



WOMEN'S HEALTH
AND WELLBEING
Barwon South West Inc.

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING BARWON SOUTH WEST INC.

PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESS BEFORE IT OCCURS

A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A QUICK GUIDE

WWW.WOMENSHEALTHBSW.ORG.AU



We respectfully acknowledge the wisdom, living culture and unique role of the Traditional Custodians on whose lands we work.

This resource was developed as part of the Office for Women Mental Health and Wellbeing Coronavirus Response package. To access the full report visit www.womenshealthbsw.org.au



**WOMEN'S HEALTH
AND WELLBEING**
Barwon South West Inc.

Context

Victoria has faced major public health challenges in 2020 with bushfires and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which will continue to have significant impact over the coming years. Such traumatic events can impact our mental wellbeing.¹

Women already experienced common mental health conditions at higher rates than men, and make up over 60% of reported cases of intentional self-harm and attempted suicide in Australia.² Emerging evidence suggests that COVID-19 has and continues to exacerbate the existing structural inequalities for women and girls across every sphere – from health and the economy, to security and social protection – and that this is compounding the existing mental health inequalities between women and men.

Other forms of inequality and discrimination – in particular, racism, ageism and economic inequality – further compound the mental health impacts for women. The frequency and severity of intimate partner violence also increases during and after emergencies,³ with confinement to the home creating additional risks.

Overcoming these issues requires long-term work addressing the social and economic determinants of mental health to create structural change for women. This requires multisectoral partnerships at local, state and national levels.

Councils have a key role to play in supporting their communities to recover from the resulting broad-ranging social and economic impacts, while continuing to respond to the major causes of ill health. As part of these recovery efforts, there are significant opportunities for councils to promote healthier and more sustainable communities.

What are the Social Determinants of Mental Health?

An individual's rights, obligations, access to opportunities, health outcomes and safety are influenced by the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, learn, play, work and age, and the distribution of power, money and resources that shapes these conditions. These are referred to as the "social determinants of health".⁴

Stressful experiences can lead to poor mental health – however, this is not always the case. Social determinants underpin and influence mental health. In addition, the intersection of gender, poverty and ethnicity contributes to the vulnerability of developing mental illness.⁵

Our social, economic and physical environments shape our mental health; therefore, action on the social determinants is required to address systemic inequities between social groups, respond to adversities and, in turn, reduce the risk of mental illness.^{5,6}

What are the Sustainable Development Goals that Impact Mental Health?

There are 5 domains of social determinants that affect mental health.



1. Demographic Domain



The specific demographic characteristics of populations that convey risk for, or protection from, mental illness

Key risk factors include: age, gender and sex, ethnicity and life expectancy.⁵

The Barwon South West (BSW) region has an estimated resident population of 420,822, according to the ABS 2019 report.⁷

Local Government Areas	Female	Male	Total
Colac-Otway	10,709	10,855	21,564
Corangamite	7902	8118	16,020
Glenelg	9845	9829	19,674
Greater Geelong	132,019	126,915	258,934
Moyne	8431	8522	16,953
Queenscliff	1517	1423	2940
Southern Grampians	8213	7887	16,100
Surf Coast Shire	16,718	16,738	33,456
Warrnambool	17,993	17,188	35,181

In our region:

- Persons aged over 45 years are overrepresented in the BSW region compared to the Victorian average (45.9%; 40.2%, respectively), while those aged 25-44 are underrepresented (23.6%; 28.6%, respectively).⁸
- BSW region has a slightly lower life expectancy than state average for both women (84 years; 84.4 years, respectively) and men (79.4 years; 80.3 years, respectively).⁹
- The rate of new-settler arrivals is lower than the state measure; however, the percentage of these who are humanitarian arrivals is second highest of all regions.⁹
- The BSW region has a slightly lower Aboriginal population than the Victorian average (0.79%; 0.81%, respectively); however, the number of those aged under 25 years is higher (54%; 52.3%, respectively). On average, Aboriginal women make up 1.2% of the population, with Greater Geelong having the highest percentage of Aboriginal women at 2.5%, followed by Southern Grampians with 1.7% and Warrnambool with 1.5%.¹⁰

2. Economic Domain



Factors relating to the production, consumption and transfer of wealth that convey risk for, or protection from, mental illness.

Key risk factors include: income security, income inequality, expenditure, food security, household debt, housing and macroeconomic trends (recession).⁴ Poverty has a more significant effect on mental disorders among women, especially during the perinatal period.¹¹

In our region:

- Greater Geelong is the only Local Government Area (LGA) with higher than state average unemployment (6.0% compared to 5.7%); however, the overall region holds high rates of part-time employment for women (region average of 51.6% compared to state average of 47.2% - men's part-time employment rate sits at 21.5% for the region).¹²
- The proportion of BSW women aged over 15 years that earn above the minimum weekly wage is lower than the Victorian average (28.4%; 29.3%, respectively), and BSW men (41.5%).¹²
- The percentage of people who delayed purchasing prescribed medication due to being unable to afford it is the highest in the state.¹²
- Food insecurity for the BSW region ranked third of out nine; however, the percentage of people who meet dietary guidelines for either fruit or vegetable consumption is the lowest in the state.¹²
- About 40% of rental housing is affordable, compared with the Victorian measure of 19.1%; however, the level of rental stress is higher than the state measure. Mortgage stress is second lowest of all regions. Social housing as a percentage of total dwellings is similar to the Victorian measure.¹³
- Two LGAs had higher than state average levels of women living in poverty. Of the total people seeking assistance for homelessness in 2015-16, 65% were female.¹³

3. Neighbourhood Domain



Characteristics of an area or community that convey risk for, or protection from, mental illness, over and above what is attributable to the individual characteristics of community members.

Key risk factors include: structural characteristics of neighbourhoods including infrastructure, safety, aggregate socioeconomic deprivation, built environment, leisure opportunities, urbanicity, crime, community violence and social cohesion.⁵ Neighbourhood level socioeconomic deprivation increases the risk of mental illness, particularly in adolescence and older people, due to increased life stressors (unemployment, violence, crime, under-resourced facilities and access to support services).⁹

In our region:

- The percentage of people who believe other people can be trusted is the highest of all regions, the percentage of people definitely able to get help from neighbours is second highest, and the percentage who are members of a religious group is third highest.¹²
- The BSW region is higher than state averages for percentage of persons that volunteer, feel valued by society, attended local community or sporting events and rated their community as an active community.¹²
- People who rated their community as 'good' or 'very good' for community and support groups was higher than the state average.¹²
- The percentage of people who could definitely access community services and resources is the highest in the state.¹²
- In 2020, Colac-Otway, Geelong, Glenelg, Southern Grampians and Warrnambool all reported a higher rate of family violence incidents than the state measure.¹⁴
- The BSW rate of family violence incidents per 1000 population is above the state measure. In Victoria, female victim reports of intimate partner violence outnumber male victim reports by a ratio of 4 to 1.¹⁷
- The rates of drug and alcohol and mental health clients are higher than the Victorian measures.¹⁴
- In 2020, Colac-Otway, Warrnambool and Greater Geelong reported a higher rate of criminal incidents than the state measure.¹⁴

4. Social and Cultural Domain



Ways in which the organisation of society, social interactions and relationships affect risk of, and protection from, mental illness.

Key risk factors include: education, family and peer relationships, social cohesion, social capital, culture and social class.⁵ Social relationships during the postnatal period are a risk factor for the development of mental disorders, particularly in the presence of intimate partner violence or low emotional and practical support.¹⁵ Social groups are protective for mental health disorders, as it creates opportunities for connection and provides supportive environments.¹⁶

In our region:

- In BSW region, 43.8% of people aged over 15 years had completed Year 12 schooling (or equivalent) as of 2016; this was greater than regional VIC. Only three LGAs had higher than state averages for women.¹⁷
- In 2016, 21.1% of people in BSW had a vocational qualification, which is lower than regional VIC (22%). There were 17.5% of people with a Bachelor or Higher degree, which is greater than regional VIC (14.5%).⁷
- When looking at gender equality in relationships, the percentage of people with low support for gender equality in relationships on average for BSW is 20.2% for women and 40.6% for men, as compared to the state averages of 25.6% for women and 41.5% for men.¹⁷
- Women make up an average of 80.4% of lone parents across the region.¹⁷
- An average of 29.2% of women in the region undertook 15+ hours of unpaid domestic work, compared to 10.6% of men.¹⁷

5. Environmental Events Domain



Serious disruptions to the functioning of a community that exceed its ability to cope by use of its own resources and convey risk for mental illness.

Key risk factors include: natural hazards, industrial disasters, armed conflict, displacement and disasters triggered by ecosystem hazards due to climate change or increased population.⁵

Take Action

Examples of protective actions and programs for mental health and wellbeing that local councils could implement that address the five domains, include:



1) Demographic Domain

- Develop a whole-of-council approach to preventing violence against women that aims to promote gender equality across all local government domains through the implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2020.
- Establish partnerships and accountable leadership to encourage respectful relationships across government and non-government agencies, and strengthen community leadership to drive change.
 - For example: work in partnership with local women's health services to understand and implement strategies that lead to long-term, sustainable change; build a respectful community and establish a 'respectful community advisory group'.

2) Economic Domain

- Apply a gender lens to the implementation of the Pandemic Response Plan, including collection of gender-disaggregated data and consideration of the specific mental health needs of women and girls.
- Focus on improving women's economic security through the delivery of high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare.
- Enable access to safe and secure housing through the application of a gender impact assessment on all property development and land subdivisions.
- Work in partnership with your regional counterparts to develop a long-term housing strategy.

3) Social and Cultural Domain

- Prioritise policies and programs that are designed to promote a sense of belonging and embrace diversity, to prevent violence and build community resilience.
 - For example: achieve rainbow tick accreditation; ensure new and existing council facilities are physically accessible for people with all abilities.
- Develop a policy on cultural diversity that embeds diversity into all council functions and activities.
- Ensure culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities can access and understand local government policies.
- Consult with local Aboriginal communities to provide opportunities for meaningful participation and engagement.
- Implement Respectful Relationships initiative into 4-year-old kinder.



4) Neighbourhood Domain

- Provide a range of local options for community participation and social connection.
- Identify groups at risk of social isolation and facilitate their participation in social activities in a range of recreational and cultural settings.
- Make full use of existing social infrastructure:
 - For example: libraries and neighbourhood houses to create connective networks in community.
- Support and deliver community events that encourage social connection through delivery of services, information, programs and festivals.
- Support community organisations and clubs (including sports, arts, and recreation organisations) to be welcoming and inclusive for all groups.
- Improve residents' access to the natural environment through appropriate planning, provision and maintenance of open spaces for residents to use and enjoy.

5) Environmental Events Domain

- Implement health-promoting and emissions-reducing policies.
- Implement initiatives focussed on greening urban areas, such as maintaining and enhancing tree coverage and vegetation on properties, lining transport corridors and greening public lands, roofs, facades and walls, and ensuring equitable access to quality open space.
- Plan and develop neighbourhoods and implement initiatives that support active lifestyles and emission reduction, including active and community transport.
- Implement policy and programs to encourage sustainable, healthy diets and to reduce food waste:
 - For example: implement a 'Nature Strip Alteration Policy' to enable residents to apply for a permit to alter nature strips for food sharing and urban farming.
- Take opportunities to make buildings more energy efficient and climate resilient to protect the health and wellbeing of their occupants throughout the year.
- Implement plans, policies and measures to support adaptation to the health impacts of climate change:
 - For example: collaborative, regional strategy addressing the planned response to natural disaster.

References

- [1] The Black Dog Institute. Mental Health Ramifications of COVID-19: The Australian context. 2020. Accessed March 1, 2021. https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200319_covid19-evidence-and-recommendations.pdf
- [2] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Suicide and intentional self-harm. 2020. Accessed March 1, 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/suicide-and-intentional-self-harm>
- [3] GENVIC. Gender Disaster and Resilience: Towards a Gender Equal Recovery. Women's Mental Health in the context of COVID-19 Factsheet. 2020. Accessed March 1, 2021. https://www.genvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Women%E2%80%99s-mental-health-in-the-context-of-COVID-19_FA-WMHA.pdf
- [4] United States Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS]. Healthy People 2020. 2010. Accessed January 10, 2021. www.healthypeople.gov
- [5] Lund C, Brooke-Sumner C, Baingana F, et al. Social determinants of mental disorders and the Sustainable Development Goals: a systematic review of reviews. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2018;5(4):357-369.
- [6] World Health Organization. Social determinants of mental health. 2014. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112828/1/9789241506809_eng.pdf
- [7] Australian Bureau of Statistics. Regional population by age and sex. 2019. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population-age-and-sex/latest-release#data-download>
- [8] .id community. Barwon South West Region. Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://profile.id.com.au/g21-region/about?WebID=150>
- [9] Richardson R, Westley T, Gariépy G, et al. Neighborhood socioeconomic conditions and depression: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*. 2015;50(11):1641 - 1656.
- [10] Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016 Census: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples QuickStats. 2016. Accessed November 10, 2020. https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/IQS036
- [11] Gelaye B, Rondon M, Araya R, et al. Epidemiology of maternal depression, risk factors, and child outcomes in low-income and middle-income countries. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2016;3(10):973-82.
- [12] Victorian State Government. Barwon-South Western Region. 2015. Accessed December 3, 2020. <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/Api/downloadmedia/%7BD38E5FAF-64C7-4AEE-A903-07E69E620219%7D>
- [13] Barwon South West Homelessness Network. Barwon South West Homelessness Report. 2020. Accessed December 3, 2020. <https://bswhn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/barwon-south-west-homelessness-report-2020.pdf>
- [14] Crime Statistics Agency. 2020. Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/>
- [15] Howard LM, Oram S, Gallet H, et al. Domestic violence and perinatal mental disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS Med*. 2013;10(5):e1001452.
- [16] Ehsan AM, De Silva MJ. Social capital and common mental disorder: a systematic review. *J epidemiol community health*. 2015;69(10):1021-8.
- [17] Victorian Women's Health Atlas. 2020. Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au/#/>



WOMEN'S HEALTH
AND WELLBEING
Barwon South West Inc.

email. info@womenshealthbsw.org.au

phone. (03) 5500 5490

visit. 1/116 Koroit St Warrnambool

postal. PO Box 785, Warrnambool VIC 3280

LIKE US ON

