GENDER COVID-19 IMPACT ANALYSIS REPORT
APRIL 2021

—

A COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

CITY OF GREATER
GEELONG

Artwork by Dr Jenny Murray-Jones

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This research was contracted by the City of Greater Geelong to provide a gender equity perspective on the impact of COVID and to inform the development of response and recovery strategies by exploring the impact of the pandemic on women[1] in the Greater Geelong area. The work was undertaken by consultants Meg Montague and Kerry Stubbings with the support of the Gender Equity officer and a Pandemic Impact Working Group and carried out between December 2020 and March 2021.

A rich mix of quantitative and qualitative data were collected via a review of relevant local, Victorian, national and international literature, one to one and group discussions with women in Greater Geelong, and an on-line survey responded to by over 350 women (Table 1).

Efforts were made to ensure that the research was informed by perspectives from women of a wide range of ages, situations, backgrounds and circumstances. However, it should be noted that those who participated in the consultations and the survey do not represent a statistically randomised or stratified sample of women living in Greater Geelong. As such, the results of this research are to be considered as indicative rather than statistically definitive of women's experiences and views.

A companion to this report is the Gender COVID-19 Impact Analysis Research Report | Implementation Action Plan 2021 – 22

RESULTS:

Section 3 of this report contains a detailed description of the impacts identified by the research, described within nine key areas; employment, education, finances, housing, physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing; violence, abuse and harassment at home, and in work, study and community settings; home and family life, and community engagement and connection. The interviews, focus groups and the survey explored these nine areas in some depth and the qualitative results are described in Table 2 with illustrative quotes drawn from the written and verbal responses of women.

This rich source of qualitative material indicates that both positive and negative impacts were experienced in all areas, often presenting a view from different sides of the same coin.

Table 3 in this section, gives some quantitative data drawn from the survey responses. These data illustrate the complexity of assessing the extent of impact on women: in some cases women checked both the negative and the positive impact boxes as they experienced both; all of the nine areas were reported as having positive, negative and no impact; some areas stand out as attracting more negative than positive comments; some drew more positive than negative comments; and some areas were reported by the majority as having had no impact.

Thank you to all the women* who contribute to this research. Your contributions were open, frank and generous.

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[1] As per the COGG definition that Women* refers to cis and trans women and gender non-binary people.
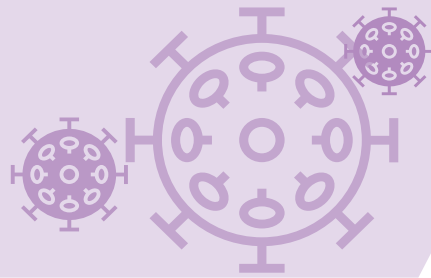
Briefly the results are summarised below.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing is clearly an area of significant negative impact for women, with three quarters or **76.3% of women reporting a negative impact** in this area. However, it should be noted that at the same time, just under a quarter **(22.8%) experienced a positive impact** on their mental health and emotional wellbeing and **one tenth (11.2%) reported no impact**.

Responses about the **impact of the pandemic on women's community engagement and connection**, whilst more positive than negative, were spread across the spectrum from **positive (30.4%) to negative (63.8%)**, to **no impact (21.0%)**.

An almost **equal proportion of women** report experiencing a **positive (49.3%) and negative (52.9%) impact** in relation to their home and family life.

In terms of **women's financial situation**, a similar proportion of women reported **positive (32.9%), negative (43.6%)** and **no impact (31.6%)** on their finances.

Responses re the **impact on women's physical health** present a mixed picture with **68.4%** reporting a positive impact; **31.6%** a negative impact and **12.4%** no impact.

Employment also stands out as an area of significant impact, both positive and negative, for the majority of women. Comments made by survey respondents (and supported by interview and focus group responses) illustrate that women overwhelmingly endorsed the benefits (albeit mentioning many of the drawbacks) of working remotely and from home. Many women report that this has made it easier for them to manage the multiple roles they play at home, as parents and in the workforce at the same time as challenging them as they juggle these multiple roles.

The three areas of education, housing and experience of violence and abuse appear to be areas of relatively low impact with between **70%** and **84%** of respondents reporting "no impact for me" in these areas. It should however, be remembered that this may say more about who completed the survey rather than being a global picture of women's experience.

Secondly, the next section of the report summarises the major themes that emerged from the research and their implications for Council (see Table 4). These include the following:

IT'S NOT OVER YET:

The emergency and the highly restricted phases of the pandemic appear to be over, however, this does not mean the end of impact for women - in a number of instances impact will become more evident in the time ahead. Council needs to remain mindful of this.

THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT OF EXISTING VULNERABILITIES AND MARGINALISATION:

It is evident that there is a compounding or intersectional effect that has magnified and will prolong the impact experienced by vulnerable and already disadvantaged groups over the last year.

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR WOMEN:

Women in Greater Geelong identified a number of positive impacts as did others' research elsewhere. Many of these positive impacts could be embedded or enhanced into the future. In particular it is worth noting the positive impacts described as a result of being able to work flexibly from home.

THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON WOMEN:

Whilst there have been some positive emotional wellbeing implications for women of the pandemic year, many women described their feelings of anxiety, depression, worry, stress, overload, tension, right through to complete mental health breakdown. In some cases this was a magnification of existing mental health issues, in others it was a new experience. The multiple roles women have at work and at home were described as being even more challenging as a result of the pandemic and on occasions this tipped women over from stress and tension into to more serious mental health issues.

THE EXACERBATION OF EXISTING STRUCTURAL AND PERSONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN:

The pandemic exacerbated a number of pre-existing structural and personal difficulties that women face. These include gender stereotypes and gendered roles and expectations at home and at work, lack of affordable housing, family violence, mental illness, and isolation due to age, disability, limited English language skills, limited digital literacy or access to communication infrastructure, limited mobility or transport. For many women these factors have always had a negative impact but the pandemic brought them into focus or magnified them and highlighted the need to respond to them.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID:

Women have also faced new challenges that were thrown up by the COVID pandemic and by the measures used to tackle the emergency such working and schooling from home, new practices at work especially in the health and care sectors, adapting businesses to new restrictions, maintaining family connection during lockdown and managing more pressurised and crowded home situations.

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS:

The pandemic has highlighted both the benefits and the challenges for women of flexible work arrangements, and without recognition of the benefits for parents and carers (not just for women) and action to encourage both men and women to adopt flexible work, a continuation of remote working arrangements could result in more pressure on women to manage multiple work, parenting, caring and domestic roles.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:

The pandemic highlighted the digital divide between those who have the skills, the infrastructure and the confidence to make use of the many (some new) means of communication and connection on line, and those who don't.

CHANGES IN SERVICE CO-ORDINATION, COLLABORATION AND FOCUS:

Agency co-ordination and collaboration and service provision were also impacted by the pandemic; some "pivoted" and improved, some declined, all were changed.

NEW WAYS OF COMMUNITY CONNECTION AND SUPPORT:

The pandemic has stimulated people to find and use creative and proactive ways to connect and support each other within local areas and through community networks.

CONCLUSIONS:

This research highlights some key ways in which Council could underpin its post-pandemic recovery plans so as to address the impact that the women of Greater Geelong have experienced over the last year. The women of Greater Geelong have told us again and again to

Listen to us; hear what we need and act on our experiences and our advice; work with the agencies that know us and support us; give us good advice, information, services and support so we can raise our families, be healthy, and get assistance when we need it; help us to share our heavy loads and our many roles at work, at home and in the community.

Council is encouraged to respond to their voices as reported in this document and to:

- **Listen and integrate women's** views and experiences into research, policy, planning and services, especially the voices of women who are most vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged

- **Adopt a gender lens** in all that it does; this will not only inform and enable compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020, but will also support Council to recognise the range of positive and negative impacts of the last year, and the ways in which women are disadvantaged, ignored or unsupported and hindered from full participation in, and contribution to, their community

- **Partner, collaborate with and support** agencies that have specific and specialised knowledge of women's experiences and needs, and support new ways for women to access opportunities, networks and services through outreach and digital platforms

- **Provide and fund** services, business development, local infrastructure and natural environments that are designed with women's input and that will meet women's needs

- **Educate and promote** new thinking and behaviours about women's roles at home and at work that emphasize a sharing of domestic, caring, parenting and income earning roles

- **Reconsider** Council's own policy, practices and research and plan new policies and practices that take all of the above into account, especially in relation to Council's employment policies and practices

- **Advocate** for local, state and federal recovery thinking and action that takes the above into account.

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR COUNCIL ACTION:

Table 5 details the recommendations for Council consideration and action within a matrix that cross references the key roles of local government with the four environments for health and wellbeing. We trust this will assist future planning so as to integrate gender equality framed action into core Council business. This is reproduced in full below.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Advocate: raise awareness of the issues and needs of local residents and businesses, initiate or support campaigns for positive change

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Advocate to state and federal governments regarding the critical impact mental health has on women and the need for gender sensitive prevention and intervention. **Advocate** to local businesses and employers around the adoption of gender equity and family friendly employment practices.	**Advocate** to state and federal governments and to developers about the need for social housing especially to cater for women fleeing family violence. **Advocate** to state government on the improved public transport provision in the region including wheelchair accessible taxis.	**Advocate** to federal government to maintain JobKeeper, increase JobSeeker and extend age limits in JobMaker. **Advocate** to regional and state government bodies about the importance of economic stimulus and support initiatives incorporating and responding to women's workforce patterns, and the importance of gender equity and family friendly employment practices.	**Advocate** to state government around the importance of safe, accessible and beautiful urban and peri-urban natural open spaces.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Partner and co-ordinate: develop relationships and alliances and work with others to achieve common goals

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental

Implement active community engagement strategies to harness women's experience and needs.

Liaise with, regularly consult with and build relationships with organisations which focus on women's' experience and needs especially in relation to young women, First Nation women, women with a disability, women experiencing family violence and housing stress and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Provide: a range of services and support, preventative interventions, infrastructure and facilities to individuals and groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Provide outdoor and on-line activities (and promote them to women) that include interaction, recreation and exercise in a safe environment at prices all women can afford, including: gym exercises, dancing, music, workshops, yoga, etc. **Provide and enhance** outreach library services which are of particular value for isolated, transport challenged and homebound women. **Provide support services** for small community organisations to assist them to operate sustainably e.g. managing compliance issues. **Address** the digital divide and • Plan digital service hubs within local areas, using existing facilities such as libraries, Council service hubs etc • Listen and respond to the specific needs of those most digitally disadvantaged • Support training for, translations and use of information apps such as Telegram app and the agencies that promote and use them as multilingual means of information dissemination • Use and deliver platforms for public interest webinars • Provide IT platforms and practical training to assist community organisations to use these methods for their activities and to ensure cyber safety.	**Provide** community transport to fill gaps in public transport system. **Develop** footpaths, pavements, roadways, paths etc that are safe, accessible, and suitable for women with wheels (assisted mobility vehicles, wheelchairs, prams, pushers, children on bikes and scooters and women on bikes). **Provide** more outdoor infrastructure for activities in local areas such as community gardens, adult exercise facilities, all ages playgrounds, picnic and shelter areas.	**Provide** support to local businesses and social enterprises through Council's economic development programs with a focus on the specific needs and aspirations of women.	**Provide** and enhance beautiful accessible urban and peri-urban open spaces that encourage use by women for recreation, exercise, social and community connection eg, support "friends of" areas, community garden groups, street based networks and home and nature strip based gardening etc.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Fund: provide grants funding or subsidies to local groups and agencies to progress and develop services and infrastructure for individuals and groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Fund appropriate organisations to undertake pro-active outreach activities that enhance community connection, link vulnerable isolated people with support and increase a focus on prevention. **Fund** community organisations to deliver engaging initiatives led by women which build social connections and the enhance health and wellbeing of women.	**Fund** modifications to existing buildings and infrastructure in ways that will encourage women to use them by addressing their security and safety concerns eg lighting, safe entrances, no hidden scary dark areas etc.	**Ensure** the majority of business recovery funds go to initiatives in areas where women work: retail, hospitality, caring and women owned small business.	**Fund** initiatives and groups that aim to promote and care for local parks and gardens, reserves, foreshores, and community gardens etc ensuing this is done in ways that support the inclusion and benefit of women.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL			
Inform, promote and educate: share information, raise awareness and develop knowledge and skills to empower individuals and groups			
RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Educate and inform the community about the benefits for all, especially for children, of shared roles for both parents across work and home settings. This includes work hours, flexible work arrangements, domestic, parenting and care tasks, involvement in education and schools etc. **Promote** the equal division of domestic, caring and paid work through Council's employment policies and practices. **Educate** Council's own workforce and the broader community on the importance of respectful relationships in all contexts and between all people. Support initiatives designed to raise awareness and change behaviour around family and sexual violence.	**Educate and inform** planners and developers about the importance of applying a gender lens to the design and construction of the built environment.	**Inform and support** employers and businesses to adopt family friendly and gender equity employment practices and workplace policies such as parental leave and flexible, hours, locations and emphasise the benefits for all of these approaches for women. **Inform and support** businesses and employers to be aware of the impact of family violence on women employees (and thus on the workplace and the business generally) and to develop supportive employment practices in response.	**Promote, inform and educate** the community about the benefits of using natural public open space for recreation, mental health community connection, every day as well as in times of pandemic and social distancing. **Promote** the mental and physical benefits of home gardening.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Research and plan: collect, analyse and disseminate quantitative and qualitative data to inform evidence-based planning, priority setting, decision making and evaluation for services and infrastructure which responds to current and future needs and requirements

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental

Routinely **seek out** women's voices when undertaking research and planning activities and make sure that appropriate and sensitive ways of hearing these voices are used, especially in relation to the voices of women from marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Undertake gender equity focussed research, data collection and analysis and apply to planning, policy and discussions for example; on the on impact on women of urban growth, moves from metro Melbourne on rural/farming communities.

Explore Council's capacity to provide and stimulate the provision of emergency and long term social housing with particular emphasis on the unmet need of women leaving family violence relationships, First Nation and CALD women.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Regulate: provide governance and regulatory controls such as local laws and health and building controls

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Utilise Council's role in public health to enhance the health of women through immunisation programs, strategies for infection control, and messaging about the safe use of public facilities and spaces.	**Increase** requirement for developers to provide a proportion of public/social housing **Consider** planning policy relating to the interface between rural/farming and growing residential development – impacts on women/families.		**Consider** planning policy relating to the provision, design and maintenance of open space that caters to women's need for beautiful, safe, accessible and useable parks, gardens, reserves and open and natural spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of the community research project that explores the impact of the pandemic on women*[2] in the Greater Geelong area. The work was commissioned by the City of Greater Geelong in late 2020 to provide a gender equity perspective on the impact of COVID and to inform the response and recovery process. As the brief states the Project was designed to advise the City of Greater Geelong (COGG) on the provision of

"**meaningful supports and programs that will enable a balancing of the scales to support women* and gender non-binary people beyond the pandemic through informed recovery approaches.[3] This will be advised by gathering locally sourced information from local women* and gender non-binary people about how they have been impacted and what they think will help them through recovery to re-establish and enable equitable and fair access to work, income security, pay parity, equal distribution of unpaid domestic duties, social status, leadership and decision making in order to achieve gender equality.**"

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[2]   As per the COGG definition that Women* refers to cis and trans women and gender non-binary people. Please note that beyond this introductory section, for simplicity sake, this document uses the word women without the asterisk except in section, table and major headings.

[3]   Consultant Brief Community Research: Pandemic Impacts on Women * in Greater Geelong. COGG. October 2020.

2. METHODOLOGY

In November 2020, Meg Montague and Kerry Stubbings were selected as consultants to carry out this work. Day-to-day support was provided to the consultants by the Gender Equity Officer. In addition, a Project Working Group was established to advise and support the research project and many members of this group provided invaluable advice and support to the consultants. The Working Group met with the consultants on three occasions; at the research design stage, at mid-point progress report stage and finally, at the draft final report stage. Members of the Working Group are listed in Appendix 1.

The methodology for conducting the research was designed as per the Project brief and with the advice of the Pandemic Impact Project Working Group. The work was conducted between December 2020 and March 2021. Due to the continuing pandemic restrictions and the third lockdown period in Victoria in February 2021, meetings and interviews were conducted remotely. However, it was possible to conduct one face-to-face focus group in late March.

Efforts were made to ensure that this research is informed by perspectives from women of a wide range of ages, situations, backgrounds and circumstances. However, it should be noted that those who participated in the consultations and the survey do not represent a statistically randomised or stratified sample of women living in Greater Geelong. As such, the results of this research are reported in general rather than statistical terms as indicative of women's experiences and views.

Below summarises the methods that were used.

METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

"....to include current findings concerning the gendered impacts of COVID-19 from international, national and state sources. The review could include examples of gender based COVID-19 recovery initiatives and mitigation strategies that will strengthen capacity to attain gender equality. "

There has been a good deal of research and commentary on pandemic impact. This largely focuses on the negative impact, a small amount on positive impact. Most comment is on impact generally, some on women specifically, a very small amount on the impact in relation to trans women and gender non-binary people. Research that covers recovery strategies is beginning to emerge, but, as yet there is limited material that evaluates recovery strategies.

A detailed bibliography is contained in Appendix 2, and insights and findings from the documents listed are integrated throughout the report.

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4   Quotes from the City of Greater Geelong Consultant Brief Community research: Pandemic Impacts on Women* in Greater Geelong: October 2020.
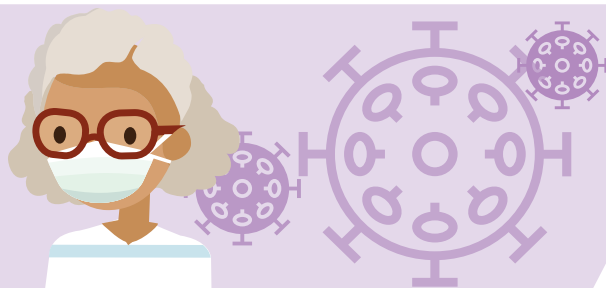
8 interviews

were held with women living in Greater Geelong who were able to speak from a wide spectrum of perspectives

6 interviews

were held with staff members and volunteers working for Council and local agencies with specific roles in relation to the women of Greater Geelong. All (except one) were themselves women living and working in Geelong

2.2 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

"…to document individual narratives, experiences, concerns and hopes for recovery and community life."

1. Woman living with a disability, also a member of a Council Advisory Committee
2. Older woman living alone in public housing with high care needs and daily support services
3. Woman caring for older family member with high care needs and daily support services
4. Woman participant in the Rainbow Alliance
5. Local township resident, older woman and member of a Council Advisory Committee
6. Young woman – university student, active volunteer with Headspace, low income family situation and experience of mental health issues.

This group were not specifically mentioned in the Project brief, however, they have been a vital source of information on the situation of their women clients as well as being able to comment from their own personal experiences (except one who was a man). In addition to their insights on impact on clients, they also provided valuable commentary on the impact of the pandemic on their agency's workers, most of whom are women, and on their agency as a whole and the strategies that were devised to cope with impact and to support women in the community. They also assisted in recruiting women for individual interview and in promoting the on-line survey.

1. Agency staff working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women
2. Council staff involved in the delivery of home care services to older and disabled residents
3. Agency staff working with homelessness agencies across the Barwon South West area
4. Agency staff working with women experiencing sexual assault and family violence
5. Agency staff working on the front line on phone support for local families in isolation and quarantine
6. A First Nation woman with a key role in an indigenous organisation.

2.3 FOCUS GROUPS

"…to discuss impacts of COVID-19 and key focus areas for recovery that will enable the City to ensure gender equitable recovery efforts."

1. Women living with a disability convened with the assistance of Women with Disabilities Victoria
2. Bilingual support workers –wellbeing navigators providing telephone support to women from CALD backgrounds and refugee and asylum seeker circumstances. Convened with the assistance of Diversitat.

2.4 ON-LINE SURVEY

" to capture local data about agreed universal measures as well as unique gendered impacts of COVID-19 and participants' stories that will help identify key focus areas for recovery efforts that will promote and enable gender equality".

The timing of the project over the holiday period made planning and execution of the survey challenging. The survey was widely promoted through Council, agency and community networks and was open for 4 weeks from late-February to late-March.

The invitation to participate on Facebook was clicked
441 times

and seen by
7,992 women
in Greater Geelong.

370
responded to the on-line survey,

and an extensive range of qualitative and qualitative data was collected. However, not all respondents completed all the questions.

THE PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS IS AS FOLLOWS:

AGE

Under 18 years	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-49 years
1.0%	2.0%	12.9%	44.3%
or 2 individuals	or 4 individuals	or 26 individuals	or 89 individuals

50-59 years	60-69 years	70-84 years	85 years+
22.4%	10.9%	5.5%	1.0%
or 45 individuals	or 22 individuals	or 11 individuals	or 2 individuals

LIVE

alone	with flat / housemates	with parent(s) / guardian(s)
15.3%	2.5%	1.5%
or 31 individuals	or 5 individuals	or 3 individuals

Couple with children	Single parent	Couple only
38.9%	12.3%	22.2%
or 79 individuals	or 25 individuals	or 45 individuals

IDENTIFY AS

Not ATSI
95.1%
or 195 individuals

Aboriginal origin
2.0%
or 4 individuals

Woman
96.6%
or 198 individuals

Trans woman
1.0%
or 2 individuals

Gender non-binary
1.0%
or 2 individuals

LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

English
97.5%
or 194 individuals

Mandarin
0.5%
or 1 individual

Other
2.0%
or 4 individuals

LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

Yes
12.7%
or 26 individuals

No
83.4%
or 171 individuals

CARING ROLE WITH AN ADULT

Yes
10.3%
or 21 individuals

No
85.8%
or 175 individuals

Responses have been integrated into Sections 3 and 4 of this report. The full results are not included here to protect the anonymity of respondents, however, they are available in a separate document for in-house Council consideration.

An analysis was also made of the responses of the 125 women who completed a survey on the pandemic that Council conducted in mid-2020. This document is similarly an internal Council document.

3. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON WOMEN*

Nine main areas of impact emerged from the literature review and the local consultations: employment; education; financial and economic circumstances; housing; physical health; mental health and emotional wellbeing; violence and abuse at home, at work or school and in community; home and family life and community engagement and connection.

The interviews, focus groups and the survey explored these nine areas in some depth and the results are described below in Table 2 with illustrative quotes drawn from the written and verbal responses of women.

This rich source of material indicates that both positive and negative impacts were experienced in all areas, often representing different sides of the same coin. As noted above in section 2, it must be remembered that this research does not claim to be statistically representative of women living in Greater Geelong; however, it does provide insight into the experiences of many.

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN* OF THE PANDEMIC

3.1 EMPLOYMENT

Survey responses:	No impact	Some positive impact	Some negative impact
N=279	16.7%	39.9%	65.8%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased work and study flexibility via home based setting and more productive use of time to work or study due to fewer distractions, interruptions or alternative activities, higher productivity and better work-life balance.

I have appreciated that as a fulltime working mother of young children having a work life balance is so important. Before COVID-19 I felt so guilty not being able to do the 'mum' things like walking my kids to school. Now with work being flexible I'm able to balance both and my mental health is so much better. I'm just sad that it had to take COVID-19 for employers to accept that working from home and having flexibility is not a bad thing and is necessary for modern day especially for working mothers. The traditional working in the office is so out dated and before COVID when I couldn't get into the office due to train issues my employer told me I had to take the day as annual leave even though I could have worked from home.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Loss of or decrease in employment due to over representation of women in casual, insecure work, and lack of eligibility for JobSeeker or JobKeeper.

The realisation that my work role was so dispensable, programs just stopped. It also showed me that being a casual is a very precarious position and that I am a woman on my own, I am self-reliant, I must depend on myself to meet all my needs and thwat can be very difficult and anxiety provoking.

Being unable to perform emergency teaching during remote learning and not receiving JobKeeper or any benefits.

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increase in business due to the switch to on-line sales.

Decreased time, expense and stress of commuting to work or study and more time to contemplate work life balance, opportunity to choose new ways of working or new approaches to work-life balance eg retirement.

Acquisition of new on-line skills, confidence and infrastructure to support home based learning and work.

Working from home facilitated better management of chronic pain or illness, reduced expectations of sociability, feeling safe at home; soothing presence of pets: all these had a positive impact on physical and mental health.

Positive financial impact of working from home without travelling, spending on petrol, parking, public transport, coffees, lunches, work wardrobe, etc.

In front line jobs there was a greater sense of cohesiveness and attentiveness to welfare by colleagues during the stressful times.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Some jobs and some training was just not possible and could not be done or completed because it has to be hands-on.

Increased work and study costs due to home based employment and education eg need to purchase home based work items, such as office equipment and internet access and to skill up in technology, increased heating and lighting bills.

Lack of separation of work, home and study made life difficult to navigate and space limitations at home exacerbated this.

> Significant impact as a sole mother, trying to work from home, manage remote learning, losing my small supplementing income and increased living expenses was very difficult. As a mother, I became mother, teacher, principal, friend, psychologist, coach, motivator, worker, cleaner, cook, everything!! It was very difficult to balance all demands with zero support.

Increased anxiety and pressure at work (front-line anxiety, new systems and processes, managing PPE, longer time to do things, concern about infection of self, clients and family at home). Especially an issue for women due to their major role in the front line in the health, child, disability and aged care workforce.

Loss of face-to-face debrief, mutual support time especially hard for women in personal care roles where they generally work alone; zoom not a good substitute for a "good chin wag" coupled with challenges of managing what for many is new or unfamiliar technology, new anxieties and challenges among clients, and greater isolation generally.

3.2 EDUCATION

Survey responses:
N=235

No impact
70.7%

Some positive impact
13.3%

Some negative impact
20.4%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Able to focus more on study and undertake variety of short, on-line education courses as working from home meant more time, more energy, and more money to pay for courses.

> From working from home I've been less tired, therefore I have been able to consider and take up education. I have also had money to be able to pay for this from saving on petrol and other costs associated with going to work in an office building. It's brilliant.

Due to COVID, unemployment and free vocational courses on line some were able to study and find work in new areas.

> Due to my unemployment I was seeking something I could do from home. I'm now half way through Certificate IV in Disability and that has been entirely free f or me. I now have a job in the industry and feel as though I probably wouldn't have made it here if the course wasn't offered for free.

> I attended TAFE and our classes went to zoom. It was great to still have classes and less stress to travel into TAFE and find parking.

New skills and confidence in self -navigating online resources and using new software/applications to communicate and participate in learning.

More contact with children's school and teachers and appreciation of school support.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Challenges in undertaking secondary and tertiary study on line; infrastructure challenges as well as the lack of face-to-face interaction and support; this was especially tough for those for whom 2020 was a transition year –eg into high school, or into university or a new course.

Lack of digital skills, infrastructure and internet connection required for work and education; hindered progress in study or caused drop out or deferral from uni courses.

Challenges in managing children's education and own study/work at home or at work.

Mental stress of working, studying, presenting, on line, managing the technology, and generally multi-tasking and multi-caring.

> The frustration at how hard women had to work to manage work (either leaving the home for work or working from home) while managing remote learning. The kids needed so much attention and support (emotional support, tech support, encouragement, reassurance plus general help with their learning).

3.3 FINANCES

Survey responses:
N=235

No impact
70.7%

Some positive impact
13.3%

Some negative impact
20.4%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Decreased spending and improved financial circumstances due to free child care, consistent and higher rates of JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments, COVID student allowance, and money saved due to decreased expenses and spending on commuting, holiday travel, shopping, sports, entertainment, etc.

> I'm in a far better financial situation. I have not had to go to staff lunches, or chip in for presents etc. These things impact on a woman like me with a single income/household. COVID has seen me be able to do some of the things my married friends with two incomes do. I feel more equal. It's great. I never want to go back to the way it was.

> I had time to rethink my life plan and reassess my financial dependence on an employer. I decided to create my own income and live frugally and sustainably. Therefore I creatively and sustainably pursued major renovations and, subsequently created resort style accommodation at my home by the beach, a business that has been financially thriving since opening in December 2020 and giving me autonomy and freedom.

More work available in front line positions so earned more.

> Financially as a single woman I feel I'm catching up and feeling more 'equal' to my male or married counterparts. This makes me feel more part of the community. I can participate more.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Financial struggle due to reduced income from employment and lack of access to JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments due to casual, part-time insecure work roles.

Increased food insecurity due to lower income and difficulties in accessing emergency food agencies and supplies. The Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into COVID:

> "The Australian government announced that it was working with the Red Cross as part of a food security initiative. Wathaurong contacted Red Cross to assist in the coordination of food packages for 600 local Aboriginal community members that we had identified as in need. We were told by management that this couldn't happen and that each individual person had to go online and fill in the registration form. There was no consideration by the Australian government or Red Cross that Aboriginal people don't have access to the internet or computers or if they had phone credit and data to fulfil this request, which is why we contacted Red Cross in the first instance. This demonstrates when governments and NGOs such as Red Cross fail to partner appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people miss out on such essential services."

Increased spending on on-line shopping, gambling etc, also on home bills such as heating, lighting, digital software and internet connection, office set up, etc and on mental health treatment costs.

Drawing down on super during COVID may create even greater inequality and poverty later on in women's retirement.

The banks' mortgage moratorium was good but creates future problems.

With secure jobs in personal care, women become principal breadwinner whose income acquired much greater importance in family budget and put more strain on women as both income earner and domestic manager.

3.4 HOUSING

Survey responses:
N=232

No impact
75.4%

Some positive impact
10.3%

Some negative impact
17.9%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Greater housing security; moratorium on evictions, lower rental payments, and a variety of homelessness initiatives.

> My home has become a place I love and a home. Not just somewhere I go to sleep or where I go when I'm not working. I feel more comfortable in myself because of this. I have also had more money to do a few improvements and hire local people. Usually as a single person I would not have had the income for improvement.

State Government Homelessness Emergency Response Program (HEART) good in short term (though not perfect) meant a safe place to live for some, and promised increased in funds flowing into the sector for affordable housing in long term and support services in short term.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased housing stress due to reduced income, inability to meet or defer mortgage or rent payments.

Challenges faced by those in the midst of renovations, moves, re-financing etc and accommodating family members who had to move in due to their own housing stress.

HEART and rent moratorium not always 100% effective especially towards the end of the year; pressure on and shift in focus for service providers from prevention activities to support services.

Lack of emergency or short term housing for those needing it, especially critical for women leaving a violent relationship.

3.5 PHYSICAL HEALTH

Survey responses:	No impact	Some positive impact	Some negative impact
N=253	12.4%	31.6%	68.4%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

More healthy eating and home cooking, decreased fast and convenience meals, fewer opportunities to go out and buy junk or impulse food.

Reduced access to alcohol and other drugs leading to reduced intake.

More time and motivation to take-up and increase in regular exercise eg via walking, cycling, gardening, on line physical activity such as zumba, dance, Pilates, yoga, meditation, etc.

Discovery of new places locally to walk and cycle and greater feeling of safety on the street and in open spaces due to larger numbers of fellow walkers, cyclists and less motor traffic.

Increased JobSeeker payments meant less reliance on food support services.

Less sickness due to isolation, social distancing and focus on infection control.

> I have not had one sick day since March 2020.

> For the first time in possibly a decade when running annual blood works my health was best it had been in a decade or more.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Decline in physical health and weight gain due to closure of gyms, pools, dance and yoga classes, bowling clubs and fitness programs and especially critical for those living with chronic pain or disability who need continual work to maintain muscle tone, balance and pain management.

> I have put on weight due to stress/comfort eating. Pilates classes were cancelled due to COVID which meant my back and neck issues became much worse.

> Not going to my regular sessions at the pool meant I lost muscle tone; I have got less flexible and less strong and this is bad for me, I fell out of my wheelchair a couple of times and ended up in hospital.

Decline in physical health due to increased eating, drinking, smoking and weight gain.

Increased alcohol and other drug consumption Difficult for many to access alternative exercise options outside or on-line due to pandemic and /or physical restrictions, or lack of digital literacy /capacity.

Reduced capacity to access therapies, health services and essential supports; especially for those living with a disability, LGBTIQ, with a chronic illness, or undergoing gender based therapies and surgeries.

> Many of my disability supports which help me with my mobility etc were suspended. It impacted my health and wellbeing negatively.

> I was diagnosed with breast cancer just before the pandemic hit. I was unable to have anyone with me during treatments, surgery etc, which was hard.

Access to food and household supplies: People saw supermarket shelves being stripped and were very anxious about access to food and other supplies such as nappies for children. This was cited a big issue within the Aboriginal community.

3.6 MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Survey responses:
N=247

No impact
11.2%

Some positive impact
22.8%

Some negative impact
76.3%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Quieter less stressed life, more time to relax, to contemplate rather than rush, adopt a slower pace, adopt a back to basics approach, live in the moment, to 'recalibrate' and reflect on what is important and what is not, and review life directions and accomplishments, even relationships.

More time to pursue or participate in creative activities, eg music, art, reading, dance and time to learn new skills, knitting, crocheting, tapestry, dog grooming and training.

Telehealth consultations could feel safer as they are more anonymous when not face to face and there is less stress in making efforts to attend services.

> I think a positive that has come out of it was that I was able to access support via telehealth. Due to the nature of my mental health I would have struggled to attend appointments in person but being able to do so via telehealth was perfect. Also I had suffered on and off with mild mental health concerns f or years prior but never took the time to seek help for them. I can see now that I should have sought support long ago.

> I have severe anxiety and clinical depression and usually therapists force me to go out and engage. During pandemic I felt safer at home and didn't feel pressure to go out. I think my anxiety was reduced.

Less exposure to stressful situations in workplace, school, education and community settings.

> I find it easier to get a break from stressful or upsetting episodes at work because I can close my laptop, walk away, immediately debrief with my husband in the next room and try to disconnect from work. When I was in the office, it was harder to get away from a stressful or upsetting situation like that, and also challenging to get that instant connection for support.

Reduction in pressure from friends, family school or workmates to go out, socialise, spend money, look or dress a certain way.

Pandemic funds have enabled agencies to develop new ways of offering support via outreach, wellbeing navigators, TelegramApp etc.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased depression, feelings of anxiety, isolation and loneliness especially evident with CALD women, young women and women with a disability.

Migrant and asylum seeker women faced significant stress due to isolation, loss of contact with close family members and inability to visit family members in home country or have proper ceremonies here in Australia, inability to interact with people with shared language and culture, lack of understanding, anxiety and confusion about restrictions and implications of the pandemic.

Increased expectations and reliance on women for caring of family members, emotional support for friends and family experiencing difficulties, supporting children and young people, especially hard for those with young children and babies.

> This has been the hardest part. Having my work stripped from me, made me feel worthless. Being at home 24/7 with my 4 children was very hard, including home schooling, a toddler at home and a breast feeding baby. I had some sessions with a psychologist to try and help, but I was at the lowest, darkest time of my life. I had to implement massive coping strategies.

> Very stressful the juggle of work home-schooling being made redundant, looking for work, single parenting and family in Melbourne.

> Very emotionally stressful trying to keep my 3 teenagers engaged in remote learning while concurrently working (myself) Space - all of us home all day -everyday - we did get 'stir crazy' and irritable!

Telehealth consultations less satisfactory - feeling disconnected when not face to face.

Having a baby during the COVID year was very difficult, isolating, anxiety provoking and frightening.

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*	NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

People have found new energy and ways of supporting emotional health of others in family and community eg regular phone texts, emails, Facebook sharing etc.

Discovered the healing effects of nature and the presence of growing things and animals.

> I realised I don't need as much counselling as I thought I did; I found many new ways of improving my mental health by walking and being in nature. I spent time meditating on nature, there was less pollution, more birds, lovely walks by the river and in the parks, the flowers and birds and trees were marvellous. I also discovered the joy of pets.

Women mentioned the empowerment, strength or mindfulness they had found or acquired as a result of the COVID pandemic.

> Definitely allowed me to find my voice, articulate and assert my needs, as well as advocate with male Management about the gender inequity. I had many discussions with management about the impact f or me. It was something they were not aware of, or experiencing themselves. They also were not aware of my previous career and qualifications, assuming I was only skilled for my casual role.

> I feel more empowered and appreciated as a woman. I also feel like I am doing better as a woman as I have more time.

> Feeling more thankful and mindful of what I have and what I need to do to keep it. More aware of others in community. More aware of the privilege I have compared to many others.

Increased suicidal or self-harm ideation and /or action.

> Acute and chronic stress and anxiety. Suicidal ideation. Anger and rage at this situation brought on us by something outside of our control.

Growing concern about the way the world is going and the selfishness of some members of the community.

> Realisation that there are nasty selfish people out there who flouted the lockdown rules, pushed conspiracy theories, blamed others and hated the politicians who were trying to keep us safe. Lost some friendships over disagreements about these things.

> I have been distressed at criticism of Dan Andrews and his team. People have limited understanding about how difficult the situation was, and how any decision would impact people.

> I'm concerned where the world is heading. I observed 'COVID mania' in people either by way of them not coping with being restricted and unable to go out, they felt hatred towards politicians and medical professionals and a loss of their freedom. They also developed conspiracy thinking. I hadn't seen this behaviour in these people/family members before.

> I lost respect f or friends who became conspiracy theorists. I have also become more socially isolated overall.

3.7 VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND HARASSMENT AT HOME, WORK AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Survey responses:
N=229

No impact
84.4%

Some positive impact
9.3%

Some negative impact
8.0%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Decreased incidence of violence, abuse and harassment due to lower exposure at work, school or in the community.

> *I was being a bit bullied or intimidated at work by my boss, and it was so much easier not going into the office and not having to see him.*

Greater feelings of safety on the street and in open spaces due to higher numbers of fellow walkers and cyclists and fewer cars and trucks.

> *I have felt safer while out walking as there have been so many people out and about, even if we were socially distancing, it felt better just having people around and lots of them were other women.*

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased incidence, threats or fear of violence, abuse and harassment at home and at work.

> *Really stressful interactions at work and home. Mainly fighting with my other half as I took on increased responsibility while he became so dependent on me. I was trying to carry the burdens of the whole family. My partner exploded at me one night which tipped our relationship over the edge. No physical violence though.*

Inability to get away to report violence or abuse or to seek out support when everyone working or studying from home.

> *It made the emotional abuse too great to bear as there was no escape or place to regather my thoughts as the gym was closed and avenues to catch up face to face with friends were no longer an option.*

Decreased responsiveness or availability of support services and loss of options to escape violence, abuse and harassment.

> *I was hurt by a family member and needed to go to hospital. Efforts to seek support via several pathways were not followed up on.*

Shift in focus for agency staff from primary prevention to support; pandemic exposed the lack of pre-planning by governments and agencies for increased levels of family violence when disaster strikes.

More anger and abuse from the public due to their frustration and anger about COVID and the restrictions, especially when they were anti-lockdown people.

> *I experienced some anger and abuse at work from members of the public who were frustrated about limitations or small inconveniences like showing ID or signing in. Also some work related abuse from my direct manager who did not cope well with COVID restrictions and took it out directly on staff.*

3.8 HOME AND FAMILY LIFE

Survey responses:
N=265

No impact
16.6%

Some positive impact
49.3%

Some negative impact
52.9%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased time spent together as a family and engaging in shared activities; discovery of new ways to do things as a family or with kids - jigsaws, quizzes, on-line games, home invented games, walking the dog, playing music, singing together); greater tolerance between siblings.

Increased understanding, support and participation by male partner in household, child rearing and kids' education activities, decreased gender segregation of household and caring tasks.

Potential for longer term erosion of social norms that currently lead to a lopsided distribution of the division of labour in house work and child care and a resultant shift in gender roles in family and household.

Closer connection with family and friends via on-line methods not used before, eg older people and people living with a disability; appreciation of snail mail!

More understanding and participation in children's education and appreciation of and connection with children's teachers.

More opportunities and impetus to sort house, paint, mend, do odd jobs, plan renovations or modifications, catch up on tasks long put off.

Acquisition of a dog or other pet with the pleasure and companionship this has brought.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increase in caring and educational burdens due to closure of child care and schools, fewer opportunities to go out and pressure of juggling caring, home schooling and work based responsibilities at home.

Prior to COVID my husband and I had a 50/50 split of the household chores and management, but during COVID with my husband still working onsite and working longer days and I being at home I found that I was doing more of the household work which did create some conflict as I was still working as hard and with just as much stress at I would in the office or in community.

I think it has highlighted even more the inequity of work expected of women in the domestic home. When I am in the office - I am at work. When I am working from home - I am home and therefore have to take control of children, cleaning and anything else that needs to happen during the day. Pre-COVID we had quite a shared responsibility in the home, during COVID that was not the case.

Took up new caring roles eg brought older relative home from residential care.

Overcrowding and housing stress due to close living and shared accommodation plus, work, and study pressures at home.

Challenge of supporting home learning by women with very little education and English language skills themselves.

Increase in family tension, stress and squabbling.

3.9 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTION

Survey responses:
N=258

No impact
21.0%

Some positive impact
30.4%

Some negative impact
63.8%

POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased interaction in local neighbourhood and increased sense of shared community effort with new friends and activities.

Discovery of new places in the neighbourhood to go for exercise, play, interaction for self and /or children, new appreciation of nature, fresh air, birds etc.

Great appreciation of quality, flexibility and accessibility of Council home care services.

Development of new means of connection, interaction and collaboration/inclusion via zoom, Microsoft teams, TelegramApp; Facebook, FaceTime, WhatsApp, outreach by family violence and multicultural services, and within the Aboriginal community.

New sources of funding to enhance community connection, outreach, use of TelegramApp etc, and members of community groups developed new ways of connecting with, and supporting each other, as well as continuing to undertake activities together in different ways.

> Social contact is so important to keep well. People need the chance to just talk. I set up a social media group - called 'Kindness Warriors' and collaborated with another coach to organise an activity every day such as yoga and cooking and this went for about 3 months.

> I would drop off food for an elderly couple living on a farm who were fearful of COVID and had no one else to get their supplies.

> We responded with food services through a partnership with Second Bite to create the Feed Me program – It was a fantastic development combining food security with social enterprise, employment element. We delivered 2,000 meals a week, voluntary with some employed including 5 women.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS FOR WOMEN*

Increased isolation and disconnection from community, and decline in work, school, volunteer and community connection skills.

Loss of volunteer opportunities so decreased community engagement.

Fewer opportunities for casual social interaction with closure of local meeting places eg, neighbourhood houses, seniors centres, meal programs, sport and rec centres, health services, cafes, and even causal chats at school and child care drop off times.

New mothers missed out on participation in new mothers' groups.

Increased pressure on existing friendships and relationships that has in some cases exacerbated existing issues or revealed new ones; potentially to the point of relationship breakdown.

Not able to date, find a partner, go out and socialise.

> Being young I found it so hard not being able to go out and find a partner, have fun, socialise and just be young and foolish.

> I think given my age and fact I haven't been able to date people has added an element to stress (time clock is ticking).

Communication, inclusion and connection challenges due to lack of computer literacy, infrastructure, access to the internet or wifi.

Table 2 provides a rich qualitative picture of women's experience.

Table 3 provides some quantitative data derived from the responses by women to the on-line survey.

TABLE 3: ON LINE SURVEY RESPONSES FROM WOMEN* RE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

AREA OF IMPACT	REPORT OF "SOME POSITIVE IMPACT"		REPORTS OF "SOME NEGATIVE IMPACT"		REPORTS OF "NO IMPACT FOR ME"	
Employment (N=279)	39.3%	N=91	65.8%	N=150	16.7%	N=38
Education (N=235)	13.3%	N=30	20.4%	N=46	70.7%	N=159
Financial situation (N=243)	32.9%	N=74	43.6%	N=98	31.6%	N=71
Housing situation (N=232)	10.3%	N=23	17.9%	N=40	75.4%	N=169
Physical health (N=253)	31.6%	N=71	68.4%	N=154	12.4%	N=28
Mental and emotional health (N=247)	22.8%	N=51	76.3%	N=171	11.2%	N=25
Home and family life (N=265)	49.3%	N=110	52.9%	N=118	16.6%	N=37
Experience of violence and abuse (N=229)	9.3%	N=21	8.0%	N=18	84.4%	N=190
Community engagement and connection (N=258)	30.4%	N=68	63.8%	N=143	21.0%	N=47

The quantitative data from the survey presented in Table 3 illustrate the complexity of assessing the extent of impact on women: in some cases women checked both the negative and the positive impact boxes as they experienced both; all areas were reported as having positive, negative and no impact; some areas stand out as attracting more negative than positive comments, some drew more positive than negative comments; some areas were reported by the majority as having had no impact. Briefly the results are summarised below.

- The three areas of **education, housing and experience of violence and abuse** appear to be areas of relatively low impact with between 70% and 84% of respondents reporting "no impact for me" in these areas. It should however, be remembered that this may say more about who completed the survey rather than be a global picture of women's experience

- Responses about the impact of the pandemic on women's **community engagement and connection**, whilst more positive than negative, were spread across the spectrum from positive (30.4%) to negative (63.8%), to no impact (21.0%)

- An almost equal proportion of women report experiencing a positive (49.3%) and negative (52.9%) impact in relation to their **home and family life**

- In terms of women's financial situation, a similar proportion of women reported positive (32.9%), negative (43.6%) and no impact (31.6%) on their finances

- Responses re the impact on women's **physical health** appear also present a mixed picture with 68.4% reporting a positive impact; 31.6% a negative impact and 12.4% no impact

- **Mental health and emotional wellbeing** is clearly an area of significant negative impact for women, with three quarters of women reporting a negative impact in this area. However, it should be noted that at the same time, just under a quarter experienced a positive impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing and one tenth reported no impact

- **Employment** also stands out as an area of significant impact, both positive and negative, for the majority of women. Comments made by survey respondents (and supported by interview and focus group responses) illustrate that women overwhelmingly endorsed the benefits (albeit mentioning many of the drawbacks) of working remotely and from home. Many women report that this has made it easier for them to manage the multiple roles they play at home, as parents and in the workforce[6] at the same time as challenging them as they juggle these multiple roles.

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[6]   Incidentally research into men's experience of flexible work reports that many have the same experience and prefer a more flexible approach to work to enable them to take on more family responsibilities.

4. THEMES IN PANDEMIC IMPACT FOR WOMEN* AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

This section of the report summarises the themes that emerged from the literature, the local consultations and the survey. These themes are set alongside a brief discussion of the implications they have for consideration and response by Council. The themes are grouped under nine headings:

1. The emergency and the highly restricted phases of the pandemic appear to be over, however, this does not mean the end of impact for women - in a number of instances impact will become more evident in the time ahead.

2. There is a compounding effect or intersectional effect that has magnified and will prolong the impact experienced by vulnerable and already disadvantaged groups over the last year.

3. Women in Greater Geelong identified a number of positive impacts as did others' research elsewhere. Many of these positive impacts could be embedded or enhanced into the future. In particular it is worth noting the positive impacts described as a result of being able to work from home.

4. There is a reported impact for many women on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. women described feelings of anxiety, depression, worry, stress, overload, tension, right through to complete mental health breakdown. In some cases this was an exacerbation of existing mental health issues, in others it was a new experience. The multiple roles women have were described as being even more challenging as a result of the pandemic.

5. The pandemic exacerbated a number of pre-existing structural and personal difficulties that women face. For many women these have always had a negative impact but the pandemic brought them into focus or magnified them and highlighted the need to respond to them. The literature review and the local consultations identify particularly vulnerable groups of women for whom specific strategies and approaches should be adopted to ensure appropriate responses.

6. Women have also faced new challenges that were thrown up by the COVID pandemic and by the measures used to tackle the emergency.

7. Agency co-ordination and collaboration and service provision were also impacted by the pandemic; some "pivoted" and improved, some declined, all were changed.

8. The pandemic has highlighted both the benefits and the challenges for women of flexible work arrangements, and without recognition of the benefits for parents and carers (not just for women) and action to encourage both men and women to adopt flexible work, this could result in more pressure on women to manage multiple work, parenting, caring and domestic roles.

9. The pandemic highlighted the digital divide between those who have on line, remote access and those who don't.

10. The pandemic has stimulated people to find and use creative and proactive ways to connect and support each other within local areas and through community networks.

TABLE 4: IMPACT THEMES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

4.1 IT'S NOT OVER YET

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
The ending of the pandemic emergency response does not mean the challenges are over not that the full impact has necessarily been seen. Women have borne a good deal of the impact of the pandemic at home, at work and in the community. They have been primary carers, parents, home makers as well as front line health, welfare and care workers; they are over-represented as members of the a casualised, insecure workforce in hospitality, cleaning, health, caring and service sectors. The employment and financial impact and in particular, the emotional toll continue. The impact on women was immediate during the year and will continue to emerge over next year (or longer). Strategies are needed to keep abreast of this on-going and, in some instances, compounding impact.	**General policy recognition** is needed that this is not a period of 'post-COVID recovery' but a time where adjustments will be needed to a 'new normal' for at least 12 months. Adaptation, contingency and forecasting plans are needed to manage this. Many people, especially those who are the most vulnerable, are not 'over the impact' but are still experiencing it – emotionally, educationally, financially etc and the effects will continue to emerge for some time. This will be further exacerbated if more lockdowns occur. A long term focus is required to continue identifying emerging changes exacerbated /created through the pandemic. Examples include planning issues to be addressed such as the trend for people to move from Melbourne and the impact this is having, and will continue to have, on housing prices and availability; the impact of changing residential patterns on farming/rural areas and the potential competition or conflict between the priorities of those engaged in farming and those with a more urban perspective (noise, dirt, smell, fire readiness etc); the longer term impact of the mental and emotional challenges many women faced as well as the rise for some women in family tension and violence. **Council driven economic recovery strategies and initiatives** need to recognise and respond to the gender segmentation of the labour market and should not focus solely on sectors –such as the building industry- where women are poorly represented in the workforce. There are opportunities to build on innovative economic development initiatives for social enterprises, small business, arts programs, local tourism etc. Adopting a gender lens will ensure that initiatives are not assumed to be of benefit to all when in fact they may have a differential impact, if any, on women (See useful discussions of this in Equity Economics 2020; Council Business Support Package etc).

4.2 THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT OF EXISTING VULNERABILITIES AND MARGINALISATION

THEMES

The compounding of vulnerabilities and the intersectionality of disadvantage has been noted during this research and by other researchers more broadly. The literature describes those who, prior to COVID-19, already faced challenges across the multi-dimensions of employment; economic security; housing; health and connections as likely to experience greater impact as a result of the pandemic. The Brotherhood of St Laurence (2020) described this compounding effect as "strongly intersectional in nature – particularly regarding gender." Refugees and new migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and anyone facing stigma or discrimination due to disability or difference are likely to experience these challenges in "particularly significant and complex ways."

OutRight Action International (Bishop 2020) explored the impact internationally of the pandemic on LGBTIQ people and noted that "history has shown us, that in times of crisis those most marginalized tend to suffer disproportionately compared to the broader population", and that "the background literature review confirms that emergencies tend to exacerbate vulnerability for those already struggling against inequality in its many forms."

The local consultations with women in Greater Geelong indicate that there are specific groups of women who appear to be especially vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic, these include

- young women and young trans people
- CALD women
- First Nations women
- Women in family violence situations, who may be living in the family home in unsafe circumstances or living with homelessness as a result of family violence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Council needs to be more aware of the compounding aspects of intersectionality and to keep an active eye on how best to respond and to become aware of merging trends. Embedding an intersectional lens within Council's policy, planning and service delivery processes would strengthen Council's capacity to identify and respond to these compounding factors and will be consistent with the work Council will need to do relevant to the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Improved ways are needed to respond to needs of (and hear the voices of) the most vulnerable, hard to reach groups of women who have been especially vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic. This could include consideration of methods of data gathering, modes of communication, remuneration to participants, tapping of intermediary sources of voice; provision of appropriate venues, opportunities, supports, timeframes etc.

4.3 POSITIVE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR WOMEN*

THEMES

See Section 3 above summarises the positive impact of the pandemic across 9 key areas: employment; education; financial and economic circumstances; housing, physical, mental and emotional health; violence and abuse; home and family life; community engagement and connection. Women in Greater Geelong have mentioned many of these including

- Increased work flexibility
- Changed demands on spending, increased income due to higher JobSeeker rates
- Short term improvement in housing options
- Quieter more reflective life with reduced work pressures, adoption of new skills and activities; more exercise and heathy eating, no commuting; and opportunities to reconsider goals or lifestyle
- More sharing of domestic roles between partners, more time with children, fathers more involved in children's learning and development
- More frequent contact with friends and family via internet, phone etc
- Development of new communication methods both in the home and in the workplace (zoom, iPad, Facebook, TelegramApp etc)
- Many examples of the development of resilience and creativity, neighbourliness and greater community connection as people looked out for one another or for those more vulnerable
- Government funding facilitating access to services, the development of innovative programs; for example free child care, the placement of people who are homeless in accommodation, the development of outreach programs and new communication and engagement strategies, JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments etc.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Consideration of building on these positive changes, in conjunction with the other suggestions below.

Firstly, Council could build on the positives for example with communications to the community that promote the combined and separate benefits of;

- neighbourliness, community connection and mutual support
- the value of the natural environment in maintaining emotional and mental health and providing safe spaces for interaction, recreation and physical exercise
- shared domestic roles and care for children
- healthy eating together as a family
- family networking and connection via non-face to face methods
- the acquisition of on-line communication skills.

Secondly, Council could use this information to inform and strengthen services and programs that enhance the positive impacts as well as address gender equality and public health goals.

4.4 THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON WOMEN*

THEMES

Whilst there have been some positive emotional wellbeing implications for women of the pandemic year, many many women described their feelings of anxiety, depression, worry, stress, overload, tension, right through to complete mental health breakdown. In some cases this was an exacerbation of existing mental health issues, in others it was a new experience. The multiple roles women have were described as being even more challenging as a result of the pandemic. In many ways this finding goes to the core of the pressures of gender inequality in the workplace, in the home and in the community generally.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Council needs to be aware of the emotional challenges women face and consider way to support preventive action as well as intervention to reduce the toll. Advocacy on broader platforms of the importance of prevention strategies and adequate mental health services and support are important. Council can also consider the importance of responses to and compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act as a means for Council to reduce the gender inequality in its own operations as well as the Greater Geelong community.

Council could identify opportunities for improved early intervention which will emerge from the State Government's response to the Mental Health Royal Commission.

4.5 THE EXACERBATION OF EXISTING STRUCTURAL AND PERSONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN*

THEMES

During COVID, women encountered many of the same challenges that affect them on an everyday basis: some of these challenges have been amplified during the time of COVID. These include

- Gender segmentation and inequality in the workforce; casualised part-time, insecure, low paid and low skilled work

- Gendered assumptions and expectations of women's role domestically and emotionally at home, as parents, and as carers

- Lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation, increased by reported population shifts from metropolitan to regional areas

- Violence and abuse in family situations, exacerbated by close proximity and pressures of lockdown

- Isolation due to age, living situation, disability, lack of English language skills, limited digital literacy and lack of access to communication infrastructure, limited transport or mobility options etc

- Mental and physical health challenges exacerbated by all of the above.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Importance of maintaining an advocacy role in relation to the structural issues that affect women and gender equality generally. Many issues may be outside the capacity of Council to influence directly, eg Centrelink income support; the local education sector; sea change trends, affordable housing supply, public transport planning. However, maintaining a voice and an advocacy perspective is important to bring local and regional issues into regional, state and national debates and responses.

Looking for ways for Council to adopt local responses to structural issues where this is possible particularly in relation to

- Applying a gender lens to business support and incentives

- Housing supply and affordability e.g adopting a Mandatory Inclusion Zone approach to support an increase in the supply of affordable housing, address limits on emergency housing in GG, plan ahead to engage with the newly announced public/social housing budget

- Council employment policy and practices to ensure gender equality is enshrined in remuneration, permanency, work hours, flexibility and work-life balance, actively supporting initiatives that support men as well as women to take up the caring and domestic roles, acknowledging and responding to the impact of family violence on women workers etc, all of which is line with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020

- The provision and upgrades of physical infrastructure and services to support community facilities to be universally accessible and COVID safe; consider new infrastructure to address existing gaps in health facilities (e.g a public hydrotherapy pool)

- Advocate for adequate public transport and wheelchair accessible taxis at all times and address the supply of community transport

- Ensure existing local agencies can continue to support women in ways that have been shown to be effective

- Adopt strategies that address the digital divide

- Be aware that investment in care services rather than infrastructure is a far more cost-effective way to boost employment especially for women (ACOSS 2021).

4.6 THE EMERGENCE OF NEW CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
Women have also had to grapple with new challenges in the face of the pandemic. These include • supporting home learning • working, studying and communicating remotely • working in highly pressured front-line situations with high levels of anxiety and infection control measures • managing and adapting a business or an agency to the pandemic context • maintaining family and community connection whilst being locked down • finding new ways to maintain physical and emotional health • coping with pressured family situations of close proximity with little relief • isolation from friends and family support networks. Many women have struggled with these new challenges in isolation. Some agencies have made especial efforts to reach out to women thus isolated and less able to find their way to supports outside the home.	**Consider ways to adopt, encourage, support and fund outreach approaches** that reach out to isolated and vulnerable women who may not ask for help or make contact with services, but who may respond to generalised inquiries about their health and wellbeing. This type of outreach can provide an important connection with someone outside their home, and can also ensure that they are linked to appropriate services as needed. The focus of such outreach would be on psycho-social rather than practical needs, though there can also be a capacity to refer. Good examples exist locally as in the Wellbeing Navigators program through Diversitat, and the local Headspace initiatives for young people. Other examples exist around the state, including buddy systems, initiatives to reach out to older and young people, people living with a disability and women in family violence situations. Local government also has potential to play a valuable role in supporting staff in community organisations to develop the skills and systems needed for effective and safe outreach approaches. **Recognise and support the value of people who work on a one to one basis in outreach and home based settings getting together for mutual support and training.** For example, Council home based services are provided by personal care workers who are mainly women who work in isolation from one another in home based settings. During COVID they have missed the regular face-to-face support session where they got together to share experiences, provide mutual support, and undertake professional development. The bilingual support workers who ran the Wellbeing Navigator's project benefitted enormously from the opportunity to get together regularly with a skilled casework who assisted them to debrief, discuss challenges and identify training needs. **Enhance the capacity for communication and connection for all, especially those vulnerable to isolation and exclusion.** There are many ways people would like Council to play a role in enhancing the communication capacity of people, especially for community based groups and for those who are vulnerable, isolated or excluded by social, physical or emotional factors.

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
Women have also had to grapple with new challenges in the face of the pandemic. These include • supporting home learning • working, studying and communicating remotely • working in highly pressured front-line situations with high levels of anxiety and infection control measures • managing and adapting a business or an agency to the pandemic context • maintaining family and community connection whilst being locked down • finding new ways to maintain physical and emotional health • coping with pressured family situations of close proximity with little relief • isolation from friends and family support networks. Many women have struggled with these new challenges in isolation. Some agencies have made especial efforts to reach out to women thus isolated and less able to find their way to supports outside the home.	Council could consider developing new ways of addressing the following: • Tailored and /or personalised support to use on-line means of communication. The consultations noted a disjunction between what people have been offered or may think they have been offered, and what they really need help with. Thus being offered opportunities to learn how to use a computer may not appeal to someone who does not see her phone or her iPad as a computer but who could benefit from an opportunity to expand her skills in using her device. Potentially, rather than urging people to avail themselves of 'computer skills training', perhaps messaging and support could be reframed in terms of how you can use your phone or IPad to find on exercise program on line; talk to your grandson in Paris, find where you can buy a widget, find that song whose words you cannot remember, get the bus timetable …. etc. • Using zoom may seem easy to those familiar with such programs, but is a rather frightening mystery for many older people who could benefit from the opportunity it offers to meet and chat with family and friends, or participate in interactive activities, such as on-line gentle exercise programs, U3A classes, craft activities, leisure programs, book clubs etc. CALD women could also, with support, better use the internet to access English language classes, chat sessions, resources etc • Internet access is an issue for many who cannot afford an internet connection or a large supply of data, and whose access is limited to free wifi (which disappeared during COVID when café's or libraries etc closed down) • Supporting diverse community groups to be able to manage their activities using new on-line options and COVID safe practices- especially relevant for small, voluntary based groups • Supporting the on-going development of initiatives such as Diversitat's work with Telegram App to reach migrant and refugee women.

4.7 FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
This research highlights the benefits and the challenges of the pandemic induced changes to working arrangements and the increase in options to work remotely from home. Women have enjoyed the flexibility this has offered and the opportunities to manage work, parenting, caring and home duties. However, they also note that it puts more pressure on them to juggle these multiple roles and at times increases the expectation that they will "do it all".	**Council can consider ways it can make flexible work arrangements available** to those who want it particularly for parents and carers. Flexible work supports parenting and caring roles, but this should not be seen as something women should do. If men do not share access to flexible work and do not pick up this option, then women could find that this is a change that actually creates more pressure on them to manage multiple roles.

4.8 THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
There have been great strides in the development of service models, communication systems, support methods, recreation opportunities on-line and many people commented how great this had been in terms of keeping in touch, finding distractions, maintaining and adopting new ways of exercising, interacting etc. But many others are on the other side of what could be termed a digital divide, for them lockdown brought isolation and disconnection and they faced many challenges as they did not have the skills or the access to digital means of communication, information search, support, connection. Issues they faced include the lack of funds to buy appropriate hard and soft ware; lack of understanding or capacity to use what they do have access to; anxiety or fear of virtual communication or of potential risks, loss of privacy or violation of confidentiality. Assumptions are easily made that all have equal access to and facility with digital systems, but certain groups are critically left behind; older people with little prior experience of digital systems, people with limited funds to purchase equipment, people with limited education or English language skills or even the physical or mental capacity to use computers effectively.	**Consider ways to reduce the digital divide** by using existing facilities such as libraries or other council facilities within local areas. Council could develop new ways of providing access, support, digital infrastructure, education, training and oversight to reassure people regarding safety and confidentiality risks.

4.9 CHANGES IN SERVICE CO-ORDINATION, COLLABORATION AND FOCUS

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
Some services blossomed into new on-line methods and ways of delivering services; some adopted inspiring, proactive, outreach approaches, some hunkered down and reduced co-operation, collaboration, and communication (for example council services that ATSI people used were reported as having been shut down or reduced). Some focussed on crisis responses and reduced their primary prevention focus.

Agencies are reporting that they have faced increased demands for support that have taxed their workforce and demanded the adoption of new ways of connecting with and meeting client needs and delivering support. Whilst this has been seen as important, it has presented them with new challenges and diverted resources and effort away from prevention activities. | **Council needs to keep an eye on these developments as service co-ordination and supply is critical and early intervention and prevention activities are vital to pre-empt the need for support and reduce the need for crisis support.** Collaboration between Council and agencies delivering services in the family violence, homelessness, multicultural areas and the recent move being led by the Wathaurong to establish a 'Closing the Gap Consortium' have been mentioned as a positive process during the pandemic. It would be beneficial to continue these collaborations and to support partnerships which improve service access, co-ordination and address critical service gaps. |

4.10 NEW WAYS OF COMMUNITY CONNECTION AND SUPPORT

THEMES	IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL
The importance of people being connected within their community and within their networks was frequently highlighted through the research, interviews and the survey. There were many examples of people initiating creative and new ways of connecting throughout the lockdown periods and many of these have continued. Some of these were led by staff of community service organisations; some were led by volunteers involved within community groups and some just initiated by local residents within their areas. Examples include fun on-line activities (cooking classes, disco sessions), small locally based social enterprises, and scheduled catch-up sessions within community networks.	**Council can support the continuation and further development of creative initiatives which build community connections with and for women.**

These can be supported by maximising the use of existing council programs and facilities to promote community connection including such things as:

• Council's community grants program/s

• facilitating access to community facilities and digital infrastructure

• promotion and co-ordination of community initiatives through Council's communication systems, and community leadership programs

• facilitating the sharing of ideas and information on successful initiatives through community networks and groups. |

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 FRAMEWORK FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights some key ways in which Council could underpin its post-pandemic recovery plans so as to address the impact that the women of Greater Geelong have experienced over the last year. The women of Greater Geelong have told us again and again to

Listen to us; hear what we need and act on our experiences and our advice; work with the agencies that know us and support us; give us good advice, information, services and support so we can raise our families, be healthy, and get assistance when we need it; help us to share our heavy loads and our many roles at work, at home and in the community.

Council is encouraged to respond to their voices as reported in this document and to;

- **Listen and integrate** women's views and experiences into research, policy, planning and services, especially the voices of women who are most vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged.

- **Adopt** a gender lens in all that it does; this will not only inform and enable compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020, but will also support Council to **recognise** the range of positive and negative impacts of the last year and the ways in which women are disadvantaged, ignored or unsupported and hindered from full participation in and contribution to their community.

- **Partner, collaborate with and support** agencies that have specific and specialised knowledge of women's experiences and needs.

- **Provide and fund** services, business development, local infrastructure and natural environments that are designed with women's input and that will meet women's needs.

- **Educate and promote** new thinking and behaviours about women's roles at home and at work that emphasize a sharing of domestic, caring, parenting and income earning roles.

- **Reconsider** Council's own policy, practices and research and **plan** new policies and practices that take all of the above into account, especially in relation to Council's employment policies and practices.

- **Advocate** for local, state and federal recovery thinking and action that takes the above into account.

In crafting the recommendations below, the consultants have been mindful that Council already has a number of statements, plans, values, principles and strategies that frame their actions. Many of these will be re-developed in 2021. The recommendations detailed below are informed by and are reflective of the values outlined in the COGG Council Plan 2018-2022.

1. Respect and encourage each other

2. Create a healthy and safe environment for all

3. Embrace new ideas and better ways to work

4. Make people the centre of our business.

Table 5 details the recommendations within a matrix that cross references the key roles of local government with the four environments for health and wellbeing. We trust this will assist future planning so as to integrate gender equality framed action into core Council business.

5.2 RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR COUNCIL ACTION

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR COUNCIL ACTION:

Table 5 details the recommendations for Council consideration and action within a matrix that cross references the key roles of local government with the four environments for health and wellbeing. We trust this will assist future planning so as to integrate gender equality framed action into core Council business. This is reproduced in full below.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL			
Advocate: raise awareness of the issues and needs of local residents and businesses, initiate or support campaigns for positive change			
RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Advocate to state and federal governments regarding the critical impact mental health has on women and the need for gender sensitive prevention and intervention. **Advocate** to local businesses and employers around the adoption of gender equity and family friendly employment practices.	**Advocate** to state and federal governments and to developers about the need for social housing especially to cater for women fleeing family violence. **Advocate** to state government on the improved public transport provision in the region including wheelchair accessible taxis.	**Advocate** to federal government to maintain JobKeeper, increase JobSeeker and extend age limits in JobMaker. **Advocate** to regional and state government bodies about the importance of economic stimulus and support initiatives incorporating and responding to women's workforce patterns, and the importance of gender equity and family friendly employment practices.	**Advocate** to state government around the importance of safe, accessible and beautiful urban and peri-urban natural open spaces.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL			
Partner and co-ordinate: develop relationships and alliances and work with others to achieve common goals			
RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental

Implement active community engagement strategies to harness women's experience and needs.

Liaise with, regularly consult with and build relationships with organisations which focus on women's' experience and needs especially in relation to young women, First Nation women, women with a disability, women experiencing family violence and housing stress and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Provide: a range of services and support, preventative interventions, infrastructure and facilities to individuals and groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Provide outdoor and on-line activities (and promote them to women) that include interaction, recreation and exercise in a safe environment at prices all women can afford, including: gym exercises, dancing, music, workshops, yoga, etc.	**Provide** community transport to fill gaps in public transport system.	**Provide** support to local businesses and social enterprises through Council's economic development programs with a focus on the specific needs and aspirations of women.	**Provide and enhance** beautiful accessible urban and peri-urban open spaces that encourage use by women for recreation, exercise, social and community connection eg, support "friends of" areas, community garden groups, street based networks and home and nature strip based gardening etc.

Provide and enhance outreach library services which are of particular value for isolated, transport challenged and homebound women.

Provide support services for small community organisations to assist them to operate sustainably e.g. managing compliance issues.

Address the digital divide and

- Plan digital service hubs within local areas, using existing facilities such as libraries, Council service hubs etc
- Listen and respond to the specific needs of those most digitally disadvantaged
- Support training for, translations and use of information apps such as Telegram app and the agencies that promote and use them as multilingual means of information dissemination
- Use and deliver platforms for public interest webinars
- Provide IT platforms and practical training to assist community organisations to use these methods for their activities and to ensure cyber safety.

Develop footpaths, pavements, roadways, paths etc that are safe, accessible, and suitable for women with wheels (assisted mobility vehicles, wheelchairs, prams, pushers, children on bikes and scooters and women on bikes).

Provide more outdoor infrastructure for activities in local areas such as community gardens, adult exercise facilities, all ages playgrounds, picnic and shelter areas.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL

Fund: provide grants funding or subsidies to local groups and agencies to progress and develop services and infrastructure for individuals and groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Fund appropriate organisations to undertake pro-active outreach activities that enhance community connection, link vulnerable isolated people with support and increase a focus on prevention. **Fund** community organisations to deliver engaging initiatives led by women which build social connections and the enhance health and wellbeing of women.	**Fund** modifications to existing buildings and infrastructure in ways that will encourage women to use them by addressing their security and safety concerns eg lighting, safe entrances, no hidden scary dark areas etc.	**Ensure** the majority of business recovery funds go to initiatives in areas where women work: retail, hospitality, caring and women owned small business.	**Fund** initiatives and groups that aim to promote and care for local parks and gardens, reserves, foreshores, and community gardens etc ensuing this is done in ways that support the inclusion and benefit of women.

Inform, promote and educate: share information, raise awareness and develop knowledge and skills to empower individuals and groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Educate and inform the community about the benefits for all, especially for children, of shared roles for both parents across work and home settings. This includes work hours, flexible work arrangements, domestic, parenting and care tasks, involvement in education and schools etc.	**Educate and inform** planners and developers about the importance of applying a gender lens to the design and construction of the built environment.	**Inform and support** employers and businesses to adopt family friendly and gender equity employment practices and workplace policies such as parental leave and flexible, hours, locations and **emphasise** the benefits for all of these approaches for women.	**Promote, inform and educate** the community about the benefits of using natural public open space for recreation, mental health community connection, every day as well as in times of pandemic and social distancing.
Promote the equal division of domestic, caring and paid work through Council's employment policies and practices.		**Inform and support** businesses and employers to be aware of the impact of family violence on women employees (and thus on the workplace and the business generally) and to develop supportive employment practices in response.	**Promote** the mental and physical benefits of home gardening.
Educate Council's own workforce and the broader community on the importance of respectful relationships in all contexts and between all people.			
Support initiatives designed to raise awareness and change behaviour around family and sexual violence.			

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL			
Research and plan: collect, analyse and disseminate quantitative and qualitative data to inform evidence-based planning, priority setting, decision making and evaluation for services and infrastructure which responds to current and future needs and requirements			
RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental

Routinely **seek out** women's voices when undertaking research and planning activities and make sure that appropriate and sensitive ways of hearing these voices are used, especially in relation to the voices of women from marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Undertake gender equity focussed research, data collection and analysis and apply to planning, policy and discussions for example; on the on impact on women of urban growth, moves from metro Melbourne on rural/ farming communities.

Explore Council's capacity to provide and stimulate the provision of emergency and long term social housing with particular emphasis on the unmet need of women leaving family violence relationships, First Nation and CALD women.

KEY ROLES OF COUNCIL			
Regulate: provide governance and regulatory controls such as local laws and health and building controls			
RECOMMENDED ACTION WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Social /Cultural Environment	Built Environment / Infrastructure	Economic Environment	Natural Environmental
Utilise Council's role in public health to enhance the health of women through immunisation programs, strategies for infection control, and messaging about the safe use of public facilities and spaces.	**Increase** requirement for developers to provide a proportion of public/social housing. **Consider** planning policy relating to the interface between rural/farming and growing residential development – impacts on women/families.		**Consider** planning policy relating to the provision, design and maintenance of open space that caters to women's need for beautiful, safe, accessible and useable parks, gardens, reserves and open and natural spaces.

APPENDIX 1: PANDEMIC RESEARCH WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

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[7]   Kaley Nicholson left the COGG before the completion of the project.

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