

WOMEN'S HEALTH ACTION

Annual Report 2011/2012





Message from the Chair

Kia ora koutou

Women's Health Action has had another year full of activity and achievements.

We have had many highlights over the year including the continued development of our research capacity partnering with Alcohol Healthwatch (Ministry of Health funded) to investigate the changing patterns, if any of drinking among women over time and the harms that result for women from their own and others harmful alcohol consumption.

A very important part of our work continues to be working with others in the community on a broad range of issues, including chairing the Eating Difficulties Community Coalition and the Metro Auckland Breastfeeding Network, consumer consultation on the Epsom Day Unit Service Review and as a participating organisation with Auckland Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children. The Women's Health Action team completed over 40 submissions and facilitated public health and community sector consultations including the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children and the Crown Health Entities Bill and we accomplished publication in an international peer reviewed journal.

The Big Latch On once again set a new record in New Zealand with 1,564 women breastfeeding simultaneously, they gathered in 133 venues across the country with all

20 DHB's hosting at least one event. This key Women's Health Action event helps to eliminate some of the social barriers around breastfeeding in public and raises awareness of support networks. Women's Health Action is proud to have started the Big Latch on in 2005, which has since been introduced to the United States in 2010 and has since spread to 297 locations mainly across the United States with a few venues in the United Kingdom, Italy and Australia.

We also continue to support workplaces to become breastfeeding friendly and were pleased to be able to recertify Vero Insurance who employs over 600 staff. Work also began with the Southern District Health Board and Te Wananga o Aotearoa – Muruhiku campus to achieve 'Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces' certification. These outstanding companies recognise that returning to work does not have to be a barrier for women to continue to breastfeed.

I wish to acknowledge the passion and hard work done by the Women's Health Action staff, trust board and many volunteers who continue on the legacy of Women's Health Action, making a difference to women's lives.

Nga mihi

Emily Stenhouse-White

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History of Women's Health Action

Founded in 1984 to assist New Zealand women take claims for Dalkon Shield damage to the United States Courts, Women's Health Action (then called Fertility Action) came to national prominence in 1987 with the publication of an article by health activists Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle called 'An unfortunate experiment at National Women's Hospital' in the monthly Auckland magazine *Metro*. The article outlined an unethical study at National Women's Hospital, the country's premier women's hospital. The study, led by Dr Herbert Green, started in 1966, and involved following women with major cervical abnormalities without definitively treating them, and without their knowledge or consent to participate. By 1987 many had developed cervical cancer and some had died.

The revelations led to public outrage, and ultimately to a Ministerial Committee of Inquiry, known as the Cartwright Inquiry, after the presiding judge Dame Silvia Cartwright. While focused on the treatment of cervical cancer, the Inquiry led to scrutiny of a range of issues related to the practice of medicine in New Zealand including research practices, teaching methods, patients' rights, and medical dominance. The resulting report, released in 1988, was a blueprint for patients' rights in New Zealand and recommended the establishment of a Health and Disability Commissioner, a code of health consumer rights, a system of ethical review of research involving human participants, and the establishment of a National Cervical Screening Programme (Committee of Inquiry, 1988).

In the years that followed the 'Cartwright Inquiry', Women's Health Action, along with other women's health groups, were strongly focused on ensuring that the report recommendations were implemented. This included assisting with the establishment of a national cervical screening programme and the office of the Health and Disability Commissioner. We retain a strong commitment to ensuring that the legacy of the Cartwright Inquiry is not forgotten and that Aotearoa New Zealand remains

a world leader in recognising the rights of health consumers. We also retain a commitment to ensuring the motivations and goals of the women's health movement continue to drive the work of our organisation. While many gains for women have been won and secured there remain many challenges.

Today, nearing three decades in operation, Women's Health Action is highly regarded as a leader in the provision of quality, evidence-based, consumer-focused information and advice through a critical gender lens. This helps to ensure women are empowered in their health care encounters. It also helps to ensure that health policy and service delivery meet the needs of diverse women, and has intended and equitable outcomes. We provide:

- Expertise in the development of high-quality health consumer information resources
- Consumer representation and women's health perspectives in a range of consultations, working parties and health service reviews
- Discussion forums, seminars and presentations on women's health, public health and gender issues
- Evidence-based analysis and advice to health providers, NGOs and DHBs, the Ministry of Health, and other public agencies on women's health, public health, gender and consumer issues. We recognise and promote recognition of the differences and inequalities between different women particularly according to indigeneity and ethnicity, disability, sexuality and gender identity, and socio-economic status
- A range of breastfeeding promotion activities which connects us with women, their families, and communities
- Research and publications on women's health issues from a critical gender perspective
- Women's human rights monitoring and reporting



NGO alternative reporting to the United Nation's CEDAW Committee

Women's Health Action has identified the usefulness of human rights instruments for progressing women's health issues and is progressively incorporating them into the work of the organisation. Consistent with this approach, this year has seen Women's Health Action participate in the preparation of alternative reporting by non-governmental organisations to the United Nation's CEDAW Committee (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

CEDAW is an international treaty and rights based framework which was adopted in 1979 as one of the six primary international documents for the protection and promotion of human rights. New Zealand ratified the convention in 1985. Governments of countries that have ratified CEDAW are obliged to submit periodic reports (4 – 5 yearly) to the CEDAW monitoring committee, outlining their progress in meeting their obligations under the convention. In tandem to government reporting, non-governmental organisations prepare alternative or shadow reports to help strengthen the monitoring committee's capacity to draw accountability from the government.

Women's Health Action partnered with Pacific Women's Watch and Shakti to prepare a non-governmental organisation alternative report ahead of the CEDAW monitoring Committee's 52nd session held in July 2012. Women's Health Action's briefing paper on discrimination in regards to women's health, which was widely consulted on, is in the appendix of the Pacific Women's Watch report. Women's Health Action also provided advice on content in the report. We have subsequently assisted with the preparation of an addendum to the report to ensure the information received by the committee was current and sent two representatives from Women's Health Action to New York to present NGO perspectives to the committee in July.

Developing Research Capacity

This year has seen Women's Health Action focus on developing its research capacity and contribute critical gender-based research on women's health issues of concern. We believe that our unique critical gender lens along with our research trained staff and strong networks in the community and health sectors makes us well positioned as knowledge producers in women's health.

We have led, partnered or participated in three research investigations the focus of which are described below:

WOMEN AND ALCOHOL RESEARCH PROJECT

Women's Health Action and our partner Alcohol Healthwatch will soon be releasing new research on women and alcohol in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Ministry of Health funded research project has run over the past year. The aims of the research were to investigate the changing patterns of drinking among women over time and the harms that result for women from their own and others alcohol consumption. We also wanted to know whether the impact of alcohol on women's health is a growing problem and what are the major influences on women's drinking or on the harm to women from others drinking. Current successful initiatives to prevent or reduce harm to women from their own or other people's drinking were also investigated.

Our research team has undertaken an extensive international and national literature review. They have also held focus groups and individual interviews with health sector and community service providers who encounter the issue of alcohol-related harm amongst women. The focus groups included one conducted by Hapai Te Hauora Tapui with Māori service providers and community representatives, and one focusing on Pacific perspectives. The research is intended to inform policy and service delivery aimed at reducing alcohol related harm to women. It demonstrates the on-going importance of gender and intersectional analysis to ensure that efforts to reduce alcohol related harm are gender sensitive and appropriate for diverse women. The final report and a summary briefing paper with recommendations will be launched at a national symposium in November 2012.

PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL RELATED HARM

This year saw the completion of the ALAC (Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council) funded research investigation on alcohol advertising and domestic violence prevention. The research, led by Dr Alison Towns of Mt Albert Psychological Service and assisted by our policy analyst, combined our interests in domestic violence prevention, alcohol related harm, and gender representation in the media. We were specifically interested in the representation of masculinity and relations between men and women in beer advertising and the relationship between these representations and the prevention of domestic violence through social change around traditional gender roles and relations. The study involved a discourse analysis of over 50 beer advertisements of the most popular New Zealand beer brands, and interviews with key stakeholders. Key

stakeholders included academics, policy makers, alcohol and advertising industry representatives, and those working in alcohol harm reduction.

The research report is still awaiting release by ALAC but the first peer reviewed journal article from the research, 'Constructions of masculinity in alcohol advertising: implications for the prevention of domestic violence' was published in *Addiction Theory and Research* in early 2012. Further articles for publication are in development.

GENDER, OBESITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

We are currently undertaking a new research investigation on gender, obesity and reproductive health. The research is exploring the proliferation of medical scientific and popular media interest in the health impacts of larger women's body weight (termed 'maternal obesity') on reproductive health outcomes and the long term health of offspring. Changes to maternity care and public health policy are currently underway with the intention of managing 'maternal obesity' as a high risk state requiring surveillance and intervention to help improve health outcomes for women and their babies.

Recognising that the medicalisation of 'obesity' and women's reproductive bodies more generally is contested, this research is intended to cast a critical lens over the construction of 'maternal obesity' in medical scientific studies and the news media. The intention is to provide a platform for a critical discussion and debate about this contemporary framing of women's body weight in the context of reproduction and the resulting policy and practice changes. The study includes a literature review, media analysis and discussion paper. The research study is funded by Auckland Medical Aid Trust and is due to be completed in June 2012.

Events

ANNUAL CARTWRIGHT ANNIVERSARY SEMINAR 2011 'WOMEN AND WELFARE REFORM'

For our annual Cartwright Seminar this year Women's Health Action partnered with the University of Auckland's Public Policy Group to present a very successful seminar on the impacts of proposed welfare reform on women. The annual Cartwright Seminar is held to recognise the release of the Report of the Cervical Cancer Inquiry 2008 (the Cartwright Report). This year's seminar titled 'Who's counting the costs?' looked at the potential impacts of the Welfare Working Group's (WWG) recommendations for welfare reform on women's health and wellbeing.



A panel of speakers made up of academics and service providers including Pam Apera, Maureen Baker, Sue Bradford, Seugagogo Fololi Lologa-Iosua, and Susan St John presented on a range of perspectives on proposed welfare reform, and provided time for discussion and audience participation. The speakers covered a number of areas including the current state of health for women on welfare, particularly those raising children on the DPB; the potential impact of proposed reforms on women's health; welfare reform and Māori/Pacifica women's health; the impact of proposed reform on women seeking to leave violent relationships; and women's human rights in relation to welfare reform. The seminar was very popular with room capacity reached and an extensive waiting list. The seminar was so successful that we are looking to grow the event in 2012 through a continued partnership with the University of Auckland.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE BREAKFAST

Women's Health Action continued its tradition of hosting an annual Suffrage Breakfast to celebrate New Zealand becoming the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote. This year's breakfast was entitled 'Women's Magazines: Empowering or Enslaving?' and was presented by Frances Walsh, author of *Inside Stories: a History of the New Zealand Housewife 1890 – 1975*.





THE BIG LATCH ON

To assist with and support the Ministry of Health's efforts to increase the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding, one of Women's Health Action's major initiatives each year is the coordination of the Big Latch On. The Big Latch On is an event that involves groups of breastfeeding women coming together at registered locations throughout New Zealand to all latch on (breastfeed) their child at a set time. The event aims to overcome some of the social barriers around breastfeeding in public, improve women's confidence, and encourage support networks for breastfeeding women. The event also enables women to come together to share their knowledge and experience, and raise awareness about the benefits of breastfeeding.



On the 5th of August 2011, 3,479 women and babies throughout Aotearoa took part in the Big Latch On and set a new record of 1,564 women breastfeeding simultaneously. Participants gathered at one of the 133 venues spread throughout the country with each of the 20 District Health Boards hosting at least one event this year.

The 2011 Big Latch On also saw an increase in Māori participation from 14% to 17% and an increase in Pacifica participation from 7% to 10%. There are considerable variations in breastfeeding rates within New Zealand both geographically and for different ethnic groups. Māori and Pacific peoples' breastfeeding rates at six weeks, three months and six months remaining consistently lower than other ethnic groups' breastfeeding rates. Evidence shows that community and peer support, and family links are critical for breastfeeding women, and have a positive influence on breastfeeding rates and duration. Participant and organiser feedback indicates that the Big Latch On is an important tool for increasing community recognition and support for breastfeeding women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

While the Big Latch On event was initiated in New Zealand, it is beginning to spread internationally! An additional 4,000 women took part in the Big Latch On at venues around the globe, including the UK, Australia, the United States, and Italy.

The Big Latch On New Zealand was evaluated by students completing a Bachelor of Health Science at the School of Population Health, University of Auckland. A copy of the

evaluation report is available on request and provides a full description of the evaluation methodology, media analysis, participant and coordinator feedback and findings and conclusions from the 2011 event.



THE PARENT AND CHILD SHOW

Women's Health Action once again took part in the Auckland Parent and Child Show at the ASB Showgrounds. Women's Health Action organised and managed a Breastfeeding Promotion stand which disseminated over 1,000 breastfeeding resource packs and saw thousands of visitors over the three days of the show. Women received some welcome breastfeeding tips as well as counselling about managing breastfeeding from La Leche League members, lactation consultants, and midwives.

Women's Health Action also took the opportunity to speak to and survey pregnant and breastfeeding women about their intended or actual breastfeeding experiences. The results of the survey highlighted demand for education and information on breastfeeding and the need for ongoing support for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Women's Health Action Online



Women's Health Action's website www.womens-health.org.nz continues to provide reliable evidence-based health information for women. With over 40,000 visits during this period, the website

is proving to be a powerful tool for communicating with health consumers, health professionals and health organisations. We also maintain a Facebook profile, which enables us to instantly communicate the latest news and events and to reach people who may not otherwise regularly access our website. You can find us at:

www.facebook.com/womenshealthaction

Women's Health Action also manages our dedicated Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces website, www.bfw.org.nz. Returning to work is consistently reported as a barrier to breastfeeding and Women's Health Action is committed to minimising this barrier and to promoting breastfeeding in the workplace. The BFW website is a comprehensive and free information resource which provides assistance to pregnant and breastfeeding women, and to employers.

Other projects and work streams

Women's Health Action remained active in research, publishing in a peer reviewed journal, producing issues and briefing papers, working with the Ministry of Health to develop and launch 'The story of HPV' DVD, developing new resources on the third stage of labour and bariatric surgery, and presenting papers at various conferences including the Abortion Providers Conference, Public Health Association Conference, and the National Immunisation Conference.

Women's Health Action contributed to policy development processes by completing 40 submissions to the government providing an analysis of the impact on women's health and a critical gender perspective on a range of proposed legislation including the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children, the Auckland Long Term Plan, Information Governance in the Health Sector, Changes to Health and Disability Ethics Committees, and the Medical Council of New Zealand Standards for Medical Practice Consultations.

Women's Health Action facilitated public health and community sector consultations on topics including the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children and the Crown Health Entities Bill, and acted as consumer representative at the Auckland District Health Board Epsom Day Unit Service Review. The organisation participated in national consultations and service reviews including the Health Identity Programme Foetal Identifiers; in media campaigns, including abortion access, welfare reform, and sexist alcohol advertising; and gave oral presentations to select committees including the Crown Health Entities Bill and welfare reform.

Women's Health Action also continued its promotion of breastfeeding. Women's Health Action founded and continues to chair the Auckland Breastfeeding Network (ABN) which focuses on ongoing and emerging issues for breastfeeding and child health, and encourages collaboration among health professionals, consumers and representatives from stakeholder organisations. Women's Health Action assisted in the establishment of an Auckland branch of the Young Parents Breastfeeding Support Group to address low breastfeeding rates among young women. Women's Health Action also promoted the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Certification and supported Vero Insurance's recertification and began working with Southern District Health Board to assist Te Wananga o Aotearoa–Muruhiku campus and the Southland Hospital to achieve Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces certification. Women's Health Action delivered breastfeeding promotional exhibitions in partnerships with local breastfeeding networks including at the Parent and Child Show and the Glen Innes festival, and engaged in a national campaign to promote the Big Latch On.

Women's Health Action has also been active in ensuring that the activities of the infant formula industry, in particular the marketing of infant formula products, are in line with the Code of the Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and do not undermine the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding. We have produced a 'Code Watchers' pamphlet to assist health consumers and health professionals to identify code violations and disseminated over 800 of these pamphlets.

Additionally, Women's Health Action staff held the chair on the Eating Difficulties Community Coalition, gave lectures on a range of women's health and gender topics to universities in Auckland and Wellington, and Women's Health Action is a participating organisation on the Auckland Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children.

As well as our research and health promotion activities Women's Health Action also continued to provide advocacy services and assisted consumers with code of compliance complaints.



Women's Health Action would like to acknowledge our Supporters and partners

A special thanks to the Ministry of Health.

- Abortion Law Reform Association
- Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA)
- ALAC
- Alcohol Health Watch
- Asian Women's Health Trust
- Auckland District Health Board
- Auckland Medical Aid Trust
- Auckland Sexual Abuse Help
- Auckland Women's Centre
- Australian Women's Health Network
- Birthcare Auckland
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)
- Counties Manukau DHB
- Eating Disorders Association of New Zealand
- Eden
- Family Planning New Zealand
- Family Violence Clearing House
- Federation of Women's Health Councils
- Hapai Te Hauora Tapui
- Human Rights Commission
- Infant Feeding Association of New Zealand
- La Leche League
- Māori Women's Welfare League
- Maternity Services Consumer Council (MSCC)
- Medical Council of New Zealand
- Mental Health Foundation
- Midwifery Council New Zealand
- National Women's Refuge
- New Zealand Breastfeeding Authority
- New Zealand College of Midwives
- Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei Health
- Northern District Support Agency
- Pacific Women's Watch (NZ)
- Privacy Commission
- Public Health Association
- Rainbow Youth
- Rape Prevention Education
- Shine
- Supportline Women's Refuge
- Te Oranga–Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa
- Te Puawaitanga Ki Otautahi Trust
- Thrive Teen Parent Support Trust
- Turuki Health Care
- Waitemata District Health Board (WDHB)
- Well Women and Family Trust
- Wellington Women's Health Collective
- Whakawhetu National SUDI Prevention for Māori