



Cassy O'Connor
Member for Denison
Tasmanian Greens

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Glynis Flower
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Dear Glynis

Thank you for your letter seeking the Tasmanian Greens views on issues of concern to Hobart Women's Health Centre.

Our response to the specific points raised are below. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to clarify any of the matters discussed.

▪ **A gendered approach to Women's Health policy (the Australian Government is developing gender based policies at present)**

The Greens give in-principle support for the development of incorporating a gendered approach in the development of Women's Health policy. The recognition of the specific health issues, requirements and needs of women will assist in ensuring the development of appropriate and effective educative, health and medical strategies (just as it should also do for Men's health).

A gendered approach to Women's Health policy should also reflect cultural diversity and help ensure that women of other cultures and faiths needs are reflected in health service delivery.

▪ **Continued investment in Women's health including a significant increase in funds for HWHC in its role in health promotion and prevention in Tasmania**

The Greens support the development and maintenance of a statewide network of women's health, long term support and crisis services. We recognise that the skills, knowledge, and community networking that are developed throughout such networks benefits the community in general. For example it can help minimise the demands being placed on GP clinics or other medical service providers when women are seeking educative materials on health, or support networks rather than actual medical attention. We have also advocated in public and the Parliament in the past,

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our Alternative Budgets, and during this campaign for an increased spend on preventative health/health promotion out of the state health budget – which we also believe needs to be administered more transparently.

- **The continuing societal, environmental, economic and structural barriers to women's participation in employment, housing, education and training and health and well being**

Tackling these continuing barriers is fundamental to our goal of achieving an inclusive and just society. Additional support is needed in key areas including, but not limited to:

- The development of gendered health policies as discussed above – and in line with national moves towards gendered health policy,
 - Supporting a network of NGO organisations such as the Hobart Women's Health Centre, the Working Women's Centre etc, to ensure that women have access to advice on industrial issues, advocacy, education and training. We recognise that greater assistance is needed to ensure these services are available and accessible to women living outside the main metropolitan areas of Hobart and Launceston
 - The provision of language and interpretative services for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure they can access social, legal, educational and cultural information
 - Affirmative programs to encourage women to achieve senior level positions within the public service, plus equal representation on public boards and committees
 - Ensure equal pay and sponsored childcare access. Poor access to affordable and convenient childcare makes life difficult for many workers. The Greens will promote subsidised childcare services in or near public sector buildings, and explore creative payment options such as salary sacrifice, with resultant tax benefits.
 - Support equal maternity and paternity leave
 - Equal access to retirement income and superannuation
 - Secure safe and affordable housing
 - Accessible public transport options – please find attached our public transport policy initiatives.
- **The ageing population trends, the fact that women live longer and suffer more chronic conditions, social isolation and often with fewer resources**

Tasmania's demographic change, and the growing awareness of our ageing population requires a comprehensive and strategic focus. We need to tap into the life-skills of our older generations and work with them in developing self-empowering

programs regarding identifying the services and assistance they require to remain active and interactive in our community.

Key areas which can ensure that social inclusion goals are met include public transport, employment and training opportunities and community involvement.

- One mechanism by which we can counter social isolation that older women may experience, is the provision of flexible and reliable public transport options. The Greens have proposed a 'MiniMetro FlexiCab scheme for the Eastern Shore, for example, where a fleet of minibuses will be available to collect people from Rosny interchange and take them to their door, or collect them from home and take them to the shopping centre to attend medical appointments, hair appointments, shopping etc, and then be taken home again. (This initiative can be found at: <http://mps.tas.greens.org.au/publications/#Policy>)
- We need to develop programs to employ older women on a casual and/or part-time basis for those who either wish to or need to remain in the workforce at some level. As our population ages we need to develop programs and pathways to retain older workers skills and knowledge; we need to develop strategies to combat ageism in the workforce, and to instead to see older and semi-retired women as a great resource in either a part-time and or volunteer capacity. Please also find attached a copy of our Elder Abuse Strategy.
- We also need to see a greater emphasis on training and mentoring programs to continue building the public sector's ability to provide the services needed by all in the community, especially our older citizens.

▪ **The dilemma of competing demands of the investment in health promotion and prevention and the immediate needs of primary health service delivery**

It is widely recognised that health budgets, whether at the local, state or federal levels are like black holes – not matter how much money is thrown at them, it is never enough! We need to break the stalemate of preventative health programs and acute and primary health service delivery being 'played off' against each other.

Appropriate government leadership would be to seek to demonstrate that investing in preventative health programs and strategies is also an investment in medical service delivery savings. It is estimated that by spending \$1 on preventative measures, we can save approximately \$8 dollars at the other end of medical care.

In this context, the Greens are committed to developing regional and community based preventative health centres to improve wellbeing and take the pressure off our clinical care system.

Our places of employment, education and training have a significant role to play in forging a cultural shift towards preventative health.

For example, the Greens are committed to developing flexible transport options for people commuting to and from work. Co-operative arrangements will need to be developed with both the public and private sectors to enhance the work environment and encouraging alternative commuting options, such as installing bike racks, lockers and shower facilities at safe locations in or near the workplace.

Through creative retrofitting and redevelopment of our workplaces we can improve workers' health, therefore increasing wellbeing, saving on health system costs and increasing productivity.

Ensuring that our drinking water and waterways are free of chemical contamination is an immediate and positive step towards making our community healthier.

- **The lack of separate facilities for women in mental health facilities and gynaecology units**

This is an unacceptable and untenable situation. A sense of self and self esteem is fundamental to everyone in our society but it is even more important to foster in those who are vulnerable such as those suffering from a mental illness. We recognise that interacting with other patients can be a vital part of treatment, however there must be the flexibility to ensure women receiving treatment in mental health facilities can access safe and separate facilities as and when needed.

Similarly privacy when accessing gynaecology services would seem a basic necessity!

We would work with service providers and stakeholders to secure appropriate separate facilities.

- **The continued high incident of violence, including sexual violence against women and the lack of services available for protection, shelter and support given the long term debilitating effects of these crimes and the huge, social and economic costs to society**

Everyone should be free to live their lives secure from violence and sexual violence. We would have the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute review the efficacy of laws that have an impact on women in the areas of violence against women and the subsequent treatment of both the victim and the perpetrator. Educative and publicity campaigns should be developed to promote a cultural shift about how violence is viewed, and how those who commit violence are viewed by the rest of our society. Work is still required to achieve full recognition that violence against women is a crime.

However, it is not all about violence that occurs within Tasmania. There are many migrant women who seek refuge here on our island who are survivors of trauma or

violence in other countries. We also need to ensure that migrant women who have been the victims of trauma or torture are adequately and sensitively supported, and have recourse to the necessary support, counselling, interpretative and medical facilities.

- **Lack of emergency accommodation for all women who are homeless.**

This has been a long standing crisis in Tasmania, especially in the more remote areas. Many of the service providers do a valiant job but unfortunately there are just insufficient places to meet the demand. The Greens are committed to working with all stakeholders to turn this situation around. We will work to secure women's access to safe, secure accommodation through the provision of adequate emergency housing. A holistic comprehensive housing policy that integrates the provision of emergency shelter needs to be developed across agencies.

- **Lack of coordinated approach to respectful relationships and sex education in schools**

The Tasmanian Greens agree that this is an unacceptable situation. We have campaigned hard to try to get the Education Minister and Premier to address this woeful, and socially irresponsible, situation. There is no standardised curriculum emphasis on sex and relationships education during primary and secondary schooling. It is left up to school communities to decide, and it's clear from educators that some are making the choice not to include this learning for fear of upsetting some parents.

Principals have also revealed that the cost of providing adequate sex and relationships education is a burden on their individual school budgets, and that schools who do provide this education '*do so at their own risk*'.

This means that the Education Department is failing to properly educate young Tasmanians about sexual and relationship matters, and is leaving our children vulnerable to unwanted sex, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and lifelong self esteem issues.

This is a serious public health issue and the Greens have a constructive proposal for a standardised sex and relationship education curriculum.

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- **The lack of eating disorders information and services in Tasmania**

This is a serious omission from both a preventative and medical health point of view. Educative programs on healthy eating, healthy food and healthy attitudes is both an immediate and long-term investment in the welfare of many young people, and in minimising demands on counselling and health services in the future. While there

has been belated recognition that eating disorders need to be treated as a serious disease, there has been considerable lag in the corresponding educative, early identification, and support programs.

A healthy society must help people help themselves, and the adequate provision of information and services should encourage just that outcome.

- **Body image issues in the media and the trends of some schools and government to concentrate on weight and obesity instead of a healthy lifestyle**

This is of serious concern for both the immediate and long-term health of our society. The Greens have launched our Apple-A-Day: Healthy Food for Healthy Students policy commitment in which we have committed \$8.5 million over three years to establish a statewide program to ensure that all Tasmanian children have regular access to safe, nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable food in schools. This program will also promote the value and importance of diet and healthy eating. We will also extend the government's current funding by \$500, 000 to enable the Tasmanian Food Security Council to continue into a third year.

(This initiative can be found at: <http://mps.tas.greens.org.au/publications/#Policy>)

We do need to encourage a culture that focuses on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles, rather than just talk about the symptoms of an unhealthy lifestyle, such as weight.

- **Lack of coordinated educational and other support for women in prison and the lack of post release services for women**

The Greens firmly believe that the correctional services system must have a rehabilitative focus and prepare people in custody to make a successful return back into society. A key area where the Greens have a proud track record is the ongoing support of mother is gaol to keep their young children with them, as well as maintain regular contact with older children who do not live in the prison with them. Research has shown that unfortunately women from the lower socioeconomic areas are over-represented in the female prison population, and for many this time has a great impact on their life-skill and parenting skills development. We need to ensure that this impact is as positive as possible and recognise that by adequately resourcing lifeskill and parenting programs is an investment in strong and healthy social skills and relationships. This is a matter of meeting social inclusion principals.

The Greens strongly support the retention and enhancement of educational, counselling and skill training programs being provided throughout the correctional system, and would support dedicated programs being developed to meet women's needs. We also recognise there are very limited post release accommodation

options for women and pledge to work cooperatively – whatever the makeup of the Parliament post March 20 – to address this deficiency.

We will support a inter-departmental taskforce involving the Departments' of Justice, Health, Education and Women Tasmania to develop a delivery strategy to address, life-skills, health and education programs for women in the correctional system.

We also believe that as part of preparing people to once again be an active contributor to their society, that prisoners should retain their right to vote.

- **Lack of GPs especially female GP s and bulk billing services throughout Tasmania**

The Greens are committed to improving the provision of health services throughout regional and rural Tasmania. We would invest in the delivery of targeted incentive packages to attract and keep GPs in rural areas. For example, the Greens' Royalties for Regions policy advocates a greater proportion of mining royalties being reinvested back into their local communities and one of the recognised purposes is to develop professional attraction and retention packages (which would also assist in keeping teachers in rural areas).

Each regional and GP clinic should have more than one permanent GP, to ensure sustainable workload and continual professional development and quality of life is maintained, and we would develop a support strategy to attract and retain female GPs in rural and regional areas, as part of any GP team established in a clinic by clinic basis.

Bulk-billing is supported by the Greens and we have long-standing policy commitments to extend and enhance access to this valuable equitable service at both State and Federal levels.

- **The particular health needs of women in rural Tasmania**

Accessing appropriate health and medical services in Tasmania's regional and rural areas can be difficult for many women and their families. We are seeing fewer and fewer GPs in country town, with those remaining having to take on patients from an expanding catchment area.

We support the provision of better access to women's services, especially respite care, education programs, and legal and financial advice. We will also work to develop a rural childcare strategy that ensures equitable childcare. Facilitating access to educational programs, including farm management and business training, can also help address social isolation concerns, provide intellectual stimulation opportunities, and also help train against injury.

We recognise that additional assistance is required for rural communities to tackle family violence. This is still a big issue in rural communities, and members require access to transport and support services in order to deal with incidents and long-term problems.

Addressing potential isolation in regional and rural areas also helps minimise mental health issues including depression.

The Greens have released our Royalties for Regions policy initiative in which we have proposed a proportion of mining royalties to be returned to local communities to be invested in securing better GP, health and education services, as well as others. (This initiative can be found at: (<http://mps.tas.greens.org.au/publications/#Policy>))

We have also released policies to deliver better palliative care services to the north and north west, as well as boosting North West Cancer Services. Both these policies can also be found at (<http://mps.tas.greens.org.au/publications/#Policy>).

Yours sincerely,

Cassy O'Connor
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Greens spokesperson for Women