living in transient accommodation who have experienced domestic violence, using a community development approach to build support networks and awareness across the community. Material was filmed by young women in the communities and will be used to create a docu-drama.

### PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

\$74,000 has also been provided through *Partnerships* to conduct the *Promoting Healthy Relationships Project* in Grafton. A review of violence prevention programs for adolescents has been conducted and the findings have informed the development of a curriculum-based program, currently being piloted with Year

7 students at a local secondary school. A further three high schools in the Clarence Valley have also expressed interest in piloting some of the modules. By targeting students on entry into high school, the project aims to reach young adolescents before patterns in intimate relationships are well established.

The Northern Rivers Area Health Service is conducting the *Kids Really Count* project, funded by the Casino Community Benefit Fund, to consult with young people aged 14–24 in Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Lismore, Casino, Grafton, Kyogle, Ballina, Evans Head and Tweed Heads and develop a multi media awareness campaign explaining the impact of domestic violence on people in relationships, and potentially on children, and providing information about strategies to deal with issues of violence in their own relationships — both as victims and as perpetrators.

Wentworth Area Health Service is conducting the *Pair Project: Preventing Abuse in Relationships*, based at Katoomba High School. The project aims to increase the capacity of young people to choose healthy supportive relationships, increase the awareness of violence early warning signs and increase young people's access to local support services.

### **Access to Justice and Equality before the Law**

A closely related issue to violence prevention is women's access to justice. Women's access to justice and equality before the law also extends to women's rights as consumers and experiences with the criminal justice system. Women in rural and remote communities can have particular difficulties in accessing legal information and obtaining impartial and confidential legal advice.

### **IMPROVING WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM**

Women's access to justice can be hampered by a general lack of knowledge about the legal system, laws and available remedies, and by the cost of legal advice and limited availability of legal aid in recent years. The following initiatives, implemented in rural areas of the State, seek to address this issue:

The Legal Aid Commission has developed a community outreach program targeting disadvantaged women in the Newcastle/Hunter region providing legal education to women from a range of population groups, including indigenous women, young women, women from culturally diverse backgrounds, older women and women with a disability. The Commission provides \$15,000 to address the lack of access to legal education, information and training to women in the region and a lack of awareness of legal aid services. A program specifically directed to indigenous women is offered in the Taree area.

Legal Aid Commission Regional Offices conduct fortnightly information sessions for local women who have separated from their spouses on how to fill out divorce applications, Apprehended Violence Order procedures and family law matters. The Commission has provided \$65,000 for this initiative to date, with more than 300 information sessions having reached more than 7000 women.

The Wagga Wagga Legal Aid Office also provides advice sessions on family law for local women, with particular emphasis on women living in refuges. More than 1800 women have benefited from this initiative since it commenced in 1998.

The Department for Women, through the *Women's Grants Program*, provided \$31,418 to the Coffs Harbour Neighbourhood Centre to conduct a *Women's Legal and Consumer Rights Education Project*. The Centre will conduct 20 workshops for

women covering civil and criminal law and consumer rights in relation to sexual abuse, violence in the family, child protection, the criminal justice system, illicit drug use, family law, sex work and discrimination. The workshops will be presented to women referred from Grafton Detention Centre, Aboriginal Family Care, CH Soup Kitchen, Probation and Parole and Mental Health Services.

### WOMEN IN CUSTODY

Women also come into contact with the criminal justice system as offenders. When women from rural areas are imprisoned it generally involves their removal from their home town to one of the few correctional centres for women based in Sydney.

The Department of Corrective Services recognises the rights of families and children to have meaningful contact with their mothers, spouses and daughters in custody and considers it essential for achieving correctional outcomes that the women can maintain and strengthen their bonds with their families and children. The Department has established centres for women in regional NSW, to meet the needs of women inmates from outside the Sydney region, in particular Aboriginal women, to be closer to their communities. Nineteen women can be accommodated at the June Baker Unit at Grafton and eight women at Broken Hill, in units attached to men's facilities. Planning is underway for a purpose built facility at Kempsey that will accommodate 50 women and the Berrima Correctional Centre, formerly a men's facility, reopened as a women's facility in December 2001.

### ENSURING EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION UNDER THE LAW AND IN PRACTICE

The Anti-Discrimination Board provides information and advice to women throughout the State about their rights under the *Anti-*

*Discrimination Act* and the complaints process via its Enquiries Service. It also investigates and conciliates complaints about discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual harassment, pregnancy, carers' responsibilities, homosexuality, age, race, disability and transgender status.

The Legal Aid Commission has provided \$255,000 in 2002/2003 to fund Wirringa Baiya, the Aboriginal Women's Legal Resources Centre, to provide advice, referrals, representation and education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women about their legal rights, victims' compensation, domestic violence and sexual assault. The Centre, located in Marrickville, provides a statewide telephone advice service and conducts outreach programs in rural and remote areas. Since the Centre was established in 1996, it has provided advice to more than 1,100 women, with a 6.5 per cent increase in clients in the past year. The Centre has also conducted workshops on discrimination complaints to a total of 90 women and provided Community Legal Education presentations to 100 women in the Bourke/Walgett/ Brewarrina area.

### Work

In NSW rural communities, women make important contributions to their families and communities through paid work, agricultural production and the operation of businesses. Women's access to employment is directly related to industry development and varies from region to region. Women's highest labour force participation rate in a NSW rural region is in the Murray-Murrumbidgee Region (59.3 per cent). Women's lowest labour market participation rates in rural regions are in the Northern, Far Western and Central West regions (45.6 per cent) and the Hunter Region (47.6 per cent). This compares to a State average women's labour force participation rate of 53.6 per cent.

The unemployment rate for women in NSW overall is 5.2 per cent. In some regions it is much higher than this. Women's unemployment rate in the Richmond, Tweed and Mid North Coast region is 7.6 per cent, in the Illawarra and Southeast region, 7.1 per cent and in the Hunter Region, 7 per cent. All rural regions have a higher women's unemployment rate than the State average, with the exception of the Murray-Murrumbidgee region, where women's unemployment rate is 4.8 per cent.<sup>25</sup>

#### EMPLOYMENT ADVICE AND ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN

The Department for Women provides \$100,000 annually to the NSW Working Women's Centre to provide a core information and advisory service to women throughout the state on industrial relations and employment related issues. The service provides industrial, anti-discrimination, and occupational health and safety information legislation to working women throughout NSW, particularly women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal women. Women in rural areas can contact the centre on Freecall 1800 062 166. The Centre provides advocacy services to redress unfair or discriminatory treatment in the workplace directly, or referral to the relevant union, a legal advice service or government agency.

#### PROMOTING CAREER OPTIONS FOR GIRLS IN RURAL AREAS

From March 1999, the Department for Women worked with Creative Brands (manufacturers of Australis cosmetics) and individual high schools throughout the state to run workshops encouraging girls and young women to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The *Australis Self-made Girl Program* for girls and young women aged 15–18 in regional, rural and remote NSW was designed to increase access to educational and leadership programs in rural and regional areas, and build links between

younger and older women within communities. The Department for Women, in partnership with businesswomen's organisations and other community agencies that work with young women, is developing a new program, GirlSavvy, to build on the success of Australis. GirlSavvy is designed to help young women focus on the concept of economic empowerment and to motivate them towards financial independence, through fun and activities, working alongside successful women from a range of industries. Private sector sponsorship is currently being sought and the program will be piloted in late 2002/early 2003.

While girls outperform boys at school, their longer term work outcomes are not as good. In 2000/2001 the Department for Women worked with Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE, Women in Vocational Education, the Women's Electoral Lobby and the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment to highlight this problem with educators and produce accessible employment-related resources for lower-achieving girls leaving school. With funding from the Australian National Training Authority, an employment-focused 'teen' magazine for young women, *Wizegirls*, profiling a number of young women in different jobs and offering useful and realistic advice to assist in job seeking, was developed by Streetwise Comics. A classroom-learning guide to accompany the magazine was also developed. The rural launch of *Wizegirls* was held at Coonamble High School during the Women on Wheels (WOW) tour in May 2001, and distributed to girls in rural schools as part of WOW Tours in 2001 and 2002. Overall, 80,000 copies were distributed through school, TAFE and community networks.

## INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

Employment opportunities for women are limited in many rural areas, and disadvantaged young women already engaging in other risky behaviour may not see employment and career development as a legitimate or feasible option. Coupled with the high rate of depression in both young women and men in rural communities, this may have major impacts on their overall health and quality of life. Low self esteem and lack of appropriate role models and mentors translate into less understanding of what to do to move into a career or participate in their community.

Building on earlier Department for Women work with the Central West Community College to develop women's employment opportunities in the Central Western region of NSW, the Premier's Department Western Regional Co-ordination Program received \$33,828 under the *Regional Service Delivery Plan* for an intensive six month Women's Employment Project in the first half of 2002 in two communities in the Central West, Oberon and Kelso (a suburb of Bathurst).

The project involves work with young women 'at risk' in the 15–24 years age group who are not employed or actively involved in their community, to develop strategies for employment and a model framework for other communities to use to strengthen support mechanisms and improve service delivery to help young women to be more actively involved in their communities. Sixteen young women are attending a specially tailored three hours per week course conducted by Western Institute of TAFE at Oberon High School, covering basic computing, self-esteem and completion of job applications, and should graduate on 20 November 2002. The Kelso course, which began on 4 June 2002 with an enrolment of 12 young

single mothers, was designed to teach them about computers in a relaxed, non-conventional way, to increase confidence and commitment and encourage them to enrol in future courses.

The Department for Women provided \$12,607 under the 2001 Women's Grants Program to the Hunter Community Program for a Women and Work project at Windale, to provide community peer support and small group training opportunities for women to improve opportunities for employment, individual and family health, community participation and family support. Training in Confidence Building for Job Searching and Decision-Making (including learning to learn, time management, learning strategies, collaborative goal setting) was provided for two hours a week over a ten-week period. Conclusion of the project was marked by presentation of certificates to participants on 5 July 2002.

Women's capacity for economic self-sufficiency through standard employment is impacted by family commitments, time away from paid employment for child rearing and lack of suitable training opportunities. Self-employment can also be limited by the cost of advertising services and micro-businesses. The Umbrella Group (TUG), a project conducted by the Armidale and District Women's Centre with funding of \$19,618 from the 2000 Women's Grants Program, explored alternative work opportunities, developing databases of participating employers and women seeking alternative work opportunities. Participants received information and advice and a start-up fund to develop their own ideas for alternative work opportunities. A number of successful micro-business ventures resulted, and a strong on-going network was formed amongst participants. A booklet describing the project, including a guide to identifying, developing and implementing alternative work opportunities, has been developed and distributed.

With Women's Grants Program funding of \$51,350, the Broken Hill Multicultural Women's Resource and Information Centre worked with the Far West Regional Council of Adult and Community Education to conduct a Vocational Guidance and Career Planning Course for local women from diverse cultural backgrounds, to improve their chances of gaining employment in the Far West NSW region. Training, covering computers, office procedures, resume writing, first aid, and basic aged care and child care skills, was provided for two days a week over a 12 month period. When the 16 women graduated from the program, Broken Hill's first vocational training course for multicultural women, in November 2001, several had already found jobs.

#### **ASSISTING RURAL WOMEN RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE**

Women in isolated rural and regional areas trying to return to work after long periods at home undertaking family responsibilities often underestimate their existing skills and have difficulties getting information about further training and possible work and small business opportunities.

The Department for Women developed a short workshop on *Economic Opportunities for Women* for rural women returning to the workforce during the first Women on Wheels Tour in 2001. The workshop covered issues such as recognising and recording existing skills, looking for jobs including telework, access to further education and training or retraining, and developing employment and small business opportunities, and included a takeaway participant workbook to help women identify existing skills. It was designed and run to maximise input from successful local businesswomen and local service providers such as TAFE colleges, Community Technology and Internet Centres and Business Enterprise Centres. The workshop was successfully

conducted in Coonamble in 2001 (with approximately 45 participants) and in Coonabarabran in 2002 (with approximately 40 participants) and formed the basis for a useful discussion amongst employment/business service providers in Armidale in 2002. The workbook has been utilised by participants and some organisations to assist women to recognise existing skills.

#### **ASSISTING RURAL WOMEN IN SMALL BUSINESS**

Women operate around one third of small businesses in New South Wales. Recent ABS data indicates women's business increased by 20,000 between November 1999 and June 2001. Women are an important force in the small business community and will continue to consider small business as a serious career choice and a pathway to financial independence.

The Department for Women has completed detailed statistical and literature-based research on the profile of women in small business in NSW and key issues for women in small business to provide accurate and current information and promote more informed policy development on this issue by relevant government and non-government organisations. This research has already been used for presentations to women in business gatherings in the North Coast and Northwest regions during the 2002 Women on Wheels (WOW) tour.

The Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD)'s Women in Business Mentor Program improves women's business skills and confidence, fostering networking and promoting business growth, enhancing the success of growth-oriented firms by providing assistance in the formative stage of the business. The Program uses a combination of mentoring and practical business training sessions, providing a total of 50 hours contact

over a six month period, including 20 hours of business skills workshops (on managing and leading a business, business planning, marketing and financial management), 10 hours of business roundtables (on topics based on participant preferences) and 20 hours of one-on-one mentoring. During 2001/02, there were nine Women in Business Mentor Programs delivered, four of which were in regional areas, including Tamworth, Albury, Coffs Harbour and Armidale.

The Workplace Advice Unit of the Department of Industrial Relations is contributing to the Program by running information sessions informing women of their obligations under industrial law. Nine Programs were run in 2000/2001 at a cost of \$120,000; five in Sydney and four in regional areas (Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, and two at Port Macquarie) with a total of 300 participants, 150 of them emerging business owners. In 2001/2002, a further nine programs were run, five in Sydney and four in regional NSW (Tamworth, Albury, Coffs Harbour and Armidale) with over 280 participants.

Building on the experience and success of a pilot program in Griffith in 2000, DSRD introduced the *Regional Women in Business Program*, combining business skills training workshops, networking events and smaller group mentoring sessions.

In 2002, \$40,000 was allocated for two Regional Women in Business Programs based on this format to be run by contracted local service providers, one in the Lismore/Ballina region between May and July, and another in the South Coast/Bateman's Bay region from August 2002. Fifty businesswomen (38 participants with 12 mentors) participated in the Lismore program, with similar numbers anticipated in the South Coast/Bateman's Bay program. Information on the Women

in Business Regional Program is available through on <http://www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au>.

The RIRDC NSW Rural Women's Award is funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and coordinated by NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network. The Award is designed to recognise and, more importantly, encourage the vital contribution women make to agriculture and resource management. It aims to celebrate and acknowledge women's contributions to the industry by increasing their opportunities to participate through financially supporting and resourcing their skills, learning or project ideas. A \$20,000 bursary is awarded to the winner and leadership training provided to the three finalists. Funding has been committed for the Award until 2004. Information about the Award is available on the Rural Women's Network website, <http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn>. Growing interest in the Award is shown by an increase in applications from 11 in 2001 to 16 in 2002. In 2001 the winner was Jon-Maree Baker, a cotton consultant and farmer from Narrabri, and the 2002 Award was won by Robbie Sefton, a public relations and communications consultant from Coonabarabran.

The Department of State and Regional Development's Home-Based Business Program provides tailored business development support services and information resources to help home-based business owner/operators build their business networks, enhance business and management skills, develop growth strategies and gain improved access to business information. It also recognises specific challenges facing women operators in managing and growing their business, including managing business and family responsibilities and operating in isolation with little direct contact

with other people. In March 2002, a three-month program for HBBs in the Lower Hunter region was commenced to increase skill levels and foster networking and growth-strategy development. The Lower Hunter HBB Program provided practical business workshops and smaller cluster group sessions on business themes, IT training and online chat sessions. Of 27 local HBBs participating in the program, 14 are women.

Many small businesses benefit from support in their early years, to sustain operations and to maximise growth. The Department of State and Regional Development Business Advisory Service Program provides information and advice to people who wish to start a business or who own or manage an existing small business through Small Business Advisory Service Centres in 50 locations throughout regional and metropolitan NSW. Services include business guidance, information and referral, training in business topics and self-help diagnostic and business tools such as fact sheets and software. In 2000/2001, 58,250 (47 per cent) of the Service's clients were women; in the first three quarters of 2001/2002, there were 55,587 women clients (47 per cent of total clients), giving an estimated total for the year of 74,116, an increase of 15,866. The Service provides invaluable information to microbusiness about establishing and operating a profitable enterprise, and creates thousands of small business opportunities including developing exports, replacing imports and promoting local employment initiatives.

Since November 2001, DSRD has provided an Indigenous Business Advisory Service with free business guidance and access to trained business facilitators for Aboriginal people seeking to start a business, or who already own or manage a business. The Service is delivered by the Parkes/Forbes Business Enterprise Centre (covering the Binaal Billa and Murdi Paaki ATSIC regions in Western NSW), and by three 'mobile'

business development managers employed by the Department, in Sydney, Northern (Ballina) and Southern NSW (Goulburn). More information about the Service is available at [www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au](http://www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au).

The Department of State and Regional Development introduced free Women in Business Growth Strategy Workshops in 1999 to help develop business skills and growth strategies. In 2000/01, 13 workshops were delivered in Sydney and three in regional areas at Orange, Coffs Harbour and Gosford, in all attended by 666 women. Topics included exporting, marketing, intellectual property, cash-flow management, selling, networking, business systems, Internet as a business tool, e-commerce and customer skills.

In 2001/02, \$30,000 was allocated for expanded workshops covering technology options, capitalisation planning, building business relationships, legal issues, marketing, risk management, financial management, sales systems, self promotion, strategic alliances and exporting. Seven were delivered in Sydney and nine in regional NSW at Wollongong, Dubbo, Armidale, Kurri Kurri, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Mudgee and Lithgow. In total, there were 514 participants. The workshops address relevant business themes to help women enhance their business management skills and knowledge levels in key areas, and to develop growth strategies in their businesses, as well as providing an opportunity for women running their own businesses to network. More than 85 per cent of participants so far indicate that they expect to implement in their business what they learnt at the sessions.

#### **SUPPORTING RURAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN SMALL BUSINESS**

The Department for Women began working with the local community in Kempsey in 1998 to increase local Aboriginal

women's capacity to contribute to sustainable economic, social and cultural development of the region. In 1999 the \$80,000 Kempsey Community Economic Renewal Project (KCERP) partnership project with the local community placed an Aboriginal Project Officer in Kempsey and raised community awareness of issues affecting Aboriginal women and increased their input into development of the region. The Kempsey women identified culturally appropriate training to give them the skills and confidence to manage their own enterprises.

Guri Wa Ngundagar Aboriginal Corporation (GWNAC) received \$20,000 through the Women's Grants Program to work with Aboriginal community organisations and Aboriginal women to develop and pilot appropriate training, and to set up a mentoring program, women's network and other necessary support structures. An indigenous grants project officer located in DFW will work with GWNAC, local Aboriginal organisations and the Kempsey women to build on the training and earlier work.

### **Power, Decision-Making and Leadership**

Despite their indispensable contribution to rural communities, women are still playing a lesser role in the more formal decision-making arenas.<sup>26</sup> Rural decision-making forums where women have been identified as being under-represented include local government, boards within the Agriculture and Land and Water Conservation portfolio, Rural Lands Protection Boards, Crown Reserve Trust Boards, National Parks and Wildlife District Advisory Committees, and Department of State and Regional Development Regional Development Boards.<sup>27</sup>

Addressing this inequality in representation requires removing bias in recruitment processes as well as providing training and

support for women to take up positions on decision-making bodies. Detailed strategies to support women to take up such positions have been developed under the *Action Plan for New South Wales Women in Agriculture and Resource Management* and are in the process of being implemented by the various responsible agencies. The Department for Women has also implemented strategies to increase the number of women elected to local government councils, including in rural areas, and the Department of Local Government has developed a program to encourage and support Aboriginal people (both women and men) to stand for election to local government, focusing on rural areas with significant Aboriginal communities as well as some metropolitan areas.

### **INCREASING THE NUMBERS OF WOMEN ON BOARDS AND COMMITTEES**

The Government is committed to increasing the representation of women on boards and committees to reflect the gender balance of our society. Several Departments are working in collaboration with the Premier's Department on specific projects to increase the number of women on boards and committees. Some of this work has had a particular focus on increasing representation of women from rural and remote NSW.

When recruiting members for the Catchment Management Boards, the Department of Land and Water Conservation highlighted the government's policy on gender equity in its advertisements, in communications with organisations from whom nominations were sought, and in instructions to its Regional Directors. Various women were contacted, including those on the Premier's Register and women involved in the previous Catchment Management Committees, and encouraged to nominate. These measures achieved an overall membership

of women on the boards of 29 per cent, an increase of 3 per cent over the previous Catchment Management Committees.

The DLWC has also developed protocols for future recruitment of members to its boards and committees. The Protocols for the Replacement of Members of Natural Resource Management Boards and Committees, including Protocol 1.1 for Improving Representation of Women on Boards and Committees set out strategies for Regional Directors to use to encourage women's nominations for vacant positions and action to retain women on boards and committees. There are now more women involved in the boards and committees. As at June 2002, the Vegetation Management Committee had 23 per cent women and 4 of the 17 chairs are women. The Water Management Committees have 17 per cent women with 13 of the 33 chairs being women.

The Department for Women worked with the Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB) in the lead-up to their 2002 elections to encourage more women to nominate for board positions. There are currently 48 RLPBs in NSW with over 380 directors. Prior to the 2002 election, only 34 of the directors were women. An information pamphlet with sponsorship from Westpac was distributed and the elections promoted at women's gatherings and events and through relevant networks. This was the first time the pamphlets have overtly targeted women. Importantly child care is now an allowable expense for Board Directors. The 2002 elections were promoted through the Department for Women's Women on Wheels tour to the North Coast and New England regions. Representatives from the local RLPB's were on hand to answer questions. The outcome of the elections was very positive for women, with 30 new women directors being elected. The Department for Women is also working with the State Council to develop an induction manual for women successful in obtaining a place on their local RLPB.

The Community Relations Commission actively sought the membership of women for its Regional Advisory Councils so that the issues pertaining to non English speaking background women in rural and regional areas could be effectively examined and acted upon.

Another strategy for increasing the numbers of women on boards and committees is to provide training to build women's capacity to take up such positions. For example, the Department of Education and Training, through TAFE NSW, the Department for Women and the Rural Women's Network developed accredited training for women interested in election or appointment to boards and committees. A short training course called *Women in Decision-Making, Boards and Committees*, as well as learning materials for distance delivery were developed. The training aims to provide women with information, skills and confidence to help them prepare for election or appointment to boards and committees. This training course was piloted in 2001 in the Central West region in Parkes and Orange through the Western Institute of TAFE, and is tailored to the specific needs of rural women. Other TAFE colleges are now running the course, including in Coonamble and Wellington.

## **Increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership**

### **RESOURCING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS**

Resourcing and supporting women's organisations and networks is an important way of increasing the capacity of women to participate in public and political life and to access decision-making processes. NSW Agriculture supports the annual *NSW Women's Gatherings*. These gatherings provide

an opportunity for rural women from across the state to come together to learn, network, access training opportunities and share information and experiences. Gatherings have been held in various locations across NSW: Orange (1993), Gunnedah (1994), Yanco (1995), Cobar (1996), Tocal (1997), Cooma (1998), Moree (1999), Wellington (2000) and Kempsey (2001). The Gatherings are now managed by community committees with support from NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network (RWN). The most recent *NSW Women's Gathering* was held in Bourke in September 2002.

The Rural Women's Network Key Contact Database and *Country Web Newsletter* are other means of supporting rural women. The Contact Database is used to find rural women who wish to participate in various meetings, consultations, workshops and decision-making opportunities. *The Country Web Newsletter* provides rural women with access to information and an opportunity to air their views on issues that concern them. Three times a year 20,000 copies of the newsletter are distributed free to rural women and their families. Recent editions have focussed on issues such as The Year of the Outback and Natural Resource Management. There are over 15,000 subscribers on the mailing list, an increase of 500 from last year. Many more subscribers are now sourcing the newsletter on the Rural Women's Network internet site ([www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn)) which had 130 000 hits in the period July 2001–June 2002.

Another initiative focussed on supporting rural women is *Making a Difference: an Action Plan for NSW Women in Agriculture and Resource Management*, coordinated by NSW Agriculture's Advisory Group in partnership with the Rural Women's Network. The Plan aims to increase women's participation in decision-making, improve the recognition of women as clients of industry and government, and increase the participation of women in the

rural sector. Initiatives were undertaken in both government and non-government agencies. The Plan provides feedback on progress and includes new initiatives to increase women's participation through improved recognition, support, training and education. The 2000 Update, and the original Action Plan are available on the Rural Women's Network website [www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn/resources](http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/rwn/resources).

### SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

The provision of scholarships and awards is another means of enabling women to access training and development opportunities which increase their capacity to take on leadership and decision-making roles in their chosen field.

As part of the *NSW State Plan for Women in Sport and Recreation 1999–2002* and the *National Policy for Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity 1999–2002*, the Department of Sport and Recreation administers the *Women's Sports Administration Scholarship Program*. A total of \$100,000 is allocated annually for professional development scholarships for women sports administrators in NSW. These scholarships aim to increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions in the sport and recreation industry, with 174 scholarships awarded since 1974.

The scholarships enable recipients either to undertake international travel to attend a relevant working party meeting or conference, or to undertake an intensive residential training program in sports administration and management. These training programs target women in different regional areas each year. In 2000 the program targeted the Hunter and Far West Regions, and in 2001 training targeted women in the Far South Coast and Riverina regions. In 2002 the region targeted was the North Coast and North West. One course each year is specifically for

Aboriginal women. Other elements of the program have included the conduct and distribution of research and the establishment of equity projects in a number of sport and recreation organisations.

NSW Agriculture offers town scholarships each valued at \$10,000. Applicants are asked to outline how they plan to use their scholarship and will be expected to share what they have learnt with others on their return. Upon completion of the project, recipients are required to submit a written report to NSW Agriculture. The focus is on women from western NSW including women from low socioeconomic, backgrounds, indigenous women and culturally diverse women. The aim of the scholarship is to support and encourage women living in the Western Division of NSW who may not otherwise have an opportunity to travel overseas to undertake a short term study trip aimed at furthering their knowledge and ability to better contribute to their community.

NSW Agriculture also provided \$9,000 scholarships for four rural women who are leaders in their community to attend the World Congress of Rural Women in Madrid, Spain, in 2002.

#### **INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING**

The Department of Local Government is addressing the under-representation of Aboriginal people on local councils by undertaking the *Local Government Aboriginal Mentoring Program*. This program provides mentoring and encouragement to Aboriginal people (both women and men) who may wish to stand for election at local government level. The program also provides education and information to address the lack of awareness amongst Aboriginal communities about local government processes and the importance of their input into local councils. The initiative is located in the following rural

areas: Albury, Cessnock, Cobar, Coonamble, Glen Innes, Grafton, Inverell, Kempsey, Kyogle, Lismore, Maclean, Moree Plains, Orange, Severn, and Tumut.

As of 30 June 2000 a total of 33 people had participated in the program. While the proportion of women is unknown, among the six councils visited as part of the evaluation 73 per cent of participants were women. The Department will survey councils annually to obtain gender breakdown of participants in the program. The program evaluation found significant support among stakeholders for the program's continuation. It concluded that the program should continue until at least the next local government elections, after which it should be re-evaluated.

The *Valuing Women's Voices* project will develop locally relevant course content which identifies historically the strengths of the Aboriginal women on the Murdi Paaki region and the contribution they have made to the pastoral industry. The women have identified skills and knowledge that a strong leader needs to apply. This information will be used to produce a culturally appropriate program which will develop political, service, governance and program management skills in Aboriginal women who want to make a difference to their communities. The project was funded under the 2001 NSW Women's Grants program.

Under the Grants Program, the Department for Women has a new partnership project with the Clarence Valley community called 'The Young Women's Project'. Adult women from seven communities will be trained to lead small groups of young women through an educative process that looks at a range of life skills, including budgeting and money matters, communication, police issues and the emotional costs of early motherhood. The Group leaders will be trained by a range of

professional staff from services including Northern Rivers Area Health Service, Aboriginal Medical Service, Clarence Valley Community Programs Inc and other relevant services. Work from a local Aboriginal Reference Group of Elders across seven communities will enhance the ties in the local Aboriginal communities for young women aged between 12 and 18 years. Other aims include improving the health and well being of women, increasing access to information for young and adult women and making new connections with service providers. Young women will have had the opportunity to explore consequences of decisions and expand their contacts within their communities.

#### **INCREASING MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN**

The Department for Women, through its grants program, is building capacity and improving advocacy skills by providing young women in Bourke with opportunities to be trained as peer leaders and educators. Peer leadership training programs will be conducted over several weeks and will include training in the areas of self esteem, health and nutrition, participation on committees. The program will include Aboriginal and non Aboriginal young women with the aim of empowering peer leaders to act as role models for other women in the Bourke shire, develop and implement their own solutions to local issues, and develop partnerships between young women, rural services and central agencies to address the needs of young women. A skill development package will be compiled and provided to adult mentors and young adult participants during the program.

#### **TRAINING FOR PARTICIPATION**

NSW Agriculture offered a training initiative in 2000, aimed at developing the participation and advocacy skills of older people in rural communities. These *Working the System Workshops* were established in partnership with the Central West Regional Council of Adult and Community Education (ACE) and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) with \$10,000 in funding from an International Year of Older Persons community partnership grant. Workshops were attended by 65 older people in five communities across NSW (Port Macquarie, Kiama, Orange, Sydney and Tuggerah Lakes), with approximately two-thirds of participants being women.

*Shaping our Futures Together* is a NSW Agriculture initiative and is a two day career and personal development course which aims to build on the diversity of leadership capacity in rural communities by developing rural women's confidence, action planning skills and establishing support networks. *Shaping Our Futures Together* is FarmBi\$ registered enabling women to claim 75 per cent of costs associated including course fee, child care, accommodation and travel. Courses have been conducted in areas such as Tocal, the Hunter and the Far West area. In addition the Rural Women's Network and the Department for Women collaborated in June 2002 to deliver segments of the *Shaping Our Futures Together* program as part of the 2002 Women on Wheels tour. The target group for the program is women in rural, remote and regional NSW, with the Far West workshop targeting younger rural women.

## Education and Training

Changes to the education and training system over recent decades have meant a vast increase in choice and avenues for women and girls to pursue their study and career goals. The education and training system is now more accessible than ever before to women in NSW. There are now multiple pathways for girls between school and education and training including vocational training in schools linked to industry. Women who have experienced barriers to formal education can undertake preliminary courses in community settings, which open up pathways to further training options and employment. The reform and expansion of the traineeship and apprenticeship system has provided training in a wider variety of entry-level occupations for a wider age group.

Over the same time, women and girls have made major gains in participation and attainment at school and in vocational and higher education. There has been a continuing improvement in participation of young women across the range and level of post-school destinations, particularly in vocational education and training and high prestige university courses such as law and medicine traditionally dominated by men.<sup>28</sup>

However, for many women and girls these achievements do not lead to the same long-term employment and economic outcomes as they do for men. While women's participation in vocational education and training has improved, some entrenched problems persist, including clustering in fields of study and at lower levels, less employer support for external training, under-representation and low completion rates in apprenticeships and non-traditional areas.<sup>29</sup> Women graduates do not achieve the same outcomes as men on a range of post course measures. Women graduates from vocational education

and training are more likely than men to:

- ❖ take longer to find employment following graduation
- ❖ be employed in lower level jobs which do not reflect qualification levels
- ❖ be in part time employment
- ❖ earn less
- ❖ experience greater periods of unemployment

Living in a rural or remote area is one of the factors that may further disadvantage women in the outcomes they achieve from school, vocational training and higher education.

### GIRLS IN SCHOOLS

There are major gender differences in educational participation, performance and outcomes from schools. Girls have shown overall better than average performance in English literacy in the early and middle years of schooling and most subjects in Year 12. However these differences in performance cannot be solely explained by gender alone and different groups of girls do not enjoy the same level of achievement. Gender must be considered with other factors such as socio-economic status, geographic area, ethnicity and language background and Aboriginality. Girls in rural and remote areas are some of the most disadvantaged girls in the school system.

Some of the issues which disadvantage school students in remote and isolated rural areas include:

- ❖ costs
- ❖ availability of transport and
- ❖ levels of family income support.

Although educational facilities are well distributed throughout rural areas in NSW, students may still be disadvantaged by a

restricted and limited subject choice, and by limited educational facilities within their schools.<sup>30</sup> Rural students are also disadvantaged by lack of access to cultural facilities and performances, including sites and performances of direct relevance to school curricula and examinations.<sup>31</sup>

These issues can be compounded for indigenous students in rural areas. Indigenous students generally achieve poorer educational outcomes than non-indigenous students, and the gap between the outcomes of indigenous and non-indigenous students is greater in rural than in urban areas. Some of the factors contributing to poorer outcomes for indigenous students have been identified as:

- ◆ culturally inappropriate teaching strategies and forms of assessment
- ◆ the relevance of school to the reality of student's lives
- ◆ teacher expectations
- ◆ attendance
- ◆ housing
- ◆ health and
- ◆ community funding resources.<sup>32</sup>

#### ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WOMEN

*Making a Difference: An action plan for NSW Women in Agriculture and Resource Management* identifies accessing relevant, affordable education and training programs as a key objective for rural women. The plan sets out detailed strategies for achieving this objective, and these are being progressively implemented.<sup>33</sup>

## Education and training initiatives for rural girls and women

In 2001/2002 the Department for Women funded e-Summer Schools at Mount Druitt and in Walgett. 15 students from years 9–11 attended each e-Summer School and the tuition was delivered by specialist TAFE Information and Communication Technology (ICT) staff. Each course included accredited ICT training, site visits or visits from ICT specialists, career information and opportunities to have fun and experiment with new technologies. Eighty-six percent of the 15 students who attended the Walgett program were Aboriginal girls.

The *Rural Women Skills Recognition Project* provides skills recognition to farming women who are working on family farms. The project is a joint initiative of the Primary Industries Training Advisory Board, NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network and the Access Division and Primary Industries Division of NSW TAFE. As part of this pilot program being offered to women in the New England region, women will enrol in the Certificate IV in Agriculture (Business Management) and will attend a series of workshops in seeking skills recognition.

The *Supporting Women in Maritime* VET courses aims to increase the formal vocational education and training qualifications of women in the maritime industry. Women are under-represented in the maritime field of study and many of those who are working in the industry lack formal qualifications. At the same time, maritime industries in the Port Stephens area have grown significantly over the last decade and have the potential to provide women with satisfying employment and opportunities for small business. This new course is designed to encourage those working in the charter boat and fishing industries to increase their skill levels and formalise qualifications. The course will be conducted by the

Hunter Institute of TAFE and will offer students components of the Maritime Services Traineeship which can then be completed through further study and work experience. This initiative should lead to an increase in women in vocational education and training in the maritime field from May 2002 and improved levels of skill of women workers in the industry. Women students who complete the course will be better qualified for employment within the industry and will have better access to training pathways.

The *Vocational Guidance and Career Planning for Women* project provided a program of accredited training for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from isolated areas in the Far West NSW region. This initiative was conducted by the Broken Hill Multicultural Women's Resource and Information Centre in conjunction with Far West Regional Council of Adult and Community Education and funded under the Women's Grants Program. The project offered training for two days per week over a 12 month period, offering modules and electives in computing, office procedures, resume writing, first aid, aged care and child care. When the 16 women graduated from Broken Hill's first vocational training course for multicultural women in November 2001, several had already found jobs.

The *Safe-TAFE* project aims to establish an innovative and systematic approach to fostering a safe learning community at Riverina Institute of TAFE. The expected outcome of this project is the creation of a safer learning environment and culture leading to enhanced learning experiences and outcomes for women students. The significant output of the project will be the Safe TAFE model (including workshops, procedures and promotional material) which can be implemented across Riverina Institute.

*Women in Viticulture* aims to increase the number of women undertaking vocational education and training in the

horticultural and manufacturing aspects of viticulture studies at TAFE NSW. This project addresses the under-representation of women in the horticultural and manufacturing aspects of viticulture courses at TAFE NSW and their under-representation in the industry. The project will be conducted by the Western Institute of TAFE at its Orange campus, and will target women who may benefit from the regional development emphasis on viticulture, wine production and wine tourism. A Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) course will provide women with an overview of the viticulture industry and the variety of employment opportunities within this growth industry.

Expected outcomes are:

- ◆ more women participate in viticulture training
- ◆ links with employers are strengthened through work placement
- ◆ WOW graduates enter the industry as trainees or employees or go on to further study
- ◆ a best practice model is developed to inform future programs to encourage women into this growth industry.

The *Moving Horizons Project* aims to promote and market TAFE courses to meet the vocational education and training needs of women and industries in the Hunter region through the provision of a guided tour of TAFE for women. The project aims to address the low participation of women in some Hunter Institute campuses which have a specific focus on local industries employing predominantly men. The tour will act as a springboard enabling women to make better informed choices on selecting courses, gaining more lucrative and satisfying employment and widening career options to extend their horizons. Information on TAFE courses, infrastructure, networks and career options will be provided. The tour will be marketed and promoted across high

schools, TAFE campuses and to indigenous communities.

NSW Agriculture's *Year of the Outback* women's overseas study scholarships are being offered to encourage women living in Western NSW to undertake a short-term study trip aimed at furthering their knowledge and ability to better contribute to their communities. The Scholarships are valued at \$10,000 each and are for women including Aboriginal women, women from low socio-economic backgrounds and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **INCREASING ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Two initiatives in the New England area aim to address the low level of retention and completion rates of indigenous communities in schools and vocational education and training programs, low participation in private enterprise and high levels of unemployment.

The first program involves the support of indigenous employment and business ventures, through the establishment of educational training programs based in Armidale. The initiative involves indigenous communities, including women, and Community Development Employment Projects to improve skills development and generate community enterprise initiatives. The initiative addresses training needs, including appropriate vocational education and training opportunities to increase local Aboriginal consultancy expertise. An example of this was the establishment of the Certificate IV in Planning and Management with a focus on indigenous content and delivery.

The second initiative aims to address the under-representation of women of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background in

vocational education and training courses, particularly at higher qualification award levels. Culturally appropriate promotional materials will be produced which outline training pathways from the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) to TAFE NSW in the New England region. The project includes a survey of Aboriginal women of various ages in the New England region to determine the most appropriate method and design for promoting training pathways and to identify the industry areas to be highlighted in the promotional material. The project should lead to more Aboriginal women undertaking vocational education and training courses and increased numbers of CDEP participants undertaking traineeships.

### **Health**

Ensuring women have access to appropriate health care requires the review of legislation and policy, the provision of services and programs and training of health care workers that reflect a commitment to women's health and a gender and culturally sensitive approach. This requires taking into account women's multiple roles and responsibilities and the diversity of their needs. These include the special needs of mothers and pregnant women, young women and girls, rural women, older women, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, women from non-English speaking backgrounds and women of low socio-economic status.

The special needs of rural women include transport and access to appropriate health services, including mental health services. Confidentiality and the need for privacy are also important and can be a barrier to women seeking health services and advice in rural and remote areas. In the case of Aboriginal women in rural areas, there is a need for culturally appropriate services.

**PROVIDE MORE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, QUALITY SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING INFORMATION AND SERVICES AND MATERNAL AND OBSTETRIC CARE.**

Women's health nurses in Area Health Services provide health education and clinical services with an emphasis on providing services for women with the least access to social and economic resources. To improve the health of Aboriginal women and their babies, six Area Health Services (in the Macquarie, Far West, Mid North Coast, Hunter, Mid West and New England regions) are working on community based outreach programs to increase Aboriginal women's attendance at antenatal care, improve identification and management of high risk pregnancies and strengthen support for teenage mothers. The Area Health Services have been given recurrent funding of \$1.5million. Teams of midwives and Aboriginal health workers work together with local GPs to provide community based care, outreach services, antenatal and postnatal education and social and emotional support.

NSW Health also provides recurrent funding to Aboriginal Medical Services that provide a community based outreach service designed to increase Aboriginal women's access to maternal, antenatal and postnatal services in:

- ◆ Daruk (Western Sydney) \$106,000
- ◆ Tharawal \$50,000
- ◆ Duri \$102,000
- ◆ Walgett \$102,000
- ◆ Awabakal \$100,000
- ◆ Illawarra \$40,000

The prevention, early detection and treatment of post-natal depression is another area addressed by area health services.

The *Stressed out Mothers Group* is for mothers at risk of developing post natal depression in rural and remote areas in the Mid North Coast region. Post-natal depression in Aboriginal women in the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra areas is also being addressed through community education and support strategies.

To improve the nutritional status of pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their babies or young children, a workbook, *All You Need to Know About a Healthy Pregnancy for a Healthy Boori*, was produced as a community resource in the Illawarra region and a train the trainer model is used to run a series of cooking programs in 12 Aboriginal communities (four communities each year) across the Northern Rivers health area of NSW.

Pre-paid public transport tickets are being provided to Aboriginal women in Dubbo to improve access to women attending health services under the *Aboriginal Maternal Health Infant Strategy* (Department of Transport and Macquarie Area Health Service).

**REDESIGN HEALTH INFORMATION, SERVICES AND TRAINING FOR HEALTH WORKERS SO THAT THEY ARE GENDER SENSITIVE AND ADOPT A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

Information, support and services and programs on various health issues are provided by 17 area health services across New South Wales. All area health services provide programs/services and information that are specific to women's health needs and many have special initiatives aimed at increasing access and improving health services for women in their community. Improved services for women with breast cancer are being provided with support and co-ordinated care through the Breast Care Nurse Program in the Macquarie and Mid North Coast regions.

**GIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF GIRLS, ESPECIALLY THE PROMOTION OF HEALTHY BEHAVIOUR, INCLUDING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.**

The major health issues for young women are depression, attempted suicide, reproductive and sexual health, tobacco use and eating disorders. Strategies aimed at improving self-esteem and body image and reducing depression and anxiety among young women are being implemented in the Macquarie, Mid Western, Mid North Coast and Illawarra area health services. One example is the *Girl Network Package (Feel Good Project)* — a socialisation and self-esteem program for marginalised and isolated young women in the Mid North Coast area.

The Greater Murray Area Health Service is providing young women with access to information and services about their health, in particular their reproductive and sexual health, through a drop-in chat room at a school. Young women will have greater access to information and the opportunity to discuss issues affecting their health and their lives including violence, drug taking, safe sex practices and body image related concerns. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies and STDs among young women is being addressed in the Blue Mountains using an educational strategy exploring the dangers of binge drinking and in the Macarthur area by providing support for young mothers and girls at risk of getting pregnant to improve their quality of life.

**DEVELOP INFORMATION, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO ADDRESS AND TREAT THE HEALTH NEEDS OF OLDER WOMEN**

Older women need information and services or programs that will help them understand and adapt to the physical and psychological changes associated with ageing. The *Out of*

*the Blues* project will evaluate the effectiveness of a weekly skills-based program for midlife and older women to reduce depression. This group program being conducted by the Northern Rivers Area Health Service uses a unique approach including educational, skills training, therapeutic and social components. Should the evaluation prove the program effective, a course manual will be produced for use in the wider community.

Many older women are carers. In fact, three quarters of all carers are women and most are in the 45–55 age bracket. The 2000/2001 *Women's Grants Program* provided \$19,960 to fund four retreats for women aged 45 who care for relatives, friends or neighbours. Carers received information and advice on health issues such as menopause, incontinence and osteoporosis and on women's roles as carers including stress management, coping strategies and services. The retreats focussed in particular on women in rurally isolated communities.

**ALLEVIATE AND ELIMINATE ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH WORK IN THE HOME AND IN THE WORKPLACE**

The New England Area Health Service is exploring the factors that contribute to the increase in motor vehicle accidents for women in the New England region and determining the gender differences that impact on female drivers, and developing recommendations to address these factors.

**DEVELOP SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS AND TRAIN HEALTH WORKERS TO RECOGNISE AND CARE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL ABUSE**

Many area health services have screening tools to assist health workers to identify women who have been or are experiencing

domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Initiatives to support women and train health workers to deliver better services to rural women include:

- ◆ A CD resource produced by the North Coast Area Health Service for parents of children who have been sexually assaulted.
- ◆ Three 'renewal retreats' held for women in the Illawarra region who have survived a violent relationship.

#### **SUPPORT NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND HELP DEVELOP NETWORKS AIMED AT IMPROVING CO-ORDINATION AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN ALL SECTORS THAT AFFECT HEALTH**

A holistic approach to the prevention and treatment of women's health issues, particularly at a local level, requires the co-ordination and collaboration of many different services from the health and other sectors. NSW Health grants include funding projects that promote collaborative approaches to women's health. The following projects in rural areas are some examples of this.

The Nambucca Valley Post Natal Depression Support Group supports women with babies who may be experiencing post natal distress or depression. Provision of group support reduces feelings of isolation, assists families to understand what experiencing post natal depression is and aids in future management by linking the women and their families to resources and services in the community (Mid North Coast Division of General Practice – \$41,800).

The *Invisible Sentence* project addresses the health and psycho-social needs of women with partners or family members who

are inmates of correctional services. Through a comprehensive consultation process with women this innovative project will address the health issues for women when a partner or other close family member is in prison (Central West Women's Health Centre (NGO) – \$129,664).

The *Rural Women's Health Print Project* aims to raise awareness of a number of women's health issues using local artists and local communities. Issues include young women and smoking; Aboriginal women and pregnancy; older women and physical activity. The artworks will be screen printed and launched locally and toured through regional galleries. (Southern Area Health Service – \$29,000).

#### **GENDER SENSITIVE HEALTH PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF RURAL WOMEN AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, AND THE NEEDS OF WOMEN ARISING FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Addressing the needs of Aboriginal women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, rural women and disadvantaged women requires the design and implementation of specific programs that take account of the particular needs of these women.

Some examples of programs for Aboriginal women in rural areas include:

- ◆ women's health gatherings and wellness camps in the Northern Rivers and Wentworth regions;
- ◆ a TAFE peer education program in the Central Western area providing information for Aboriginal women about health issues and encouraging them to be peer educators for other women within their communities, and

- ◆ *The Strong Women's Project* in Gilgandra — a model to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal women by decreasing the incidence of cardio vascular disease, diabetes and cancer in the Aboriginal population, using the principles of capacity building, a social view of health and recognising the strong supportive position Aboriginal women have in their communities.

### **Better support for Koori carers – Koori Carers Yarning Project**

To increase awareness among local service providers about the emotional support needs of Koori carers and to existing counselling agencies about personal and practical issues facing Koori carers, the 2000/2001 *Women's Grants Program* funded a day camp for Koori carers and service providers where strategies were identified to promote access to their services (\$53,540).

Forty seven service providers and 12 Koori women carers came together in two camp settings over two days — one at the Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation in the Mid North Coast area and the other at the Boorambola Sport and Recreation Centre in the South West region of NSW.

The camps increased Koori women's knowledge of available services to meet their caring needs. Service providers became aware of how to be more culturally responsive to Koori women's needs and developed strategies to access Koori carers better. These strategies and the information about Koori carers' needs will be incorporated into a training manual for service providers. The manual will also provide an evaluation report and information for other service providers to set up Koori yarning camps within their area.

### **ADDRESS WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

Mental health has been identified as a key area for NSW Health. An additional \$107.5 million has been allocated in recurrent expenditure for mental health services over three years (1999/2000–2001/2003). Depression, eating disorders, the prevention of suicide and additional mental health services in rural and regional NSW have been targeted as priority areas. The *School-Link Initiative* (\$5.5 million in partnership with the Commonwealth) promotes early recognition and effective interventions for depression and related disorders in adolescents. In 2000–2001 approximately 1,800 counsellors from schools, TAFE colleges, child and adolescent mental health workers and other appropriate health workers were trained in this area. Advanced school-link training modules on depression and related disorders will be developed during 2002/2003. Area School-Link Co-ordinators assist schools to implement mental health promotion, depression prevention and resilience-building programs. More information is available at [www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/publications/school-link/](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/publications/school-link/).

### **ESTABLISH AND/OR STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT ADDRESS THE PREVENTION, EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT OF BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCERS**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in NSW women and the leading cause of death from cancer. State-wide breast and cervical screening services, jointly funded with the Commonwealth, are provided to women in the target age groups (those aged 50–69).<sup>34</sup> BreastScreen NSW provides mammographic screening services for the early detection of breast cancer through 10 screening and assessment services

around the State, with 36 fixed screening locations and 152 mobile screening locations. Information about this program is on [www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/publications/4295.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/publications/4295.html).

Special programs to encourage breast checks and mammography screenings among women, particularly Aboriginal women, are being conducted in the Central Coast and Mid North Coast Area Health Services. The *NSW Cervical Screening Program* aims to increase the participation of women aged 20–69 years in regular, two-yearly screenings.

The participation rate in biennial cervical screening for women aged 20–69 years in NSW was 61.3 per cent (1,056,058 women) at the end of December 2001 with the highest participation rates occurring in large and small rural centres.<sup>35</sup>

The NSW Pap Test Register contains records for 1.6 million women, with over 2.8 million cytology reports registered.<sup>36</sup>

The incidence rate of cervical cancer among indigenous women is twice that of non-indigenous women while the mortality rate is more than eight times that of non-indigenous women.<sup>37</sup>

Initiatives aimed at increasing cervical screening rates among women are being carried out in Area Health Services across the state. This includes partnerships with Mid North Coast general practitioners to increase their competence and confidence to perform Pap tests.

Aboriginal women have alarmingly high rates of cervical cancer compared to other women. The Hunter Area Health Service is encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to have regular Pap tests through the production of a video, education sessions in Windale and promotional activity in

Muswellbrook. The New England Area Health Service is improving Aboriginal workers' knowledge and skills about cervical screening and has produced an educational booklet and a kit that includes information about Aboriginal women's role in the family, the need to present pap tests in a 'healthy woman' way, the barriers that Aboriginal women face in regard to having a pap test and information about providing explanations for results of pap tests and treatment for abnormal results.

#### CREATE AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, POLICY MAKERS AND THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF TOBACCO USE

Another key area for the prevention of illness and disease is the reduction of tobacco use.

Strategies to reduce smoking among women have been implemented in many Area Health Services. The Central Coast Area Health Service project *Out of the Smoke Screen: Reducing smoking in young women 12–17 years* targets young women by helping them to recognise the distorted portrayal of smoking in the media. The project will be producing a commercial that will be screened prior to teenage blockbuster movies during school holidays. Illawarra Area Health Service *Getting Out of the Smoke Screen: An evaluation of the quit smoking for women program 1997–2002* found over 50 women have attended Quit Smoking for Women courses in the Illawarra over the four year period, with 32 per cent cigarette-free up to four years later. The Southern Area Health Service *Aboriginal Women Quit Smoking* project will address the reasons why Aboriginal women find it difficult to quit smoking and to remain smoke free. The project will include the development of gender and culturally appropriate programs for smoking cessation for Aboriginal women from the Shoalhaven region. The Mid North Coast

Women's Health Service will develop a program for young and pregnant women with a smoking habit. Smoking cessation groups will be held in Taree, Forster and Wingham.

#### CREATE AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO MAKE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN OF ALL AGES TO PARTICIPATE IN SPORT, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND RECREATION

The *NSW State Plan for Women in Sport and Recreation 1999–2002* aims to improve the participation of women and girls in sport, recreation and physical activity at all levels and in all capacities. Actions identified for 2000/2002 are in progress and are reported on by the Department for Sport and Recreation on a quarterly basis. The *NSW Ministerial Taskforce for Women in Sport and Recreation*, a community taskforce established in 1997, provides independent advice to the Minister to ensure that programs, services and strategies reflect the sport and recreation needs of women and girls in NSW. During 2001, community consultations were conducted in Nowra, Maitland, Murwillumbah and Dubbo. The NSW Department of Sport and Recreation continue to liaise with regional areas to implement identified needs.

To improve physical activity, reduce isolation and improve quality of life for older women living in a remote area (Snowy Mountains), the Department for Women funded through the *NSW Women's Grants Program* an aqua exercise club. In partnership with the community, the health sector and business community, aqua exercise classes were provided for 19 women over 60 years of age. All participants reported better mobility, less illness and increased social connections. Some of the women continued to use the pool or sought out other forms of physical activity such as Tai Chi and chair dances.

The *Windale/Booragul Women's Physical Activity* project will identify barriers to and opportunities for physical activity for women living in the Windale community. The project is a partnership between the Hunter Area Health Service and *Hunter Community Renewal Scheme*, a New South Wales Premier's Department initiative aimed at supporting disadvantaged communities. A number of two-day camps, supported and subsidised by the Department of Sport and Recreation and the Hunter Centre for Health Advancement, will provide women with the opportunity to 'come and try' and participate in a wide range of fun and interesting activities including walking, belly dancing, tennis, netball, archery, canoeing, tai-chi, gentle exercise, water sports and ropes courses. The women are encouraged and assisted to continue participation in selected physical activities within their community following the camps. There are also plans to extend the project to the Booragul/Bolton Point community. Another project aimed at increasing women's physical activity levels include walking groups for Aboriginal women in Bourke.

NSW Health gave the Women's Centre in Albury/Wodonga \$17,000 for an exercise and fitness program, *Fitness At Any Size: The large T-shirt* project, which focuses on the positive aspects of fitness and self-esteem, rather than on dieting and weight loss. There will be a program for young women with children and one for older women, and both will help women to maintain a level of physical activity that will increase their health and wellbeing.

## The CEDAW Promise

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women requires governments to take necessary actions in political, social, economic and cultural fields to ensure the full development and advancement of women.<sup>38</sup>

Women in rural communities are a specific group noted by the convention. The particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles they play in the economic survival of their families, are to be supported by appropriate government,

corporate and community measures. Rural women have the right to participate in the decision-making and development planning at all levels. Their participation in community activities should not be restricted by sex. They should enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.<sup>39</sup>

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