



WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023





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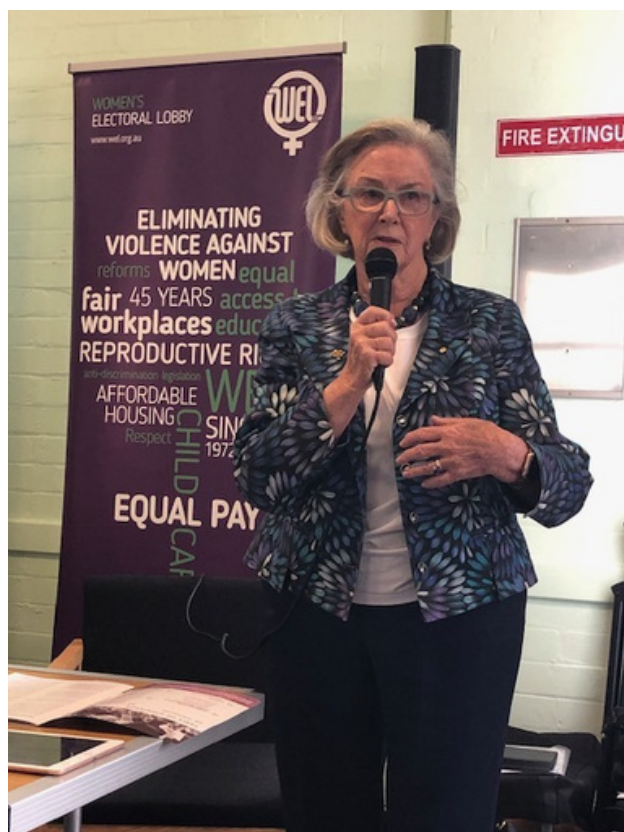
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WEL acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners and Elders past and present across Australia, with particular acknowledgement to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. It is upon their ancestral lands that the WEL NSW office is located.

OVERVIEW

True to our founding principles, WEL is a feminist, independent, not for profit, non-party political organisation that advocates for a society where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards and where women's potential can be fully realised.

This report covers the period from 10 December 2022 to November 2023.



Wendy McCarthy AO
WEL Ambassador



2023 Voice to Parliament Forum, Western Sydney Women Say 'YES', presented by WEL and Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association NSW

FUTURE OF WEL

The WEL NSW and WEL Australia AGMs will be a landmark in the long history of WEL activism: members will be asked to support a change to WEL's organisational structure. If all state branches proceed as recommended by the WELA National Coordinating Committee (NCC), state based branches, including WEL NSW, will be dissolved.

Over the last year, the WELA NCC together with the WEL NSW Executive Committee and other state WEL groups, have been considering WEL's future. A strong view has emerged that WEL must change its 50 year old structure of separate state and federal organisations to become a more effective and representative voice for women.

We believe we need to focus our resources by establishing WEL as one nationally representative women's advocacy organisation, with the flexibility and capacity to advocate for women at both national and state level. Most issues of concern to women have both federal and state implications.

The sophistication and complexity of the Federal Government's policy agenda for women and the urgent necessity to push them harder and faster on issues such as childcare, domestic and family violence and sexual assault, pay equity, and recognition and wage justice for care work, means we need a more authoritative and well resourced national presence, supported by vibrant state and territory activists.

WEL sought pro bono legal advice from Gilbert + Tobin law firm on a range of options for undertaking this structural change. The favoured option was dissolution of existing state groups including WEL NSW, with WEL Australia remaining as the one nationally representative WEL body. This advice together with specific guidance on the steps needed to achieve it, was received in May 2023 and circulated to WELA NCC. It was considered and endorsed by WEL NSW Executive on 14 June 2023.

Consistent with this legal advice and NCC decisions, the WEL NSW Executive Committee recommends the winding up of WEL NSW and transfer of all surplus funds to WELA.

WEL's future organisational arrangements will be the subject of consideration and agreement by WELA members. WEL work in NSW will be able to continue, should this be desired by its members, as a delegated WELA sub-committee. Over the last decade, some WEL branches have already closed and members have transferred to WEL Australia membership.

Up until now WEL NSW, with the largest number of active members and strong networks, has taken on the major responsibility for lobbying, submissions and website for both NSW and WEL Australia.



WEL AUSTRALIA

WEL outlined a detailed policy platform for the 2022 Federal election and women voters and candidates played a historic and decisive role. We continue to assess Federal Government policy progress during 2023 against our National Platform.

WEL has engaged with the Federal Government's gender equality initiatives through our membership of the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA), our collaboration with the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) on Federal Budget analyses, submissions to consultation papers and inquiries, as well as through detailed comment in our newsletter, WEL Informed and through press releases and active presence on social media.

At our 10 December 2022 Annual General Meeting WEL was honoured to host the Hon Linda Burney Minister for Indigenous Australians who spoke with us on the Voice and the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We committed there and then to campaign for a Yes vote in the 2023 Referendum.

You can find our report on the Voice forum we held on Darug Country on page 15 of this report.

We are deeply saddened by the referendum outcome and will now consider ways we can continue to engage with Indigenous women and support campaigns.



Millie Ingram welcoming WEL Members to Country (top) Emeritus Professor Marian Sawyer AO (middle), WEL Historian giving an address on WEL history, and Wendy McCarthy AO, WEL Ambassador, raises a glass at the final WEL NSW AGM December 2023

WEL NSW

In February and March 2023, WEL developed a detailed policy platform for the 25 March NSW election. The WEL 2023 NSW Election Scorecard assessed party election policies against our demands.

We were disappointed that neither the Coalition nor the ALP spelt out a coherent set of women's policies, let alone a vision for achieving women's equality during the election campaign.

You can find more on our NSW Election campaign on page 8 of this report and on the WEL website.

WEL receives no government funding and relies on volunteers to maintain its advocacy work. Ongoing fund-raising is needed to support our activities, including maintaining our digital media presence and communicating with our members and supporters. This will become increasingly imperative if WEL is to sustain a strong and effective national and regional lobbying presence in the future.

We extend our thanks to Erina Finau, our paid part-time Membership and Engagement Coordinator until 10 September 2023, and since then to Amanda Keeling, who have so ably assisted with WEL's work. Our thanks as well to members of the WEL NSW Executive Committee and the WELA NCC. We are deeply appreciative of all their efforts and the efforts of the many others who have supported WEL through their activism and their continuing membership subscriptions and donations. There have been thousands of such members over the half century of our political work. These have sustained the organisation. We hope this support will continue.

WEL thanks Gilbert +Tobin for their pro-bono advice providing a sound legal basis for our proposals to restructure WEL.

Jozefa Sobski AM
WEL Australia Convenor

Dr Mary O'Sullivan
WEL NSW Convenor



CAMPAIGNS

2023 Voice Referendum

WEL was privileged to welcome the Minister for Indigenous Australians the Hon Linda Burney as guest speaker at our 2021/22 Annual General Meeting. At that 10 December 2022 meeting we committed to support the Yes vote in the referendum for the inclusion of recognition of Australia's first peoples in the Constitution together with an Aboriginal voice as outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The WEL NSW Executive Committee made a strategic decision to focus our efforts on Western Sydney and to ask immigrant women leaders there to join with us to articulate the yes case from an immigrant women's perspective. We wanted to take the Voice debate out of the inner city and into parts of Sydney where people were seeing the issues through diverse life experiences in order to make an informed decision.

WEL partnered with Immigrant Women's Speakout Association to organise and host the forum in the heart of Darug Country. Charity Danquah from IWSA Board and the Association's CEO Sunila Kotwal worked closely with a subcommittee of the WEL Executive to organise the event and to circulate the event on social media. Following the forum Charity Danquah contributed her expertise and skills to circulate extracts from the forum on social media.

We held the forum on Tuesday 5 September in Blacktown Library's Max Webber Centre. Federal Member for Greenway and Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland, welcomed the forum and urged a Yes vote in the referendum.

Women from diverse local communities put questions on the referendum to the panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women community organisation leaders and legal experts. Kittu Randhawa, who works in Indian community service organisations and is an advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse women in Australia, facilitated the forum.

Proud Darug woman Colleen Mitchell welcomed the panel and audience to her Country and gave a revelatory and moving account of her family's history in the Blacktown area since the first white colonisers' occupation of the Darug people's lands.

Panellists Anita Hanna and Facilitator Kittu Randhawa spoke of their discovery of how Aboriginal people had suffered violence and exclusion from their lands and cultures following British occupation and the establishment of Australia, with the 1901 Constitution intentionally silent on 60,000 years of Aboriginal civilisation.

Panellist and Bidjara/ Iman woman and legal expert, Ruby Langton-Batty gave a special reading of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

WEL thanks forum facilitator Kittu Randhawa and panellists Colleen Mitchell, Professor Gabrielle Appleby, Nalika Padsamena, Ruby Langton-Batty and Anita Hanna for making this event an inspirational occasion.



NSW Election 25 March 2023

WEL developed an extensive NSW Policy Platform to advocate for issues which we considered should be a priority for any incoming state government. These were: Housing Affordability and Homelessness, Early Childhood Education and Care, Consent Education and Respectful Relationships, Women's Health, Domestic and Family Violence Prevention, and Women's Political Representation.

Our platform called for a gendered approach to climate emergency planning and to include women in training for the energy transition.

We also called for the government to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to adopt policies, legislation and programs that have a cultural, holistic and rights-based approach to the empowerment and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Before the election the WEL 2023 NSW Election Scorecard assessed party election policies against our policy platform so that voters could make better informed decisions. We distributed the scorecard and policy platform as media releases and on social media.

Our scorecard analysis concluded that there were strengths and weaknesses in the policies of both major parties and that the two major parties fell short for women. Neither the Coalition nor the ALP spelt out a coherent set of women's policies, or a vision for achieving women's equality during the campaign. On balance we concluded that ALP's focus on wage justice for care workers and on lifting the public sector salary cap could assist more women and especially low paid women workers than any commitments made by the Coalition.

Following the election we were delighted to note that almost half of the new Cabinet ministers were women in key portfolios such as Transport, Industrial Relations, Police and Education.

We wrote to each of the Ministers responsible for policy areas covered by our election platform to highlight our priorities. We particularly congratulated Jodie Harrison, the new Minister for Women. We were able to meet with Minister Harrison to discuss our priorities and ways to ensure oversight across all areas of government that affect women's rights, health, safety, and to enable their equal participation in economic and social life.

Through our newsletter we commented that the 25 March election underscored the Coalition's seeming inability to consider women voters and to select women as candidates. Forty six percent of ALP candidates were women and 48% of elected Labor MPs are women. Thirty three percent of the Coalition's candidates were women, who comprised only 31% of elected Coalition MPs.

We are disappointed but not surprised that the new Opposition leader Mark Speakman has rejected quotas as a way of improving women's representation in the Liberal Party.

We acknowledge the hard work and commitment of Bronnie Taylor, Minister for Women under the Coalition Government. She was unwavering in her support for women, often in the face of a conservative political culture that was hostile to feminist policy.

NSW 2023

State Election Scorecard

WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY NSW

2023 NSW ELECTION SCORECARD

WEL POLICY DEMANDS

Social housing & homelessness funding; support for renters & older women	✗	✗	✓
Women's reproductive health access & pay for health workers	◐	◑	✓
Domestic & family violence funding	◑	◑	✓
Early Education and Care Access and Funding	◑	◐	◐
Mandating respectful relationships & consent education	✗	✗	✗
Women's political representation – setting targets	◐	◑	◑

✗ Minimal Commitment
◑ Significant Commitment

◐ Some Commitment
✓ Full Commitment

WEL Policy Priorities

1 HOUSING CRISIS

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

2 WOMEN'S HEALTH

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

3 DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

4 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

5 RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS & CONSENT EDUCATION

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

6 WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

SPOTLIGHT: WEL POLICY PRIORITIES

Ending Violence against Women

For the NSW State Election, WEL campaigned within the framework of Seven Calls to Action to End Gendered Violence developed by the NSW Women's Alliance. In that context, WEL's major demand was for an increase in new funding for domestic and family violence services and crisis accommodation, specialist staff and multicultural safety training.

WEL recognises that further funding increases are dependent on joint federal and state commitments made under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32, its Outcomes Framework and various national funding agreements.

The First Action Plan, 2023-2027, as part of the National Plan, commits governments to 10 Actions in the four domains of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. WEL has noted that among these are Action 3 targeting workforce capability and Action 10 on improving housing for women and children experiencing violence, both of which are priorities in our 2022 Federal Election platform. WEL will continue to advocate for these priorities at both national and state level through its networks and with domestic violence service providers and peak organisations.


Reproductive Health

WEL has always campaigned for full reproductive rights for women. With the passage of Western Australia's Abortion Law Reform Bill on 20 September 2023 abortion is decriminalised and treated as healthcare under the law in every state and territory.

In principle every person now has the right to access abortion care regardless of where they live or how much money they have. However in practice people in rural and regional Australia, in culturally marginalised communities and on low incomes often have limited or no options for timely and affordable reproductive health care, including abortion and contraception.

In late December 2022 WEL made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' Inquiry into Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare. Our recommendations are discussed in more detail further on page 16 of this report.

On 25 May the Senate inquiry delivered its report 'Ending the postcode Lottery: Addressing barriers to sexual, maternity and reproductive healthcare in Australia'.



The Report recommended 36 reforms to the healthcare system to ensure that women and gender diverse people can access the services they need. It detailed how contraceptive options and advice available to Australian women are often outdated and expensive, the medical and health practitioner workforce has limited training in many basic aspects of reproductive healthcare, with availability of services and expertise geographically determined in many instances and with abortion services confined to fee for service private providers in most states.

The Report recommends that an implementation plan for the National Women's Health Strategy incorporate measures recommended by the Inquiry.

The Federal Government holds the levers for implementing almost all of the Report's recommendations. WEL has called on the Health Minister to work with the states and territories to ensure consistency and free access to publicly provided reproductive health, across all postcodes.

WEL has written to the Assistant Minister for Health urging her to develop and plan for implantation of the recommendations through the National Women's Health Council, which she chairs.

WEL met with Children by Choice CEO, Daile Kelleher and Women's Health NSW CEO Denele Crozier in September to discuss approaches to advocacy in relation to the Senate Inquiry report recommendations. We discussed a range of issues and agreed that we should push hard for the implementation of Recommendation 17 of the Report which advocates for the establishment of a national support, information and referral model for sexual and reproductive health care services.

This would require mapping of services across the nation; pathways for accessing services; the development of clinical guidelines and a national telephone hub such as 1800 MyOptions, leveraging off an existing model. We also agreed that there was a need for a brokerage fund such as Tasmania's Women's Health Fund. It covers the cost of specific sexual and reproductive services and is administered by Women's Health Tasmania. The services are provided to Commonwealth Concession Card holders as well as those experiencing financial difficulty.

The next National Conference is to be held at the Brisbane Convention Centre on 8 - 9 August 2024. This will be an important opportunity for all advocacy organisations to press the Federal Government on implementation of the Senate Inquiry report recommendations.



Housing and Homelessness

2023 saw both cost of living pressures and Australia's housing crisis worsen. The gendered nature of poverty has meant that women are being particularly hard hit. WEL's 2023 work in this area focused on the housing needs of older women, women escaping domestic violence and low income women in general.

WEL collaborated with national and state organisations including Everybody's Home, Homelessness Australia, Shelter NSW, NCOSS, and Homelessness NSW. Our 2023 WEL NSW Election Scorecard and our responses to both the 2023 federal and NSW Budgets highlighted affordable and safe housing for women as a policy priority. While WEL is pleased that both the NSW and federal governments are committed to building additional social housing, we continue to express our concern that the commitment falls very short of what will be required to address women's housing disadvantage.

WEL is a member of the Housing for the Aged Action Group at national level and actively participated in Ageing on the Edge in NSW to advocate for more housing for older women. Ageing on the Edge is a coalition of about 140 members and supporters, including housing, homelessness and community sector organisations, peak advocacy bodies and private sector organisations, working together to address housing and homelessness related issues of older people.

In February 2023 WEL attended the launch of Decades of Housing Decline, commissioned by Ageing on the Edge, which shows the worsening of housing circumstances for people over 55 years. The report analysed the latest census data on older people's housing in NSW, which shows fewer people owning their home outright or in social housing, and a higher proportion renting privately or paying off their mortgage, leaving them at greater risk of homelessness.

WEL is disappointed that the NSW government has not yet implemented recommendations of the report of the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues Homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in New South Wales, including lowering the priority age for social housing and developing a specialist housing and support service for older people that would provide both early intervention and a crisis response, a model which has been successful in some other states.

At federal level, WEL contributed to the Equality Rights Alliance submission on the National Housing and Homelessness Issues Paper, released by the Federal Government in August 2023. The paper and feedback are to assist with developing a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Campaign to Make Telehealth for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Pregnancy Counselling Permanent

WEL joined with Family Planning Australia, expert groups such as the Royal College of General Practitioners and other advocates to campaign for the retention of Medicare Benefits Schedule telehealth items for sexual and reproductive healthcare, including pregnancy support counselling and termination care.

Exemptions allowing Medicare benefits for telehealth, delivering pregnancy counselling and sexual and reproductive health were due to expire on 30 December this year.

People under 30, those living in rural and regional Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are strong users of telehealth for services like abortion, gynaecology and contraception. Medicare rebates for these telehealth services are one of the only ways young people and those from isolated and rural and regional communities can access reproductive health services.



We were pleased to note that a report of a review of Medicare Schedule telehealth items has now recommended that the exemptions for sexual and reproductive health care be made permanent. WEL has made a brief submission to the Review Committee urging adoption of this recommendation.



Consent and Respectful Relationships

WEL's national and NSW policy priorities include the mandating of consent and respectful relationships (CRRE) in the school curriculum. While no political party at the state level has committed to such mandating, action has proceeded at the national level under the Ministerial Council. A national Education Expert Working Group has been established chaired by Patty Kennersly, CEO of Our Watch. It will guide program design and delivery methods.

The Federal Government has allocated \$77.6 million in grant funding to states and territories and non-government school systems to help schools invest in CRRE tailored to their communities with guidance from the Working Group which meets monthly. WEL has continued to monitor its progress including the allocation of grants funding once the process is agreed.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has published a Respect Matters curriculum connection. It emphasises that CRRE requires intentional planning and explicit teaching. We will continue to monitor implementation of state and national approaches to this important cross curriculum initiative supported by WEL.

WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA)

WEL is a member of ERA and has until recently been represented on its governing body. After receiving legal advice, ERA underwent a significant restructure and is now set up as a program of YWCA Australia with the object of working with experts, not for profit organisations and social enterprises to advocate for the human rights of all women and girls and to achieve gender equality. We are represented in the restructured ERA on its Advocacy Policy and Advisory Council which met in September 2023. WEL is also a member of its Economic Security committee.

Through ERA, WEL has participated in the consultations on the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the Strategy for the Care and Support Economy as well as endorsing the submission of Women's Legal Services Australia on the Family Law Amendment Bill.

WEL's membership of ERA provides us with important insights into the government's priorities and we have benefitted from its detailed policy work and submissions in key areas of women's policy.

National Foundation of Australian Women (NFAW)

As in previous years, WEL cooperates with NFAW on its budget and policy work as issues arise. WEL Australia's National Convenor, Jozefa Sobski contributed to NFAW's Gender Lens on the 2023 Federal Budget in the areas of education and training and ending violence against women.

International Women's Day

WEL participated in the Unions NSW International Women's Day 2023 Committee which met from November 2022 leading up to the march. WEL members attended the march in Hyde Park in Sydney's CBD on Saturday 11 March and were amongst the largest delegation.

Older Women's Network (OWN)

WEL continues to support the Older Women's Network in its work and advocacy on behalf of older women on issues such as homelessness, aged care, aged pension, unemployment benefits, violence and poverty. WEL NSW Executive members Lorraine Slade and Menaka Cooke are on the Board of OWN NSW, with Lorraine in the role of Secretary to both the NSW and National Boards.

In the past year OWN NSW has won two grants to support women as they age. These grants are funding two new projects: 'Pathways to Employment' which will support women who have been unemployed to re-enter the workforce, and 'Hear our Voice' which will develop a suite of educational materials for those who work with older women who have experienced sexual assault.

Once again, OWN NSW hosted the Edna Ryan Awards 'Making a Feminist Difference' online to celebrate the trailblazers who agitate and continue to make change for women in their chosen field.

The 2023 National Older Women's Conference around the theme of 'Hear us Roar – Ending the Invisibility of Older Women' featured a range of great speakers and panellists. Menaka Cooke and Lorraine Slade both attended the Conference, along with a number of other women who are members of OWN and WEL.

WEL acknowledges the leadership of Beverly Baker (Chair of NSW OWN and President of NOWN) and the work of Yumi Lee (CEO of OWN NSW) and appreciates the opportunity to work with OWN and share the Newtown premises.

Australian Council of Social Service and NSW Council of Social Service

WEL is a member of NCOSS and through NCOSS of ACOSS. We are appreciative of the broad-based policy and advocacy leadership they provide.

In the last year this has included policy and budget responses to women's poverty and supporting WEL and other feminist and progressive organisations' recommendations for systemic responses, such as raising the rate of Newstart and the successful campaign to raise the age cut-off for the Parenting Payment (single) from 8 to 14 years.

WEL federal and NSW budget responses are always informed by NCOSS and ACOSS. We acknowledge the strategic focus the former NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty brought to her leadership and look forward to working with her replacement.

Family Planning Australia

During the past year WEL has benefitted from our long alliance with Family Planning Australia (formerly Family Planning NSW). Our submission to the Senate Inquiry on Access to Reproductive Health Services was partially informed by Family Planning NSW experience and research as a service provider. Family Planning led the campaign to retain Medicare Coverage for Telehealth Consultations for Sexual, Reproductive and Pregnancy Health Consultations, which WEL has supported.

We pay special tribute to Professor Ann Brassil who recently stepped down as CEO of Family Planning NSW. WEL's hard fought and successful campaign to decriminalise abortion in NSW was underpinned by Ann Brassil's unstinting leadership and support as a key member of the NSW Pro-Choice Alliance.

NSW Aged Care Roundtable

The Aged Care Roundtable of NSW consists of approximately 20 organisations concerned about and interested in aged care. The members are medical groups, nurses' unions, and organisations like WEL, Older Women's Network and regional organisations like Country Women's Association. WEL is represented on the NSW Aged Care Roundtable by NSW Executive member Tabitha Ponnambalam.

The Aged Care Roundtable has more recently been focused on updating the 10 Questions to Ask series. Its main purpose is to assist people and their families to ask the pertinent questions about their aged care services whether in relation to dental care, dementia care, mental health care, palliative care, cultural needs, staffing standards etc. This series is produced in multiple languages including indigenous languages. Considerable time and effort have been spent in updating the questionnaire which was first developed in 2017. The official launch of the 10 Questions to Ask series will be at Parliament House in Canberra on 30 November 2023.

EVENTS

Forum on the Voice Referendum

Our forum in support of the 2023 Voice Referendum which we held jointly on Tuesday 5 September with Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association was a major focus for WEL in 2023. It is discussed in detail under Campaigns on page 7 of this report.

SUBMISSIONS

Submission on Senate Inquiry into Reproductive Health Access

In December 2022 WEL provided a lengthy submission to this Senate Inquiry.

In addition to supporting recommendations made by the Equality Rights Alliance and Family Planning, WEL's submission made eight recommendations covering issues such as:

- cost and accessibility of contraceptives
- cost and accessibility of reproductive healthcare
- sexual and reproductive health literacy
- availability of reproductive health leave for employees

One key issue which we highlighted was that we see no reason why abortion should, despite its decriminalisation in Australia, continue to be deemed subject to special legislation over and above normal medical law and regulation, when men's reproductive health is regulated under medical law as a normal medical procedure.

WEL has urged that the Federal Government undertakes to work with states and territories to map abortion and medical law and regulation with a view to achieving a simplified national approach where abortion is regulated as a medical procedure only.

See the WEL website (www.wel.org.au) for our full submission.

WEL Response to Consultations on a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

In November and December 2022 the Office for Women conducted a series of consultations to inform development of a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality. The Equality Rights Alliance participated in the 2022 discussions on behalf of WEL and our sister advocacy organisations.

On 19 April 2023 WEL provided an additional independent response to a Survey and Discussion Paper, building on the 2022 consultations. We understand that detailed discussions have also taken place with Women's Ministers in states and territories so that the Strategy is embedded at both state and federal levels with appropriate budgetary provision and accountabilities. We are anticipating release of the Strategy before the end of 2023.

Submission on the Paid Parental Leave Amendment (Improvements for Families and Gender Equality) Bill 2022

On 19 October 2023 the Senate referred the provisions of the Paid Parental Leave Amendment (More Support for Working Families) Bill 2023 to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 5 February 2024.

WEL's submission to the Committee expressed support for the 20 weeks paid parental leave provided in the Bill and noted that the Minister has committed to bring forward more legislation to start on July 2024, which will progressively increase the scheme by six weeks until it reaches 26 weeks (or six months) by 2026.

However, we expressed disappointment that the move to 26 weeks is so drawn out and piecemeal and fails to get close to the OECD average of 12 months paid parental leave.

WEL's 2022 Federal Election policy called on parties to commit to 12 months paid parental leave shared between parents and legislated flexible work and leave provisions for parents and caregivers.

WEL also calls on the government to introduce superannuation in association with their paid parental leave legislative commitments through to 2026. This is a vital gender equality measure that supports economic security for women.

NSW Government – First Budget 2023

WEL welcomed the Gender Equality Budget Statement released by the NSW Treasurer in the NSW Government's first post election budget. Our press release noted the Budget initiatives directed at addressing women's inequality, as well as those focused on creating more well paid permanent positions in industries where women predominate.

While we praised the government's intentions, WEL views the measures announced in the Statement as representing only tentative first steps towards achieving a gender responsive and equal budget. See the WEL website for our media release - wel.org.au.

MANAGING WEL

WEL is supported by one part time Membership and Community Engagement Co-ordinator, its only paid position. The work of the Co-ordinator is essential in maintaining an ongoing WEL presence and in providing critical support for our communication and campaigning activities.

Lack of funding hampers WEL's ability to effectively lobby on issues affecting women. We need to expand our staff resources and invest in more professional communication and campaigning approaches. We have undertaken regular fundraising activities throughout the year, principally through appeals for donations in our newsletter WEL Informed and our End of Year appeal. Commitment to support WEL through regular donations is particularly welcome and provides the certainty we need for our ongoing work. We sincerely thank all those who have donated through the year.

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Over the last year, WEL has aimed to engage more strongly with its members and supporters and encourage activism and community political awareness through its regular newsletter WEL Informed and presence on social media platforms.

Since November 2022 we have published seven WEL Informed issues, distributed to WEL members and supporters. WEL Informed includes WEL commentary on federal and state policy and legislative issues, together with updates on WEL initiatives and campaigns. The Newsletter is also distributed to politicians and media networks.

WEL issued a number of press releases through the year, which can be accessed on the WEL website. Issues covered include the 25 March NSW Election, the Federal Budget's Women's Statement and the NSW Budget, the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce report, the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into Access to Reproductive Healthcare and WEL's campaign in support of the Voice.

WEL members and supporters tend to engage with WEL content through higher email open rates than the norm, with some electronic direct mailings (EDMs) seeing an open rate of up to 80%. Generally, the open rate for WEL EDMs ranges from 18% up to 47% (average open rates for all industries sit at 21%).

WEL has been very active on social media during the year in a conscious effort to engage with a broader audience. We are present on all main platforms: Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter). Our current Facebook following is now over 13,000.

WEL's more recent presence on LinkedIn aims to utilise this forum to establish new professional networks and develop current political connections.



TREASURER'S REPORT

WELNSW acknowledges with gratitude the ongoing support of the City of Sydney and the Older Women's Network through the provision of rent-free accommodation at Victoria Street, Newtown.

The overall income for 2022/23 reflects an increase of almost \$12,000 compared with 2021/22, after allowing for the UNSEEN Project income and the reimbursement from WEL Australia (WELA) for federal election expenses included in the previous year.

Membership revenue and general donations for 2022/23 increased by 30% compared with the previous year. The additional income was due in large part to donations received through the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) Preferred Donor Fund which provides donors with access to gift tax deductibility. WELNSW now has a program of regular monthly donations, and we thank all those members and supporters who participate in this program.

Overall expenditure was slightly higher in the current year compared with 2021/22, again after allowing for the UNSEEN Project expenditure included in the previous year.

The overall loss for the year was \$7,600.

The Executive Committee remains committed to a strong online presence for WEL, one of the critical roles undertaken by WEL's Membership and Community Engagement Co-ordinator.

WEL NSW finished the financial year with a cash position of \$4,379. Additional current assets included investments of \$104,418 and the NFAW Preferred Donor Fund of \$19,637.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I would like to thank Jann Skinner for undertaking the role of Honorary Auditor for WELNSW, and I would also like to thank her for her support and advice.

WEL NSW's Annual financial report for the year ended 31 June 2023 has been separately circulated and can be viewed at wel.org.au/financial.

Margaret Mackie (Treasurer)
2 December 2023

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE WEL AUSTRALIA

Jozefa Sobski AM, Convenor
Deborah Poulton, Treasurer
Priscilla Todd, Secretary
Menaka Cooke
Philippa Hall
Dr Mary O'Sullivan
Indira Chatterjee
Kerry Burton

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WEL NSW

Dr Mary O'Sullivan, Convenor
Jane Bullen, Deputy Convenor
Terrie Roberts, Secretary until September 2023, resigned due to illness
Margaret Mackie, Treasurer
Menaka Cooke
Josefa Green
Tabitha Ponnambalam
Lorraine Slade
Jozefa Sobski AM

WEL AMBASSADOR

Wendy McCarthy AO

2023 WEL STAFF

Erina Finau

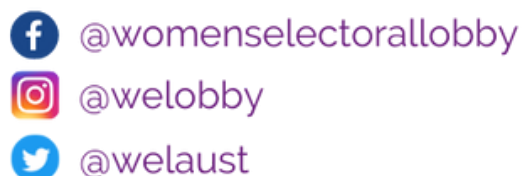
WEL Coordinator - Membership &
Engagement (to September 8)

Amanda Keeling

WEL Coordinator - Membership &
Engagement (from September 8)



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*WEL acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation
and traditional custodians of the lands where we live.
learn, and work*