

**Lithgow City Council**  
**Women's Advisory Committee**  
**Service Advocacy group**

*Service Advocacy aims to identify gaps and advocate for service delivery in our region.*

From our perspective as women we have identified gaps in services and inequities in the area of women's health and well-being. We propose the formation of a dedicated health and well-being space to specifically meet the needs of women in our community.

The Lithgow Women's Health and Well-being Centre will be an expansion of existing services already Lithgow offered by LINK, Lithgow Community Projects, and private therapist and practitioners. It will be a one-stop shop with a holistic person centred approach.

Informal research has shown that women from Lithgow are travelling to Katoomba to access Blue Mountains Women's Health & Resource Centre. There is a base of support from professionals and women in the community for the formation of a similar service in Lithgow.

The Lithgow Women's Health and well-being Centre will link in to Lithgow City Council's Strategic Plan as this centre will expand and build on services already available in our area.

The Lithgow Women's Health Centre would be funded by NSW Health and NSW Community Services. It would provide low-cost and affordable medical, allied and complementary health care and education services to improve women's health and well-being in the LGA.

Services offered would be broader than existing services currently available in Lithgow. The centre would be focussed not only on improving health outcomes for local women, but also improving levels of well-being. The centre would offer groups and workshops to foster inclusion and connection, encompassing groups such as social groups, support groups and physical activity groups. Workshops could include health education and prevention such as quit smoking and life skills such as financial literacy.

Services would include GP, mental health services, reproductive health education, advice and referrals. Complimentary therapies including acupuncture, massage, art therapy and music therapy for women, children and young people. The women's centre would also host a drop in centre for young women.

Lithgow Health and Well-being Centre will be exclusively staffed by women. Programs and services will be determined by women in the LGA according to need.

## **Why does Lithgow need a dedicated women's health centre?**

Australian women may experience lifelong cultural and gender based inequality and discrimination. Women need a safe place to access specialised, targeted health advice and treatment. They also need a safe space to grow as women, to be educated and to make connections. A service dedicated to women will help bridge the gap created by cultural and gender bias. This service will help improve the status of women and redress cultural imbalance.

Health issues unique to women have traditionally been under resourced. Often medical trials do not include women due to the difficulties the affects female hormones have on participants regarding scientific benchmarks for drug testing trials. This has caused negative outcomes when drugs are prescribed by doctors unaware of the impacts on women. Also, doctors traditionally have discounted women's symptoms especially symptoms of pain. Cancers that only affect women have often been underfunded for research due to gender bias, women not being an historical priority for those in power to fund research projects.

Other issues negatively impact women's health and wellbeing:

- Gender biased pay gap, pay rates Australia wide 14.6 %. This figure rises to 22.4% in WA . There is limited participation in eight industries for example mining only 13.7 % of workers are women.
- Women are retiring with substantially lower superannuation funds and are more likely to experience poverty and depend on the Aged Pension. Contributing factors are loss of income due to part-time work and leave from the workforce to care for children and parents. 64% Of women's total workday is taken up with the performance of unpaid work.
- Sexual harassment and physical violence-1 in 2 women experience sexual harassment and 1 in 3 experience physical or sexual violence. Indigenous women experience twice this rate.
- Domestic violence is the biggest contributor to ill health, death and disability in women, it has a larger impact than obesity, alcohol and drugs. Domestic violence has significant impact over a lifetime on well-being and productivity.
- Women over 55 are the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness. Women are more at risk of becoming homeless due to the effects of a lifetime of gender based disadvantage and economic/financial inequality. Homelessness in this group has been described as a 'sleeping giant'

It is timely as a women's advisory committee to propose a dedicated space for women, a space that prioritises women's and children's issues. Women are the centre of family life. To improve the health and wellbeing of women is to improve the health and wellbeing of the whole community. The community will become stronger and more resilient. Please support the proposal to create Lithgow Women's Health and Well-being Centre.

Proposed by Allyn Jory & Leanne Hopkins

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