



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# New alliance calls for urgent action on the mental health of women and girls

MELBOURNE – 27 November 2019

A new Women's Mental Health Alliance has been established to advocate for a stronger focus on the mental health of women and girls.

Consumers, clinicians and community organisations have come together to demand more be done to address the specific mental health needs of women and girls. The Alliance includes mental health consumer bodies, women's health organisations, family and sexual violence advocacy and support organisations, human rights bodies, mental health clinicians and researchers.

With the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System under way, there is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for government to show that women's and girls' mental health matters, and commit to funding a dedicated strategy to improve women's mental health. This view has been endorsed by 28 organisations and released today in the form of a joint statement.

There is clear evidence that Australian women experience poorer mental health outcomes than men on a range of measures. However, the high rates of poor mental health among women and girls, and the factors that put women and girls at risk, are not well-recognised.

Professor of Psychiatry at Alfred Health and Monash University, Jayashri Kulkarni, said, "Women experience significantly higher rates of anxiety and depression than men. They are twice as likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as men. Eating disorders are the third most common chronic illness in young women and have the highest mortality rate of all psychiatric illnesses.

"Suicide is the leading cause of death for young women aged 15-24 and, alarmingly, the suicide rate among young women increased by 47% in the decade to 2016. Nearly 1 in 3 girls aged 16-17 have self-harmed. These statistics are unacceptable. Yet they are not well known."

The evidence shows a clear connection between the high rates of family and sexual violence and abuse experienced by women and girls and poor mental health. "It is essential that the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System draws these links and that the critical work being done to address violence against women following the Royal Commission into Family Violence continues to be resourced and prioritised," said CEO of Women's Health Victoria, Dianne Hill.

"We need to invest more in research focused specifically on women's mental health. And we need to invest in upskilling mental health practitioners and mental health services so they understand and can respond to the specific mental health needs of women and girls," continued Professor Kulkarni.

CEO of the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Maggie Toko, highlighted the importance of implementing the recommendations of previous inquiries that showed that women are not safe and do not feel safe within the mental health system. "Women's experiences and concerns should be front and centre when we are thinking about how to improve our mental health system," she said.

The Alliance calls on governments, community organisations, clinicians and women with lived experience to work together to find solutions to these pressing problems.

– ENDS –

[View the Statement from the Women's Mental Health Alliance on the Women's Health Victoria website.](#)



## Media inquiries and interviews

For further information on the Women's Mental Health Alliance or media commentary from any of the members, please contact Kylie Inserra, Communications Coordinator at Women's Health Victoria, in the first instance: [kylie.inserra@whv.org.au](mailto:kylie.inserra@whv.org.au), (03) 9664 9316 or 0409 119 101.

To arrange to speak with a lived experience advocate, please contact Maggie Toko, CEO of the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAAC): [maggie.toko@vmiac.org.au](mailto:maggie.toko@vmiac.org.au) or 0402 724 165.

## About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, statewide women's health promotion, advocacy and support service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV collaborates with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants.

For more information, visit [whv.org.au](http://whv.org.au)