



QUEENSLAND WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK NEWS

APRIL 2009

'Aims to strengthen links between women by providing access to information and support'

WOMEN & POVERTY

Missing Out On The Essentials

Economic wellbeing has a significant impact on women's health outcomes.

GEORGINA WARRINGTON of *Welfare Rights Centre Inc* looks at the effects of living below the poverty line.

An extraordinary number of people live in poverty in Australia and with the economic downturn, this number looks set to increase. When calculated using the poverty line applied by the OECD [which is set at 50% of the median (i.e. middle) disposable income of all households], an estimated 11.1% of Australians, (2,210,000 people) were living in poverty in 2006.¹ For a single adult, this meant having to survive on \$281 per week. Living below the poverty line translates into not being able to access all the 'essentials of life', such as a decent and secure home, \$500 in emergency savings, access to dental treatment when needed, a separate bedroom for each child over 10 years and a week's holiday away from home.² Life is an on-going juggling act where you continually have to weigh up priorities and



sacrifice 'lesser' needs, such as medical or dental treatment, against 'greater' or more pressing needs, such as paying the rent.

Take a basic health issue like dental treatment. There were at least 500,000 people on waiting lists for public dental care in Australia in 2006.³ The lack of funds to pay for private

treatment, coupled with lengthy waiting lists for public dental treatment has resulted in many people 'fixing' their problem by accessing bulk-billing General Practitioners who prescribe antibiotics and painkillers.⁴ The ultimate loss of teeth leads to further health, social and employment problems, a vicious cycle of

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Missing Out On

deprivation causing health problems and further deprivation. This scenario illustrates how, while poverty, socio-economic status and inequality affect a person's health, health status in turn affects a person's socio-economic status.⁵ The detrimental effect of poverty on health is worsened by the reduced scope of disadvantaged individuals to

make healthy decisions.⁶ The global financial crisis is already causing job losses in Australia and unemployment is expected to continue to rise. Along with this, we can expect to see increasing numbers of people struggling as many people are really only one accident or bout of unemployment away from poverty.

There will be increasing numbers of people who find themselves suddenly without income but do not know what support is available or how to access it. The Welfare Rights Centre has put together the following information to assist the newly unemployed seek income support. Please copy and distribute as needed.

Our Next Newsletter

will examine aspects of:

WOMEN&OBESITY

Does your organisation have expertise in this area?

Or are you a woman with knowledge / experience on this topic?

Share your insights with over 400 organisations, professionals, and other women in Queensland and beyond...

We welcome your articles, news items, or other submissions. If you have an idea, or would like more information please get in touch with us today!

Deadline: 1 June

QWHNEWS



As a Queensland Representative for the Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), I'd like to draw your attention to the **6TH AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE 'The New National Agenda'** to be held in Hobart in 2010, which is now calling for abstracts. The deadline is 1 June (see pages 6 & 7). And look for your free Conference Bookmark which is being distributed with all mailed copies of this edition of QWHN News!

Maree Hawken
Coordinator

I'VE JUST LOST MY JOB, WHAT DO I DO NOW?

There are so many things to think about and to do if you lose your job. Finding an income is likely your main concern. These notes will help you get started.

CONTACT CENTRELINK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE – TIME LIMITS APPLY.

- After receiving your notice of termination, test your eligibility for a Centrelink payment by making a claim. You can do this over the phone and you should do it immediately.
- Time limits will apply. This means that if you do not take action, payments may be forfeited or delayed.
- Australia has a complex and targeted social security system that has undergone significant change since 2006. People should not simply assume they are eligible for one of the many payments. Advice should only be sought from Centrelink or other qualified personnel.
- There are many payment and supplementary benefit types, so make sure you tell Centrelink everything about your circumstances as you may be eligible for a payment or supplementary benefit you were unaware of, such as Rent Assistance.

If you are concerned about privacy, you can ask to use an interview room.

If some of the issues are difficult to discuss, ask to talk to a social worker in private.

You are legally obliged to tell Centrelink all relevant details about your financial affairs.

If you have dependant children but were not previously eligible for Family Tax Benefit (FTB), you may now find that you are eligible.

WAITING PERIODS AND PRECLUSION PERIODS:

Periods of non-payment

Depending on your circumstances, you may have to wait before a Centrelink payment is payable.

Non-payment due to perceived non-compliance

See Employment Separation Certificate below.

HOW MUCH WILL YOU RECEIVE?

The rate at which you can be paid a Centrelink payment can be affected by:

- Any income you receive
- Any assets you possess
- Your partner's / spouse's income

RESIDENCY

- To be eligible for a social security payment, you must be an "Australian resident".
- Residency issues are very complex and qualified advice should be sought.
- New Zealand citizens should check their residency status with Centrelink.



The Essentials (cont)

- Permanent Visa holders may be eligible for Special Benefit where they are not eligible for another social security payment.

ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS TO TAKE TO CENTRELINK

- Employment Separation Certificate (ESC) – see below.
- Original *Proof of Identity* documents.

COMPLIANCE

- Unemployed people need to be looking for work to be eligible for payment.
- Some people may be eligible for exemption from compliance requirements. We encourage you to check this if looking for work is going to be problematic.

IMMEDIATE HELP REQUIRED?

- If you are having difficulty paying utility bills or finding enough money to buy food, you can ask Centrelink for a referral for *Emergency Relief*.
- Some community service organisations can assist people with debt negotiations at no cost. Ask Centrelink for contact details for your local Financial Counsellor.

WHAT I NEED FROM MY PREVIOUS EMPLOYER

- *Employment Separation Certificate* (ESC). This is a form from Centrelink (or a letter from the employer on business letterhead) which contains information about how the employment ended and details of any leave payments paid or owing and /or any compensation payable.
- Voluntary unemployment can delay entitlement to payments for 8 weeks.
If your employer says you became voluntarily unemployed

but you disagree, tell Centrelink you want to *appeal*, (see below).

NOT HAPPY WITH A CENTRELINK DECISION? RIGHTS OF APPEAL

- You have the right to be told in writing about why Centrelink made any decision about your payment and you have the right to appeal any Centrelink decision you believe to be wrong.
- You can download the Factsheet "Appeals - how to appeal against a Centrelink Decision" from here: <http://www.welfarerights.org.au> You can also contact the Welfare Rights Centre on 1800 358 5111 or contact Centrelink on 13 28 50.
- If you are appealing against a Centrelink decision not to grant you a payment, you can get paid while you appeal. Tell Centrelink you want to *request payment pending review*.

For further information, contact: **Centrelink Employment Services on 132 850**
Welfare Rights Centre on 07 3421 2510 or 1800 358 511
www.wrcqld.org.au

PLEASE NOTE: The above contains general information only. It does not constitute legal advice. If you need legal advice about your Social Security entitlement, please contact your local Welfare Rights Centre/Advocate.

The above information was updated in February 2009.

The Welfare Rights Centre Inc is a community legal centre, specialising in Social Security law, administration and policy. It is entirely independent of Centrelink. All assistance is free.

- 1 Australia Fair, 2007, *Update on those missing out, The numbers and stories of those missing out*, ACOSS, Strawberry Hills, Australia.
- 2 ACOSS, 2008, *Who is missing out? Hardship among low income Australians*, Strawberry Hills, Australia.
- 3 Australia Fair, 2007, *A Fair Go for all Australians: International Comparisons*, 2007, 10 Essentials, ACOSS, Strawberry Hills, Australia.
- 4 Schrader, T. (2004) *Poverty and Health in Australia*, *New Doctor*, 80, Autumn.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ibid

AND UNSEEN SCENE



Poverty in Pictures Photographic Prize

With growing concern for those Queenslanders missing out, the Welfare Rights Centre Inc. has decided to raise the profile of poverty by running an annual photographic prize.

Individuals, businesses and large corporations can get involved in three ways:

- Sponsor the prizes so more people are encouraged to get involved.
- Promote the competition, annual event and raise awareness of poverty in Queensland through their networks and publications.
- Take photographs of images in public places of contemporary communities that portray poverty. These are visions that may have been left unseen if it wasn't for the artistic eye.

This year's competition is open until **Anti-Poverty Week** in **October 2009**, and it will take place throughout regional, coastal and urban Queensland.

For further information, contact the **Welfare Rights Centre Qld** on **3421 2510** or check out the website: <http://sceneandunseen.com/>



How Much Pain Can

An extract from a presentation to The Brisbane International

We are born into an organised society that deprives individual citizens of a fair share of benefits and rewards. Sex and Gender proscribe a "less reward for more work". Class and Caste proscribe "less choice about more performance". Locality and Commerce proscribe "less scope for personal expression and more penalties for misbehaviour." If these six forms of oppression fail to achieve your capitulation, then Racism and Ageism will assist.

After a chain of setbacks a woman can no longer afford to participate

"... For women of few assets or resources each fresh situation of failure compounds her pain ..."

as an equal, and she retreats to a marginalised and less contested position — a position constructed for her by others. When things go wrong there are fewer resources to draw from and fewer assets to fall back on, and her grip on her current position is weakened further.

God has pity on kindergarten children.

He has less pity on school children.

And on grown-ups he has no pity at all,

He leaves them alone,

And sometimes they must crawl on all fours...

Yehuda Amichai

For women of few assets or resources each fresh situation of

failure compounds her pain. There is also the pain of failing to provide comfort for the hurt of those in her care, while she herself lives without comfort. When this pain is unresolved it soon turns to stress, anxiety, relationship failure, depression, physical ailments, and loss of confidence or substance abuse. Every reduced level of performance increases the likelihood of further loss of effective participation as an equal in society, and guarantees further marginalisation.

Our Market Place System of accounting, book-keeping and court-enforced debt collection does not recognise the costs she has been forced to pay. This unpaid cost is done in a *double-denial* manner — they deny that you are being economically, physically, socially and emotionally abused, and they deny you any process of redress. You feel trapped, abandoned and of little value to anyone, including yourself.

Confronting your Monsters will cost you even more, at the time when you can least find the strength to continue. Your defiance attracts even more retaliation. But you cannot afford to stay entrapped until you do actually break. Because if you have a *stress* breakdown — what your physical body will do in self defence — you will most likely be treated by friends and employers and professional helpers alike as if you have a *mental* or a *nervous* breakdown and at this point you

absolutely must save your own life.

Back to Book-keeping. The dominant fiscal accounting system refuses to recognise the bulk of exchanges exercised in the *domestic* economy, the *vernacular* economy, the *subsistence* economy and in the *non-monetised* economy. This dominant fiscal accounting system makes its profit *from your pain* and from *your ignorance* and from *your inability* to find and use an acceptable accounting system for your own lived experience.

You can learn to leave this abusive Market Place without losing, when you weigh up the benefits of escaping from the margins of another person's domain. You do not belong in the place that someone else would have you

"... Every reduced level of performance increases the likelihood of further loss of effective participation as an equal in society ..."

occupy, unless you are giving informed consent to be there. But first you have to recognise the reality of your situation.

If you are a woman with reasonable resources and assets, then The Economy buys you at the price they can offer you. If you are a woman with little resources other than your life then The Economy sells you at the price it can get for you. If you do continue to live in reduced circumstances and continue to cope with the pain



A Woman Afford?

Feminist Conference 2008 by LILLIAN GEDDES

of participation at this stage of your life, for reasons that you understand, then so be it. If you know that you cannot keep this up for much longer then I suggest that you remove some of the unfair bits and pieces that lock you into this unjust paradigm of loss. You can move across to a different accounting system.

Now, back to your well-being. When your mental framework is so challenged that it can fall apart, what is now available to you is the

opportunity to pick up the separated pieces that you are left with, and reassemble them. You can glue yourself back into a pattern that is more health-giving and supportive of yourself than the last one was.

So how much pain can a woman afford? There are other ways to live – more beneficial ways. We can function differently – if we are to function at all. And we must function differently if we are to reclaim our birthright. We must

reduce our transactions with the juice-sucking tentacles of the dominant economic paradigm, and keep more of our life's blood for ourselves.

Lillian has been active in the Community Development sector for over 20 years, exploring self-funded options for low-income groups. She established the Community Development Institute of Queensland in 1992 as a not-for-profit business held in trust, and works outside of the grants-dependent c.d. sector. Website: www.cdiq.org.au

RESEARCH

The Effects of Genital Image and Body Image on Sexual Functioning in Women

This study will evaluate the association between genital image, body image and sexual satisfaction in women across the reproductive spectrum.

Coping with psychosexual issues for individuals and their partners can be difficult. Disappointment, isolation and poor quality of life can occur if sexual issues are not understood. Perceptions of one's physical self play a significant role in one's sexual self-esteem. The more discomfort one has about their body the more avoidance one may experience in expressing their sexuality. Genital image is an important component of sexual functioning that is poorly represented in the literature. Indirect evidence for the concept of genital image can be found in the media that document the recent increase in women seeking cosmetic surgery for their genitalia.

This research will investigate further, the intimacy issues for women by evaluating if genital image concerns influence comfort during sexual activity. The research aims to evaluate the type of framework or prevention intervention that is necessary to enhance quality of life for women who have genital image concerns. One way

The study invites participants to complete questionnaires on-line which will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

www.fhs.usyd.edu.au/sexualhealth/genitalimage

of achieving this is helping women become more knowledgeable and comfortable with their genitals.

The study is being conducted by Frances D'Arcy-Tehan and will form the basis for the Doctor of Philosophy (Sexual Health) at The University of Sydney under the supervision of:

Dr Gomathi Sitharthan, Research Co-ordinator, Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney and Dr Matthew Dunn, Associate Supervisor, University of New South Wales.

If you would like to know more about this research please feel free to contact:

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University of Sydney
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fdar7260@usyd.edu.au

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WHAT'S ON...

Important Events, Conferences
and Workshops around the State & beyond

***18-21 MAY 2010 6th NATIONAL AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE — HOBART, TAS.**
The New National Agenda. Call for Abstracts Closes Soon!
The major focus of the Conference will be to continue the work of getting women's health as a priority issue onto the public agenda. It will provide an opportunity for individuals, organisations and services involved and concerned with women's health to contribute to international dialogue, share ideas, knowledge and practice. *Abstracts are invited for oral presentations, workshops, performances and poster presentations.*
For information visit the **Australian Women's Health Network** at <http://www.awhn.org.au>

17-20 MAY 10th NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE — CAIRNS, QLD.
'Rural Health: The Place To Be...' Celebrating the innovation and resilience of country communities. Research reports, case studies, workshops, an exhibition and a special Community Day. Conference Program is available through the National Rural Health Alliance at: <http://10thnrhc.ruralhealth.org.au> or call (02) 6285 4660.

25-26 JUNE QUEENSLAND ALLIANCE 'ALTERING STATES' CONFERENCE 2009 — BRISBANE, QLD.
International and Australian speakers look at how to achieve their 2020 Vision of the mental health system. Visit <http://www.qldalliance.conorg.com.au> or (07) 3832 2600

16-20 Aug 4th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSING RESEARCH — ADELAIDE, SA.
Bringing together the work of researchers, managers, administrators, and practitioners from across community health and nursing. For more information visit <http://www.sapo.org.au>

31 Aug- 1 SEPT QCOSS 50th ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE — BRISBANE, QLD.
Celebrating 50 years of working for a fair Queensland. Visit <http://www.qcoss.org.au>



WOMEN'S HEALTH ON THE NET

Hot Spots on the Internet for Women

OXFAM AUSTRALIA www.oxfam.org.au

Oxfam Australia is an independent, non-profit aid and development organisation that aims to overcome the root causes of poverty and injustice. They achieve this by supporting people's right to: a livelihood; basic services; life and security; be heard; and equity. The comprehensive website includes valuable resources including *From Poverty to Power* (manifesto), Oxfam News magazine, RSS Feeds (media releases), MP3s and

Podcasts (lecture series), and E-newsletters. There are also Policy Papers providing information for activists, students and anyone interested in social justice issues.

WOMEN URGED TO TELL THEIR DES STORIES ONLINE [Http://desnsw.blogspot.com](http://desnsw.blogspot.com)

DES Action Australia — NSW has launched its official blog, developed and written by DES daughter and co-ordinator of the group, Carol Devine. In her true wax lyrical style, this blog site will provide information, resources and

a forum for sharing experiences for DES exposed women and men and their loved ones.

Carol has christened it with her very own literary effort, *Voices of Thousands Ring*, a poignant tale of the experiences of DES affected lives that have crossed paths with her group and been touched by her activism for women's health. Carol is now urging all women to visit <http://desnsw.blogspot.com/> to share their own experiences and connect with others who have been touched by DES in some form.





Australian Women's Health Network

REPORT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK by DR GWEN GRAY

The Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN) is the peak organisation for women's health in Australia. AWHN is a not-for-profit network run primarily by volunteers to maintain and advance a national voice on women's health through advocacy and information sharing. AWHN is an umbrella organisation for State and Territory Women's Health Networks (including QWHN), and other national organisations which embrace its objectives and philosophy.

CONVENOR'S REPORT

2007, 2008 and 2009 have been busy years for AWHN. We set out to get women's health back on the national political agenda and I'm pleased to say, we succeeded. In 2007, we produced a women's health discussion paper, followed by a Summit at Parliament House, Canberra in September. After wide input, the Paper was revised, published and distributed to hundreds of stakeholders and relevant politicians around Australia. It can be found on the AWHN web site.

Our work, which went back to mid-90s, came to fruition when Nicola Roxon announced that, if elected in 2007, Labor would introduce a new National Women's Health Policy (NWHP). 2008 saw AWHN working on three main fronts: to progress the new NWHP, to strengthen our Aboriginal Women's Talking Circle and to plan for the Sixth National Australian Women's Health Conference, to be held in Hobart, 18-21 May 2010. The invitation to submit an abstract is now open. Details are on the website.

To help progress the NWHP, we sought meetings with Nicola Roxon and other relevant Ministers and their staffs and with key policy

people from the Commonwealth Department of Health. We wrote to other politicians, including the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development and the Labor Women's Caucus. We applied for support for our Aboriginal Women's Talking Circle and a meeting of State and Territory reps is being held in Adelaide in April. Agenda items include Aboriginal women's NWHP priorities and participation in the Sixth National Women's Health Conference.

In 2008/09, AWHN contributed to and participated in Commonwealth enquiries and forums, including the 20/20 Summit. Submissions went to the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Paid Maternity and Parental Leave,

the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act and the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children. AWHN continues to advocate for improvements in all these areas.

The new NWHP will be developed during 2009 and released in mid-2010. It aims to ensure "that the planning and delivery of health services better meet the needs of Australian women". Prevention and the social determinants of Australian health inequalities, including gender, will be priorities, along with the needs of ATSI women, women in rural and remote communities, CALD women and economically disadvantaged women. Policy will be developed through a series of consultations, beginning with a Roundtable in March.

The consultations are a great opportunity for us to tell the Commonwealth what we want. I encourage you to participate and to distribute information as widely as possible. The effort could be well worth it: the first NWHP produced a quadrupling of women's health services around Australia! The background paper can be downloaded from www.health.gov.au/womenshealthpolicy

All AWHN's work is voluntary and we rely on membership fees for essentials, such as teleconferences. We ask you to support our work by joining. Membership forms can be found on our web site at:

<http://www.awhn.org.au/>

Gwen Gray
AWHN Convenor

6TH AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE

Call for Abstracts
NOW OPEN
Closes 1 June, 2009.
www.awhn.org.au

FREE BOOKMARKS

are being distributed with
this edition of QWHN News.

To order more, or for further
information please contact your
AWHN Qld Rep. & QWHN Coordinator

Maree on 4789 0665
or qwhn@bigpond.com



'Stepping Out of the Shadows: Reducing Stigma in Multicultural Communities'

This resource is a new training package that has been developed for CALD community workers to educate their communities about mental health to help reduce stigma towards mental illness.

This package contains additional resources including a DVD and bi-lingual mental health fact sheets. The training package aims to:

- reduce stigma
- help individuals, families and communities from CALD backgrounds deal with mental illness and address the stigma associated with it
- increase their knowledge about mental health and decrease stigma

The training kit aims to build a greater awareness of mental illness, dispel myths and misunderstanding, raise acceptance of mental illness as another illness, break down the stigma associated with mental illness, assist families and encourage them to seek the medical help required.

MMHA has already piloted the training kit nationally. Expert Trainers have already been selected from each state and territory under the direction of MMHA. Some of the Expert Trainers have since trained their community leaders, who will be supported by MMHA during this funding round, to roll this stigma reduction training kit into their immediate communities. The Community Trainers are responsible for working at the grassroots level in raising awareness and acceptance of mental illness.

The implementation of the training kit will rely on the commitment and goodwill of many people working in the mental health and multicultural community sectors around the country.

To be involved in the national roll-out of this training, please call **Multicultural Mental Health Australia — 02 9840 3333**.

Information supplied by Multicultural Mental Health Australia. Visit www.mmha.org.au

QWHN CONTACT DETAILS

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HAVE YOUR SAY...



We are interested in obtaining feedback on the quality of the newsletter and issues and topics you would like to see in future editions.

If you have something to say please contact Maree on (07) 4789 0665 or email us at qwhn@bigpond.com

MEMBERSHIP

To join or renew your membership with QWHN, simply fill in this form and send to QWHN at PO Box 1855, THURINGOWA BC, QLD 4817

Membership of the Network is open to women's organisations & individual women who are in agreement with the Network's purpose and objectives.

Name:	NEW MEMBER? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Address:	
Phone:	Fax:
Email/Web:	
Profession / Organisation:	
MEMBERSHIP FEES: Individual (unwaged or student) — \$5.50 Individual (waged) — \$11.00 Organisation — \$33.00	

Please find enclosed a cheque/money order for \$..... for one financial year's membership (1 July 2009–30 June 2010)

Do you consent to your name, as part of the membership list, being distributed for networking purposes? YES NO

I/We hereby agree to abide by the Purpose, Objectives and Policies of the QWHN. (see website)

Signature

Date

TAX INVOICE
ABN 11700374032