

# Annual Impact Report

Illawarra Women's Health Centre

2026

Our Centre is situated on land of the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal Nation.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, where the Aboriginal people have performed age-old ceremonies of storytelling, music, dance and celebration.

We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past, present and those of the future, for they hold the memories, traditions and hopes of Aboriginal Australia.

We must always remember that under the concrete and asphalt, this land is, was, and always will be traditional Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge that we work in the context of generations of resilient, strengths-based, holistic resistance to violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We commit to actively supporting and promoting the voices of Aboriginal people and organisations in our work

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Font page: Our front page is a collective artwork, celebrating our 40th anniversary. The project was led by artist Sally Ann Conwell. The symbols and images used represent what the Centre means to women who are connected to the Centre.

# Chair Report



**Jessica Koot**
**Illawarra Women’s Health Centre**

As we reflect on the 2025–2026 financial year, we do so at an extraordinary moment in the history of the Illawarra Women's Health Centre. This year marks 40 years since we opened. 40 years since a group of women came together with a vision for a different approach to women's health, grounded in equity, community, advocacy and social justice.

Four decades later, that vision remains as relevant and necessary as ever.

This has been a year of significant achievement and transition. As the Council of Women, we have had the privilege of overseeing three remarkable services: the Illawarra Women's Health Centre, with its longstanding commitment to holistic women's healthcare, and the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre, an Australian-first model supporting women recovering from domestic, family and sexual violence, and the Warilla Education and Care Service providing education and care to children.

A defining moment has been our leadership transition, including the departure of our longstanding Executive Director, Sally Stevenson AM.

Sally's commitment, advocacy and service over the past 12 years and her contribution to women's health and safety in the Illawarra never wavered. Her leadership has strengthened the Centre's place as a trusted provider of specialist services and a powerful voice for women's rights. One of her most significant legacies is the establishment of the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre, the result of years of determined advocacy, collaboration and a refusal to accept that women should be left without support for long-term recovery.

On behalf of the Council of Women, I extend our deepest gratitude to Sally for her commitment, vision and contribution to the Illawarra Women’s Health Centre and the women of our region.

We also welcomed Elise Phillips and Jess Davidson into the leadership of the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre and Illawarra Women's Health Centre respectively. Both bring strong values, experience and a shared commitment to advancing women's health, safety and equality.

This leadership transition provides an important opportunity to shape the future of both organisations. The Council of Women has started laying the foundations for the eventual separation of the Centres, recognising their distinct purposes, service models and strategic directions. Our focus remains on ensuring that each organisation has the governance, independence and sustainability to thrive while maintaining their shared feminist foundations.

I sincerely thank my fellow Council of Women members, Tanya Sainty, Simone Lord, Vi Blazevska, Natalee Davis, Melissa Jones, Bianca Hunt, Katherine Garaty and Tegan Bezzina for their support this year. I also want to thank our outgoing Council of Women members Narelle Hawkins and Kelly Cole for their commitment and investment into our governance.

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, partners and supporters for your dedication and tireless advocacy for women throughout this significant year. Thank you to the team at ECTARC for your management of the Warilla Education and Care Service. Most importantly, I acknowledge the women who have shaped our history and continue to guide our future. Thank you for standing with us and allowing us to stand with you.

Forty years is an extraordinary legacy. Our responsibility now is to ensure that we continue to evolve, strengthen and advocate for the health, safety, dignity and equality of women for generations to come.

Jessica



# CEO Report



**Jess Davidson**
**Illawarra Women’s Health Centre**

This year marks 40 years of the Illawarra Women's Health Centre standing alongside women in our community. Founded in 1986 by a collective of determined women, the Centre was built on a belief that remains central to our work today: women's health cannot be separated from the social, economic and structural conditions that shape their lives.

Access to healthcare, financial security, safe housing, meaningful relationships, bodily autonomy and freedom from violence are not privileges. They are fundamental to women's health and wellbeing.

As we reflect on 2025–2026, there is much to celebrate. But our 40th year is also a reminder that the work of those who came before us remains unfinished. Gender inequality, economic disadvantage, social isolation and violence continue to shape women's health outcomes. These challenges are interconnected, and our response must be equally comprehensive.

Throughout the year, our staff delivered essential counselling, casework, women's health nursing, therapeutic services and community programs. We have continued to see demand for these services increase, and continue to advocate for funding so we can respond to this demand.

Funding limitations also meant we made the difficult decision to close our Young Women's Program, which was delivering structured group work programs in local high schools. However, we remain committed to supporting young women through targeted workshops in schools and the community, while continuing to seek sustainable, long-term funding to re-establish this important early intervention work.

This year we strengthened our response to housing insecurity through generous funding from Bendigo Bank, establishing a new Homelessness Prevention Program. Our International Women's Day panel provided an important opportunity to bring our community together around women's rights and justice. Through our Workplaces for Change Lunch and Learn, we also engaged local employers in recognising their responsibility to foster workplaces to support employees impacted by violence.

Our commitment to advocacy and systemic change remained strong. We hosted a regional roundtable with Commonwealth Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin and NSW Women's Safety Commissioner Hannah Tonkin, highlighting the challenges facing women across the Illawarra and the need for coordinated, adequately resourced responses.

Our annual client survey, completed by over 100 women, reinforced the meaningful impact of our services. Women reported feeling more empowered, supported and better equipped to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. As one woman expressed: “Without all the help I have received, I truly don't know where I would be. I am learning how to get well and have some hope for a healthier future”.

None of this work would be possible without our dedicated staff, volunteers, Council of Women, partners and supporters. I extend my sincere thanks to each of you, and particularly to the women who place their trust in our Centre every day. Forty years on, our purpose remains clear. We are here not only to support women through individual challenges, but to address the inequalities that create them.

Jess



# CEO Report



**Elise Phillips**
**Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre**

The past 12 months have been a period of growth, evolution and deepening impact for the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre. As we look to 2025–26, I am proud to reflect on the foundations we have strengthened, the partnerships we have built and, most importantly, the hundreds of women across the Illawarra who have been supported to feel safer, more hopeful and more connected to others.

The work of the Centre is transformative. Every day, we see what becomes possible when women are offered not only crisis responses, but long-term, specialist, trauma-informed care that honours their strengths, choices and hopes for the future. Lived experience advocate Faith Labaro captured this powerfully when she said, "Crisis money keeps a woman alive. Recovery gives her a life back." Her words go to the heart of our purpose: recovery is not optional or secondary. It is essential to women rebuilding their lives after domestic, family and sexual violence.

Over the past year, we have increased our capacity by welcoming additional staff, enabling us to broaden the range and depth of support available to women. We have strengthened existing partnerships and established new ones, including with partner services that deliver outreach support onsite. Together, we have expanded the practical, therapeutic and social supports women can access at the Centre, including eco-therapy and equine therapy, creating more pathways for healing, connection and confidence.

This has also been a year of learning, evidence building and advocacy. As the Centre has grown, we have strengthened the way we capture data, listen to women's experiences and understand the outcomes of our work.

These more sophisticated approaches are helping us demonstrate the difference that healing and recovery services make in women's lives, inform continuous service improvement and support our advocacy for further investment in long-term recovery responses.

Our public presence has continued to grow. Through media engagement, social media, sector advocacy and community events, we have worked to raise awareness of the impacts of domestic and sexual violence and the need for services that support women beyond immediate safety. This included the opportunity to speak about our work at the 2026 Australian Healing and Recovery Conference in Brisbane, contributing to national conversations about what is needed to support women's recovery after violence. These opportunities remind us that women's voices must remain central to how services are designed, delivered and evaluated.

We have also been proud to develop the Change Makers Collective, a trauma-informed leadership and advocacy program, made possible thanks to the generosity of GM[3].

I extend my sincere thanks to our staff, whose skill, compassion and commitment make this work possible every day. I also thank our partner services who provide valuable outreach support onsite, our Board members for their leadership and governance, and our community partners for standing with us in this shared purpose. Most importantly, I thank the women we walk alongside. It is a privilege to be trusted with your stories, your hopes and your recovery journeys. Your courage continues to shape and strengthen the work of the Centre.

Elise



# Our Vision

Women and girls are respected, safe, healthy, and supported to lead rewarding lives.

# Our Purpose

To improve the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of women and girls, and ensure their views, engagement and experiences inform decision making at all levels.

# Our Strategic Goals

- Strengthen the core women's health service offering in the Illawarra.
- Expand and improve the quality of individual and group programs, community engagement and social collaboration.
- Maintain the Centre's position as a recognised expert and trusted voice on women's and girl's health matters, by advocating for women-led social change on critical new or ignored issues.
- Build the governance, business and practice model for the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre to ensure its success.
- Build the Centre's organisational capabilities and capacities critical to future sustainability and success.

**"We are so very lucky to have this safe place for girls and women of all ages. The sisterhood in action, everyday."**

Feedback from our annual client survey

# Our year in numbers

**3,982**
Individual appointments

**7,062**
Women attending groups

**2,562**
Case work, advocacy and support appointments

**757**
Nurse practitioner appointments

**1,076**
counselling appointments

**380**
Massage and allied health appointments

**"I’m thankful that at times when I need some help or support in bad times, staff are there for me. They don’t just treat me like a number they actually care.”**

Feedback from our annual client survey

## Impact

| | |
|---|---|
| **87%** | Of women believe accessing our programs and/or services made them feel more empowered to manage thier own health and wellbeing. |
| **78%** | Of women feel more connected with others after using our services and/or programs. |
| **75%** | Of women feel more confident in thier daily life after accessing our services and/or programs |
| **70%** | Of women have learnt more skills at the Centre to use in thier daily life. |

# Safe and Together

The Safe & Together model is an internationally recognised approach to Domestic Family and Sexual Violence informed practice that aims to keep children safe and, wherever possible, together with the non-offending parent. This model highlights the protective actions women take every single day within the context of violence and recognises that the source of harm is the person using coercive control and patterns of abusive behaviour.

The training explores how domestic and family violence affects parenting, wellbeing and child development, and how systems sometimes unintentionally shift responsibility onto mothers. The model reinforces how mothers are protecting their children and keeps the focus on the person using violence. The Safe & Together approach provides practitioners confidence and language to work alongside survivors and interact with systems to strengthen safety for families.

This year Illawarra Women's Health Centre delivered the core training three times, and ensured all of our staff across both Illawarra Women's Health Centre and Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre received the training. Both Centres are prioritising the Safe & Together training as part of a broader commitment to implementing and influencing trauma-informed, domestic violence-informed practice across the region.



Illawarra Women's Health Centre

# Weavers Program




This year, the Illawarra Women's Health Centre undertook a review of the Weavers Program to strengthen its structure, sustainability and long-term impact for women caring for someone with dementia.

As part of this, we began consultation with the program facilitator, carers and volunteers, who provided valuable insights into the program. It was clear the significant value of the Weavers program has in reducing social isolation and providing a safe, supportive environment where women can share. Having space to share experiences, access information and connect with others who understand the challenges of caring for someone with dementia, were essential to strengthening wellbeing and resilience of women.

We also identified opportunities to strengthen participant leadership and increase involvement for those with lived experience in shaping the program's future, while maintaining its welcoming and supportive culture.

In consultation with the group, the Centre commenced transitioning the Weavers program to a peer-led model, building on the strengths and lived experience of the women involved. The Centre continues to support this transition through leadership development and volunteer support. This reflects the success of a community development approach, where women are empowered to independently shape the future of programs in ways that reflect their own needs, experiences and aspirations.

# Homelessness Prevention Program

The Bendigo Bank Homelessness Prevention Program commenced in 2026 to provide practical and timely support to women and families experiencing housing insecurity, financial hardship, and family and domestic violence. Funded through the support of Bendigo Bank Oak Flats and Gerringong, the program combines case management with flexible brokerage funding to help women maintain safe housing and prevent homelessness before it occurs.

The program has enabled timely interventions that address immediate barriers to housing stability. Brokerage funding has assisted women with essential needs including rent arrears, utility bills, removalist costs, storage, security measures, furniture, household items, and other expenses that can determine whether a woman remains safely housed. The program has also filled an important gap in local service provision by providing rapid, practical assistance during times of crisis. For women escaping domestic and family violence, support such as personal safety alarms, security cameras, relocation assistance, and emergency financial relief has provided an immediate pathway to safety while longer-term goals are addressed through case management.

During the reporting period, the program was further strengthened through a partnership between the Illawarra Women's Health Centre and Wollongong Homeless Hub and Housing Services. Supported through Bendigo Bank Partnership Funding, the initiative provides transitional accommodation for women and women with children experiencing homelessness, alongside intensive wraparound case management and wellbeing support. This integrated model combines safe housing with advocacy, referrals, tenancy support, and practical interventions to help women move beyond crisis and achieve long-term stability and independence.

The initiative is particularly important for women experiencing what is often referred to as “hidden homelessness”, where a woman may be couch surfing, sleeping in a car, or staying in an unsafe relationship because they have nowhere else to go. Often these women are invisible in the homelessness system, and not always meeting a traditional definition of homelessness, a trend that we were seeing at Illawarra Women’s Health Centre.

This program recognises that housing is just one part of the solution, that it also needs to be combined with specialist support such as case work and wellbeing services, as well as flexible and tailored brokerage. This program has been about creating a pathway that not only helps women find a safe place to stay, but gives them the support they need to build a secure future.

By combining flexible funding, housing support, and person-centred case management, the Bendigo Bank Homelessness Prevention Program has helped women improve their safety, housing security, and wellbeing, while reducing the risk of future homelessness.



# Our year in numbers

ILLAWARRA WOMEN'S TRAUMA RECOVERY CENTRE

**290**
Individual registered clients

**682**
Group sessions

**2104**
Counselling sessions

**2214**
Casework and advocacy sessions

**319**
Financial counselling sessions

**317**
Massage appointments

## "I feel stronger after each time I come here."

Client feedback

## Groups

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **246** | Movement based group sessions | • Mind-body connection, Walking group, Yoga, Martial Arts |
| **189** | Creative expression group sessions | • Singing and Music, Art Group, Gardening Group, Stitching Circle, Clay Group |
| **18** | Social group sessions | • Cooking/Baking, Older Women's Group |
| **195** | Learning group sessions | • Self-Care, Self-Compassion, Body Acceptance, Acceptance Group |
| **34** | Therapuetic group sessions | • Healing with Horses, Healing in Nature |

# Healing with horses

Over the past 12 months, we have continued to expand the range of therapeutic and social opportunities available to women at the Centre, including through the introduction of Healing with Horses. Developed in partnership with NEST Equine and Nature Assisted Learning, this innovative eight-week equine-assisted learning program has created a new pathway for women experiencing or recovering from domestic, family and sexual violence to explore healing, connection and personal growth.

Delivered at NEST's 90-acre property in Dunmore, the program is grounded in The Horse Wisdom Program, developed by the Equine Psychotherapy Institute. Through structured, gentle interactions with horses, women explored themes including trust, boundaries, leadership and emotional regulation — areas that can be significantly affected by trauma. The program's emphasis on consent, choice and mutual engagement provided a safe and contained environment for women to build connection at their own pace.

Importantly, the impact of Healing with Horses has extended beyond the activities themselves, with participants experiencing significant personal transformation throughout the program. Women developed greater confidence in connecting with others, strengthened their awareness of boundaries and emotional regulation, and experienced opportunities to reconnect with themselves in a way that felt safe and supported. The presence of the horses and the natural environment provided a unique opportunity to experience co-regulation, trust and connection, with the program demonstrating the powerful role that nature and relational approaches can play in recovery.

The introduction of Healing with Horses is an important achievement in our ongoing commitment to providing diverse, trauma-informed pathways to recovery. We are grateful to Lauren Dawson and the team at NEST Equine and Nature Assisted Learning for their partnership and shared commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for women to heal, grow and reconnect.



# Changemakers Collective

The Change Makers Collective is a trauma-informed leadership and advocacy program that reflects our commitment to ensuring women with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence have opportunities to shape the systems, services and communities that affect their lives. We are deeply grateful to GM[3] for their generous philanthropic funding, without which we would not be able to deliver this important program.

The 10-week program supports women to build the knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate for change on issues that matter to them. Participants explore how to influence decision-makers, engage with the media and share their lived experience safely, while also learning about boundaries and self-care. Through developing their own advocacy projects, women are supported to translate their ideas into action, in ways that reflect their interests, choices and aspirations.




Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre

**“It was thoroughly positive and inspiring. It left me feeling hopeful.”**

Changemakers participant

This year, six women graduated from our inaugural cohort. The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with women describing feeling inspired, developing a strong sense of solidarity with one another, and gaining valuable skills and knowledge in advocacy. The connections formed through the program have reinforced the importance of creating spaces where women can learn from one another, recognise the value of their lived experience and build confidence in their capacity to contribute to meaningful change.

The Change Makers Collective represents an important investment in lived-experience leadership. By supporting women to use their voices on their own terms, we are helping to ensure that lived experience continues to inform the services, systems and responses that support women’s recovery from violence.

# Treasurer Report

**Simone Lord**
**Treasurer, Council of Women**
**Illawarra Women’s Health Centre**

During the year, the Illawarra Women's Health Centre and the Illawarra Women’s Trauma Recovery Centre continued to expand and strengthen its delivery of vital health, wellbeing and trauma recovery services across our community. Despite growing demand and an increasingly complex operating environment, the organisation maintained a strong financial position, secured ongoing funding and invested in programs that improve outcomes for women across the Illawarra.

The Centre remains in a strong financial position. At 30 June 2026, the organisation held cash and cash equivalents of $9.94 million, including approximately $8.94 million invested in term deposits. Net assets remained strong at $2.89 million, providing the organisation with a sound financial foundation for future operations and strategic initiatives.

It is important to note that $9.09 million of the Centre's cash balance relates to grants received in advance. These funds are committed to future program delivery and are recognised as liabilities until the related services are provided. As such, the Centre's reported cash balance should not be viewed as unrestricted surplus funds available for general expenditure.

O'Donnell Hennessy Taylor independently audited the annual financial statements, issuing an unqualified audit opinion confirming a true and fair view of the organisation’s financial position and performance.

On behalf of the Council of Women, I would like to thank our previous Executive Director Sally Stevenson, leadership team, finance and operations staff, funders, volunteers and community partners for their dedication and commitment throughout the year. Together, we continue to build an organisation that delivers lasting impact for women across the Illawarra.

# Finances

ILLAWARRA WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE INCORPORATED
ABN: 57 253 131 534

| FINANCIAL MEASURE | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| Total revenue and other income | $6,093,032 | $5,924,028 |
| Total expenditure | $6,361,065 | $5,849,136 |
| **Surplus / (deficit)** | **($288,032)** | **$74,892** |
| Cash and cash equivalents | $9,936,322 | $10,633,069 |
| Grants received in advance | $9,086,654 | $9,593,588 |
| Net assets | $2,893,901 | $3,161,933 |

# Acknowledgements

**Our work would not be possible without our partnerships and generous supporters. Thank you for another incredible year.**

- Ahoy Ahoy
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Awareness Co
- Bendigo Bank Oak Flats and Gerringong
- Be Recruitment
- Centrelink
- Chronic Pain Australia
- Coordinare
- Culture Across Time
- CWES
- Danielle Thompson
- Deakin University
- Department of Communities and Justice
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Dress for Success
- DVSAS
- Flagstaff
- GM3
- Healthy Cities
- Hearing Australia
- Human X
- Illawarra Legal Centre
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District AOD
- Kiama Community College
- Legendary Leaders
- Medicare Mental Health
- Nikolovski Lawyers
- OZ Harvest
- Priceline Pharmacy
- Quota
- Ratha's Place
- Sassi
- Shellharbour City Council
- Souter Creative
- Sureways Employment
- TRC Lived Experience Advisory Group
- Unitech
- Uniting NDIS
- Vinnies
- Violet Co
- Waples
- Women's Legal NSW
- Zhara
- Zonta



**“Healing means you care more about your future than your past.”**

IWTRC client feedback

**“I have gained a lot of my self-esteem back from this Centre. I feel empowered as a woman.”**

IWHC client feedback








Illawarra Women's Health Centre

Established 1986



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