



The Women's Mid-life to Later Years Strategy 2019–2023



the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

Acknowledging the Traditional Owners

The Royal Women's Hospital acknowledges and pays respect to the peoples of the Kulin Nations, the traditional owners of the country on which our sites at Parkville and Sandringham stand and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The Women's is committed to improving health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families and we recognise the fundamental significance of cultural traditions, beliefs and connection to country for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the importance of kinship and family structures as a cohesive force that binds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and we recognise their cultures, community connection, and self-determination as critical protective factors for wellbeing.

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Foreword

We are pleased to present The Women's Mid-life to Later Years Strategy 2019-2023, which is a new strategic focus for the Women's.

Women in their mid-life to later years are a highly diverse and growing population who make an invaluable contribution to our community.

We know that health is an important priority for women as they age. Women in their mid-to-later years are an important part of our patient and consumer cohort. These women come to us for specialist healthcare for women's breast and gynaecological cancers and procedures, chronic pelvic pain, incontinence, menopause, and sexual assault support. We also know that many older women experience systemic and individual barriers that impact on their health, and access and utilisation of healthcare services.

In response to this need, this strategy aims to increase the visibility of and enhance the specialist services we provide to women in their mid-to-later years. We will continue our work in partnership with the health system to advocate for increased resources to ensure women receive responsive, dedicated, women-centred healthcare.

This strategy applies an overall vision and reflects an ambitious four-year strategy to provide exceptional patient experiences and specialist clinical care for women in their mid-to-later years. The strategy is framed around six strategic directions that strengthen our commitment to advance women's health, dignity and choice in their healthcare. We are focused on:

- Patient experience and clinical care
- Access and diversity
- Freedom from violence
- End of life care
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Communications and promotion

Our strategy is informed by the insight of approximately 550 women of diverse backgrounds to ensure that they have an active voice in our hospital, our services and in their care. Women's quotes feature throughout the strategy to give voice to the experiences that they graciously shared with us.

Over the next four years we will continue to partner with women, our staff and a range of organisations to deliver on the long-term goal of supporting the healthy and active ageing of women in their mid-to-later years to live well now and into the future.



Dr Sue Matthews
Chief Executive Officer

The Women's Mid-life to Later Years Strategy 2019–2023



Overview

The Women's supports women in their mid-to-later years by providing our patients with exceptional experiences, best practice models of clinical care in our specialist areas, research, innovation and communications, and through collaboration with our health and community sector partners.

The Women's provides specialist healthcare for women's breast and gynaecological cancers, chronic pelvic pain, incontinence, menopause, and sexual assault support for women in their mid-to-later years.

Developing our strategy

A range of communities of interest were consulted in the strategy design and have informed its strategic directions and objectives.

- Almost 550 women aged between 55 and 85 years participated in focus groups and an online survey. This included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, women from refugee and migrant backgrounds, women who identify as lesbian, bisexual and transgender, women from rural and regional Victoria, and women who are carers and volunteers.
- Nine peak bodies and specialist organisations were consulted — the Council of the Ageing, Breast Cancer Network Australia, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Carers Victoria, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Women's Health Victoria, Gender Equity Victoria and Family Planning Victoria.
- Our staff participated in interviews and focus groups to inform the strategy. We also conducted a literature review and analysis of hospital service data trends.

A changing and growing demographic

Women over 55 years are a highly diverse and growing demographic. Women in this age group make a significant contribution to our community via their civic participation, community and business leadership, workforce participation, volunteering and caring responsibilities.

Older Victorian women are highly culturally diverse, with ageing impacting on women differently. The latter is particularly true for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who experience poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians.¹ In Victoria, 41 per cent of those aged over 65 were born overseas, with one in five older Australians speaking a language other than English. Living with disability is also common, with older women experiencing a higher rate of profound or severe disability compared to older men.²

Women over 55 years are also experiencing increasing rates of financial hardship, relationship breakdown, insecure housing, and difficulties in retirement due to limited superannuation. Unpaid care is also a common experience, as women make up 70 per cent of Victoria's primary carers, of which 25 per cent are 55 years and over.³ Many women in their mid-to-later years also experience difficulties with access to affordable transport, digital exclusion, social isolation, loss and grief, and inadequate end of life planning, which impacts on their healthy ageing.⁴

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, *Deaths in Australia*, available at www.aihw.gov.au

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012, *Reflecting on a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census*, Canberra: ABS

3 Victorian State Government, 2018, *Recognising and supporting Victorian carers*, Melbourne: Victorian Government

4 Council of the Ageing (COTA), 2018, *An Agenda for Ageing in Victoria*, Melbourne: COTA

The strategy for women in mid-life to later years

Defining mid-life to later years

We understand that ageing is both a biological and social construct. For the purpose of this strategy, and as informed by our consultation, we define mid-life as 55 to 64 years and later years as 65 and over. This definition aligns with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Commonwealth and State Governments' definition of older people.

What women value in their healthcare

Women in their mid-to-later years value respect, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.⁵ Women spoke of the importance of a hospital system and its staff being compassionate, understanding and listening to their healthcare needs. Women also conveyed that valuing diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's self-determination is essential to women-centred care.

Principles informing this strategy

The strategy is informed by a number of approaches to enhance the specialist healthcare of women in their mid-life to later years. The Women's provides healthcare that is gender and age responsive and is informed by a social model of health. Our model is women-centred to ensure women's diverse voices and experiences are central to our practice. Our approach is intersectional and responds to the compounding disadvantage experienced by many women who access our services with the aim to advance health equity.



5 These values were amended from the guiding values of *The United Nations Principles for Older People*, The United Nations General Assembly, 1999

Strategic directions

In working to enhance the care and services we provide to women in their mid-life to later years, this strategy promotes a focus on six strategic areas:

- Patient experience and clinical care
- Access and diversity
- Freedom from violence
- End of life care
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Communications and promotion

Strategic direction 1: Patient experience and clinical care

The Women's is committed to providing exceptional patient experiences and clinical care to women in their mid-to-later years.

According to the women we consulted for this strategy, the most important priorities and services for women in mid-life to later years are: mental health, incontinence, cancer care, gynaecology, and menopause services. Women view services that are holistic, multi-disciplinary, and include nurse-led models, as preferable and consider them to be the most effective models of care.

In response, we will look at ways to better integrate our specialist models of care and advocate for increased mental health resources to ensure we provide high quality services that are responsive to women's identified needs. To achieve this, we will:

- Develop strategies to enhance patient experience for women in their mid-life to later years.
- Deliver integrated clinical care in incontinence, women's cancers, gynaecology, and menopause for women in their mid-life to later years.
- Advocate for appropriate funding for mental health services to meet the unique needs of women in their mid-to-later years.

Insights from women and our patients

'The mental health services that I accessed through the mindfulness program [at the Women's during my cancer care] was life changing. It allows for a holistic approach to healthcare and recovery.'

'Breast care nurses are so important. Having that one person who is a specialist and knows all about me... and supports me to navigate the system. That support is priceless.'

Spotlight: The Women's Continence and Prolapse Clinic

The Women's Continence and Prolapse Clinic is a state-wide specialist clinic that offers an interdisciplinary approach for women that includes doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. The clinic treats women with a range of conditions, with the majority related to pelvic floor dysfunction, which causes bladder, vaginal and lower abdominal dysfunction and incontinence. Treatments vary from pelvic floor exercises and lifestyle modifications to surgery. The clinic supports women throughout their care experience from diagnosis and the commencement of treatment and beyond.

Spotlight: The Women's Menopause Clinic

At the Women's Menopause Clinic, women see a gynaecologist and clinical nurse who specialise in menopause and the treatment of its symptoms. In consultation with a multidisciplinary team, women are provided with safe and effective menopause care. The clinic supports women with a wide range of cancers, including those where treatment commonly induces menopause. The clinic offers advice on medical therapies to help alleviate menopausal symptoms, information on lifestyle factors and sexual counselling. There is also expert information specific to women's unique health needs relating to mental health, heart and bone health.

Strategic alignment

The Women's commitment to patient experience and clinical care aligns with:

The Women's Patient and Consumer Experience Strategy 2016-2020, which sets our vision for a disciplined, transparent and evidence based approach to creating exceptional experiences with our patients, consumers and people.

The Women's Mental Health Enhancement Strategy 2017-2021, which supports integrated mental healthcare in all areas of our clinical practice. This strategy brings focus to menopause and ageing, women's cancer, gynaecology and chronic pelvic pain, to shape innovation in service design, research, teaching and advocacy.

Strategic direction 2: Access and diversity

The Women's is committed to being a culturally safe, welcoming and inclusive hospital that provides high quality clinical care that is flexible to the diverse needs of women in their mid-to-later years.

Many women in their mid-to-later years experience barriers that impact their health. With one in three older women living below the poverty line⁶, the majority of respondents to our online survey noted that the cost and accessibility of healthcare is a significant concern, as is the need to improve rural and regional women's access to specialist services.

Older women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, refugee and migrant women, and those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex often experience stigma and discrimination, and a lack of high quality healthcare that is appropriate to their needs.

To improve access and address issues of marginalisation and stigma, we will:

- Advocate for publically accessible healthcare and work to minimise associated access costs for women in mid-life to later years.
- Advocate for improved access to women's cancer care and gynaecology services for rural and regional women in their mid-to-later years.
- Ensure the Women's is a culturally safe, welcoming and inclusive hospital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, refugee and migrant women, and lesbian and bisexual women in their mid-to-later years and across the life course.
- Advocate for the development of comprehensive models of care to promote the healthy ageing of transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people.

Insights from women and our patients

'Rural women struggle with the cost and time to obtain specialist care. It involves overnight trips, days off work, accommodation, travel and general expenses. Just to attend an appointment ends up costing hundreds of dollars. I know I have cancelled appointment as I just can't afford it.'

'Cultural values and women's business in Aboriginal culture [are important in Aboriginal women's healthcare].'

'[It's important to ensure] respect and care for lesbian and transgender people.'

'Not speaking English makes life very challenging and it's why interpreters are so important... cultural training is so important.'

6 Help Age International, 2015, *Global Age Watch: Insight report*, United Kingdom: Help Age International

Spotlight: Badjurr-Bulok Wilam

Badjurr-Bulok Wilam is a culturally sensitive service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women of all ages and their families. The service offers support and advocacy services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women regarding their social, emotional and cultural needs. Women are offered practical assistance, and can access assistance in navigating the Women's services, as well as receive information and referrals for other services.



Strategic direction 3: Freedom from violence

The Women's is committed to a future where all women live free from violence and abuse.

Women over 55 years are experiencing increasing rates of family violence, which is a contributor to the rapidly growing number of homeless older women.⁷ There is limited evidence on the prevalence of elder abuse. However, it is estimated that 70 per cent of elder abuse victims are women and that the most common forms of violence are psychological and financial abuse, which is often intergenerational.⁸

Through our consultation, we heard from women, our staff and our partners who said that responding to family violence and elder abuse is critical and must form the basis of our hospital's approach to providing high quality and equitable healthcare for women in their mid-life to later years.

To ensure women live free from violence, we will:

- Enhance a whole-of-hospital and sector response to identifying and responding to elder abuse and other forms of violence against women in their mid-life and later years.



7 Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2018, *Older People at a Glance*, available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au>

8 Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, 2014, *1921–26 cohort: Summary 1996–2013*, Queensland: University of Newcastle and the University of Queensland

Insights from women and our patients

'It's important to respond to abuse from within the family or elsewhere.'

'Society has changed. I think many women stay in relationships through lack of choice.'

'Adult children returning home after divorce and domestic violence.'

Spotlight: The Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence Program

The Women's leads the Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence Program, which is a statewide initiative to enhance the capacity and capability of Victorian hospitals and health services to identify and respond to violence against women. The program works across the life course and includes specialist content, training models and statewide support to respond to violence against women in their mid-to-later years who experience family violence, elder abuse and sexual assault.

Strategic alignment

Our commitment to ensure women live free from violence aligns with *The Women's Prevention of Violence Against Women Strategy 2017-2021*. This strategy provides a framework to unite the Women's existing activities and guide our future work on the prevention of all forms of violence against women.

Strategic direction 4: End of life care

The Women's has a proud legacy of leading clinical care in sensitive and complex areas of women's health.

The majority of stakeholders and over half of women consulted for this strategy stated that advanced care and end of life planning is an important priority for women in their mid-to-later years. This includes supporting women to understand the legislative framework for voluntary assisted dying in Victoria, which is available for those with a terminal illness who are dealing with unbearable suffering.

This is particularly relevant to our work in advanced cancer care, and how we partner across the Parkville precinct to support our patients' right to choice, autonomy, and high quality advanced care planning and end of life care. Central to this, is supporting patients to openly discuss their values and plan for their healthcare, so that women's preferences can be respected and enacted at a time when they may not be able to voice their decisions.

To ensure women have high quality end of life care, we will:

- Promote advanced care planning and access to end of life care that includes safe and compassionate voluntary assisted dying available under Victorian law.

Insights from women and our patients

'Supporting women to feel strong and independent in their decisions.'

'I think end of life planning is a very important issue, as when you have cancer you are forced to think of death and planning this, so if you can just let go of it, it can really assist.'



Strategic direction 5: Partnerships and collaboration

The Women's is committed to working in partnership with a range of services to enable health system integration and to improve continuity of care for our patients.

We are proud to be a member of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, which provides a multi-site, multi-disciplinary specialist cancer service and research centre to improve outcomes for people with cancer.

The staff and organisations we consulted identified working in partnership with hospitals, primary care, welfare and sub-acute services as an important priority to better meet the healthcare needs of women in their mid-to-later years.

By strengthening our partnerships and integrated care pathways, the Women's will improve patient transition between primary care providers and our hospital, ensuring that women can access the range of services they require to optimise their health and recovery, and where possible, access healthcare closer to home.

To enhance our partnerships and collaborations, we will:

- Work with primary care providers to support continuity of care, shared care and specialist community-based healthcare for women in their mid-life to later years.
- Strengthen pre-admission discharge planning and referral pathways with sub-acute care providers.

Insights from women and our patients

'I came to the Women's and was diagnosed with cancer. I was referred to Peter Mac for my radiation. Services seem really integrated...which was really reassuring.'

'My GP referred me to the Women's. He said...it's the best for breast cancer care. I think GPs being aware of the services that the Women's provides is really important. As soon as I arrived, I felt taken care of.'

Spotlight: Comprehensive Women's Cancer Service

The Women's world-class Breast Service is part of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, which brings together specialist teams from the Women's, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Our focus is on the initial assessment and diagnosis, breast and reconstructive surgery, and women's care through the breast cancer journey. The Women's breast service team comprises specialist breast surgeons, plastic surgeons, doctors and breast care nurses, together with medical oncologists and radiation oncologists at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and Royal Melbourne Hospitals. Services include diagnosis and management of breast cancer and pre-cancerous diseases through to surgery, reconstruction and medical and radiation oncology.

Strategic direction 6: Communications and promotion

The Women's is a trusted source of quality, independent health information that supports women to make informed choices about their health.

A common theme raised by women, our staff and partner organisations during consultation was the under-representation of older women in the media and in communications materials, as well as a lack of tailored health information. Many spoke of the need to create gender and cultural norms that promote women's health as a priority and advance older women's healthy ageing. The promotion of the Women's as a hospital that offers specialist services to women in their mid-to-later years was also seen as an important priority.

To advance our communications and promotion for women in their mid-to-later years, we will:

- Build the Women's reputation as a hospital for women of all ages and promote our specialist models of care for women in their mid-to-later years.
- Promote positive and diverse visual representations of women in their mid-to-later years in our communications, promotion and marketing.

Insights from women and our patients

'I don't think the community know that the Women's provides services to older women...I didn't.'

'I think the other message to women needs to be that you matter — always put yourself and your health first... This is about gender norms and ageing, and how we care for others and not ourselves.'

'Online and phone access to reliable advice about women's health really matters.'



Key areas for success, monitoring and resources



An action plan that outlines our strategies, responsibilities, and timelines accompanies this strategy, to ensure that we have the capabilities and accountability to effectively deliver enhanced patient outcomes for women in the mid-to-later years.

The successful delivery of the strategy is measured by our capacity to deliver on the six strategic directions and associated objectives outlined in this document.

Central to this is measuring the impact and outcomes of our efforts for women, patients and consumers. This will be supported by *The Women's Patient and Consumer Experience Strategy 2016–2020* and quantitative and qualitative data sources, as well as data from the Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey that collects, analyses and reports the experiences of women attending our hospital.

Most importantly, this strategy supports the Women's to deliver on our strategic goal of putting our patients and consumers at the heart of everything we do. This strategy applies an overall vision and plan to enhance our efforts, and collaboration with our partners, to deliver responsive, specialist, women's care. This is central to our commitment to advance women's health, dignity and choice in their healthcare and deliver exceptional patient experiences to women of all ages.

The Women's Strategic Plan 2016–2020

Our goal, strategic directions and areas of strategic focus

The Women's is committed to transforming healthcare for women and newborns. The goal of the Women's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 is that our patients and consumers are at the heart of everything we do.

The strategic plan is made up of four strategic directions plus four areas of strategic focus. Together, these capture the breadth of our work across our clinical streams: maternity, neonatal, gynaecology and women's cancer and our associated services at Parkville and Sandringham.



The Women's Declaration

For more than 160 years, the Women's has led the advocacy and advancement of women's health and wellbeing across Victoria and further afield.

Our origins as the first hospital in Australia for women who were pregnant, vulnerable and often destitute and our founders' commitment to evidence based medicine has created a proud legacy of excellence in care for the most disadvantaged in our community.

This culture has endured through more than a century of transformations in health and health care as well as major changes in the social, economic and legal status of women.

Our Declaration, which reflects the principles and philosophies fundamental to our hospital, captures the essence of who we are and what we do.





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