



**Submission to Golden Plains Shire Council
in response to the Council Plan 2017-2021,
incorporating the Municipal Health and
Wellbeing Plan.**

Dear Mr Nicholls,

Women's Health Grampians (WHG) is a regional leader in women's health advocacy with the aim of improving women's equality, as the most significant way of enhancing their health and wellbeing. Our priorities are to prevent violence against women and improve women's sexual and reproductive health; underpinning these issues is the promotion of gender equality. Our role is to support a range of organisations including local government, to apply a gender lens to achieve healthy public policy and improve service provision for women.

In 2016, WHG led the development of the *Communities of Respect and Equality (CoRE) Plan: A plan to prevent violence against women and their children in the Grampians region 2016-2020*. Golden Plains Shire Council is a member of the CoRE Alliance and has committed to supporting activities that align with this plan. We want to encourage you to ensure your commitment, and the activities you will undertake as a member, are represented in the Council Plan. The key contact person for CoRE at Golden Plains Shire Council is Greg Anders, Director of Assets and Amenities.

Council Plan

WHG would like to congratulate Golden Plains Shire Council on the development of the Golden Plains Shire Council Plan 2017-2021, which also incorporates the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan.

This Plan aligns with WHG's Strategic Plan and we were pleased to see this Plan highlight the importance of the prevention of family violence (pg.11). With Golden Plains Shire Council being a signatory to the CoRE Plan and a member of the CoRE Alliance, we would encourage the council to formally cite this commitment in the Plan, as currently there is no specific reference. Such a statement reinforces that the council's investment in this issue is part of a broader, collective and integrated response to addressing violence against women by stakeholders across the Grampians region.

Preventing Violence Against Women

The Plan states an *"integrated response to support those experiencing family violence"* (pg. 11) will be prioritised by council. Whilst this response is undoubtedly necessary considering shire residents

have to frequently visit other regional cities (i.e. Geelong and Ballarat) to access family violence services, prevention of the issue is equally paramount and we would encourage council to consider explicit reference to primary prevention in the Plan.

Gender inequality is nationally and internationally recognised as the underlying cause of violence against women, thus preventing gender-based violence begins with promoting gender equality. Whilst the Plan informs the audience that family violence will be addressed through gender equity measures (i.e. the council will *“proactively address gender equity issues in our organisation and our community”* pg.11), we believe this statement needs to be transparent in implying that a gender equity approach is indeed primary prevention. Often the role of gender equity in the prevention of family violence is not easily communicated or understood by the community; therefore it is important that council extend every effort to articulate that the prevention of violence is at the forefront of its rhetoric and that gender equity is the conduit to achieving such prevention parameters.

A statement around council’s inclusion in CoRE, words to the effect of ‘council will support, encourage and act on the CoRE plan to prevent violence against women’ could be included under the heading of *how we will go about it* (pg.14).

Gender Equality

It is very pleasing to note the council will *“proactively address gender equity issues in our organisation and our community”* (pg. 11). In light of ‘Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy’, released by the state government, which emphasises gender inequality as the key cause of violence against women, it is comforting to see this consistency reflected within a local council.

If the council is inclined to expand on the aforementioned statement, we would recommend the Plan consider specific reference to how gender equity issues would be addressed, such as through the application of a gender analysis to key projects, strategies and services, and/or the provision of training and resources to support culture change. Notably, the council have already begun work on a Gender Equity Action Plan through their CoRE involvement, and referencing this strategy serves to inform the community of the systematic approach taken by council to create an equal, valued, diverse and inclusive community and workforce.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

The Victorian Government recently released the first Victorian Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy. The strategy acknowledges that while access to sexual and reproductive health services is a fundamental right for every Victorian woman, there is often little or no access to the information, support and services that women require, particularly in rural and regional areas. It also recognises that family violence is associated with poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes with women being at greater risk of reproductive coercion, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection.

The strategy calls for partners across the health system, including primary health, women’s health services and local government, to work together to improve access to services. Opportunities for collaboration with local government in the strategy include working with existing youth groups to

provide youth-friendly sexual health information, or to improve access to contraceptive choices, for example expanding access to condom vending machines in community-based settings.

WHG have begun work on a sexual and reproductive health plan for the Grampians region and can assist Golden Plains Shire Council to consider strategies and partnership opportunities to complement this state-wide strategy.

Health Profile and Data

The Council Plan has included data from the Municipal Scan Summary, providing snapshots on characteristics such as health and wellbeing outcomes, economic outcomes, and built environment issues across the shire. Whilst such data highlights for example that there is *“lower proportion of people undertaking physical activity on four or more days than for Victoria”* or *“high proportion of adults (57%) not eating enough fruit and vegetables”* (pg.15), this data is not separated by sex.

Only through the collection of sex-disaggregated data can we identify gender differences, thereby allowing the proper allocation of resources, programs and services to address such inequalities. We would encourage council to consider its methodology for collecting, analysing and presenting health profile data.

Gender is not only a determinant of health but also affects areas such as employment, education, access to the built environment, and leadership, therefore we advise a gender lens be applied to all four areas of which the council has nominated as its strategic priorities – *promoting healthy and connected communities; enhancing local economies; managing built and natural environments; and delivering good governance and leadership* (pg.13). WHG will continue to support council to consider gender in these areas.

The Plan’s intention for evaluating improvements in the areas of family violence aims to rely on *“increased community safety indicators”* and *“reduced prevalence of family violence”* (pg. 14). While both data collection mediums are useful markers of progress, the limitations associated with these measures restrict a holistic understanding of progress in these areas. We would encourage council to broaden its assessment of perceptions of safety by using sex-disaggregated data, and broaden its monitoring of family violence prevalence through indicators of culture change such as using the VicHealth Indicators Survey, which measures gender equality in relationships.

Other key documents and policies to consider:

The [Victorian Public Health Plan 2015-2019](#) outlines the government’s key priorities and strategies for improving health and wellbeing over four years. The Plan identifies ‘Preventing Violence and Injury’ and ‘Sexual and Reproductive Health’ as key health issues for the state. We therefore recommend that all Councils include these as issues in their Council Plans that also incorporate their Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans.

The [Royal Commission into Family Violence Summary and Recommendations](#) report provides an extensive summary of the findings from the Royal Commission and outlines 227 recommendations to address family violence in Victoria. For Local Government, recommendation 94 is relevant for Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans, as follows:

Recommendation 94: The Victorian Government amend section 26 of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)— which requires that councils prepare a municipal public health and wellbeing plan—to require councils to report on the measures the council proposes to take to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims. Alternatively, the Victorian Government could amend section 125 of the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)—which requires each council to prepare a council plan—to require councils to include these measures in their council plan (rather than their health and wellbeing plans) [within 12 months]. (source: [Royal Commission into Family Violence Summary and Recommendations](#) March 2016, page 71.)

VICTORIAN STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

[Free from Violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women](#) sets out the Victorian Governments response to the Royal Commission recommendations and provides a strategic direction for addressing both violence against women and family violence. The focus of this strategy is on primary prevention and long term structural and behavioural change at a population level.

VICTORIAN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH STRATEGY

A Victorian Government Strategy '[Women's sexual and reproductive health: key priorities 2017-2020](#)' has been developed to improve the sexual and reproductive health of all Victorian women. This plan is relevant to regional and rural areas and WHG encourages local government to engage and collaborate with local services and organisations to provide greater education and access to sexual and reproductive health services for women in the region.

INQUIRY INTO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION – A FIVE YEAR GAME PLAN FOR VICTORIA

Local Government has a key role in supporting recreation and sporting activities within the community and therefore can have a significant influence over the representation of women in recreation and sporting groups. WHG supports the Victorian Governments recommendations from the '[Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation – A Five Year Game Plan for Victoria](#)'. A recommendation from this is to 'Mandate gender balance and good governance principles'. This includes that a minimum quota of 40% should be set for female representation on governing bodies. WHG recommends that the Ararat Rural City Council reflects this requirement by the Victorian Government in the Council Plan.

Conclusion

The Golden Plains Shire Council Plan provides a comprehensive plan for the future health and wellbeing of the residents within its 56 vibrant rural communities.

Women's Health Grampians and Golden Plains Shire Council are partners in the implementation of the CoRE Plan and we look forward to working with the Council to implement key activities that support both the CoRE Plan and the Council Plan 2017-2021.

We look forward to seeing the implementation of the Council Plan and working in partnership with Golden Plains Shire Council. Please contact Dee Angelina Micevski, Regional Consultant- Central Highlands on 5322 4100 if you need any further information.

Regards,



Marianne Hendron
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Health Grampians