

ILLAWARRA
WOMEN'S
TRAUMA
RECOVERY
CENTRE

Strategic Plan

2026-2029



BE, TOGETHER



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the *Wodi Wodi* People of the *Dharawal* nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, skies and sacred places on which the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre stands. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present, and to the generations of Aboriginal Peoples who continue to care for Country with wisdom, strength and love.

We honour the enduring connection between the South Coast People and Mother Earth—her lands, her waters, her air, and all living beings. This connection is reciprocal, sacred, and healing. It teaches us that when we care for Country, Country cares for us.

In Her spirit, we commit to walking alongside our Aboriginal communities in truth-telling,

healing, and conservation. We recognise that the wellbeing of women, especially those recovering from domestic, family and sexual violence, is deeply intertwined with the wellbeing of Country. Healing is not only personal, it is cultural, environmental and spiritual.

We acknowledge the resilience of Aboriginal women and families, and the strength of community-led resistance to violence. We stand in partnership, guided by cultural knowledge, and committed to protecting our future generations.

This Centre is built on Country. It is shaped by Country. We are dedicated to honouring Country in all that we do.

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Statement on Language and Cultural Authority

The Illawarra Women’s Trauma Recovery Centre respectfully acknowledges the importance of language, healing, justice, and cultural strength. We have ensured that Aboriginal language is respectfully and meaningfully embedded in the Centre’s work with the guidance of Cultural Custodians.

This collaboration recognises that language is not only a vessel of identity and belonging, but a living expression of truth-telling, resilience, and cultural continuity.

The inclusion of language honours the strength and survival of women who have experienced domestic, family, and sexual violence. It affirms that healing is most powerful when grounded in culture and that growth is possible when we walk together, guided by the wisdom of Elders, the strength of community, and the voices of women reclaiming their stories.

This statement stands as a testament to the power of cultural respect, shared purpose, and the enduring legacy of Aboriginal languages on Country.

“Miigay gali ganbi” – “The Women who Dance with the Fire”

The South Coast of New South Wales has always pulsed with the rhythm of *ganbi* (fire). Not the destructive kind that scorched the *ngurra* (land) in fury, but a gentle, purposeful *gili* (flame) – carried by the *miigay* (women), who understood that *ganbi* was not just a tool, but a teacher.

Our old People would gather the young ones beneath the canopy of *ghundu* (trees), their voices rising with the crackle of kindling. “*Ganbi*, is how we *gama* (speak) to Country, our *ngaba* (Mother).” With their hands, they lit small, low-intensity burns that crept slowly across the land, clearing the old undergrowth, healing, awakening seeds, and inviting fresh life to rise. Our *ngaba* (Mother) responds with gratitude – Kangaroo grass would flourish, yam daisies would bloom, and all manner of wildlife would return to feed – a cycle of renewal guided by ancestral knowledge.

These cultural burns weren’t random. They followed the *djindjingara* (stars), the winds, and the stories etched into the *ngurru*. *Ganbi* cleared pathways through the overgrown bush and revealed pathways to sacred sites and healing spaces. It helped track animals, regenerate food sources, and promote areas for crops to flourish, ready for harvest. Every burn was a ceremony where the *gaanda* (smoke) cleansed the spirits of all our *mamang* (sisters).

In the cool mornings, *miigay* would gather herbs and bush foods that had sprung from the *murrungga* (ashes). *Gunamaragung* (little) *djadja* (brothers) and *mamang* (sisters) played nearby, learning not just how to *gili ganbi* (light fire), but when, why, and where. The *gili* are never feared. They are respected. They are kin.

The *ganbi* carriers walk again in all *miigay*, bringing with them the wisdom of thousands of years of knowledge and truth-telling, reminding us that to care for Country is to listen and to learn. Because when our *miigay*, *mamang* and *ngaba* are strong, our communities are strong and life is abundant.

The artwork on the following page brings together this cultural heritage and the values of the Illawarra Women’s Trauma Recovery Centre.

Ganbi | Fire

Gili | Light, Flame

Miigay | Woman/Women

Manang | Sister/Sisters

Miigay gali ganbi – The Women who Dance with the Fire artwork
Honouring culture, values
and our shared journey
forward.



Artist

Jasmine Sarin is a proud, queer, First Nations artist. Born and raised in Wollongong (Dharawal Country), with family connections to the South Coast (Jerrinja and Yuin Country) and Coonabarabran (Kamilaroi Country). - JS Korri Design

Foreword

Introduction by Chairwoman Jessica Koot, and Executive Director, Sally Stevenson AM.

The Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is an Australian-first, community-led initiative providing comprehensive and long-term support to women who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence. Our model of care seeks to transform the response, recovery and healing services provided to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence by offering innovative services co-designed by women with lived experience, health practitioners, and service providers. We are focused on offering practical and evidence-based solutions for healing from the epidemic of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.

Our approach is founded on the understanding that recovery and healing is an essential component of prevention and that both the immediate and intergenerational impacts of abuse will continue unless our response to domestic, family and sexual violence expands beyond safety and crisis management. The traumatic impact of violence and abuse can last many years and for many women a lifetime. Too often, the long arc of recovery and healing for women remains invisible and unsupported. The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was created to change that.

Grounded in the leadership and experience of the Illawarra Women's Health Centre and supported by a lived experience, advocacy, and expert collaboration, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre provides a truly integrated model of care that is trauma-informed and evidence-based. It aims to be both a local sanctuary and a national prototype.

This Strategic Plan is our map for the next three years. It outlines the values that guide us - Integrity, Sisterhood, Connection, Dignity, and Truth-telling. It affirms our purpose to provide a care framework informed by lived experience so that women can rebuild their lives with safety, agency, and hope. It sets out the practical and visionary steps we must take to ensure that the Centre is sustainable, effective, and accessible to all who need it.

We very much appreciate, and thank the women, subject experts, communities, and organisations who continue to accompany us on this journey, especially those with lived experience, who continue to drive, shape, and lead this work. We also acknowledge the confidence entrusted in us by the Illawarra community along with the Commonwealth and NSW Governments whose support and funding has enabled us to bring our framework to life.

Our commitment for our Centre is clear: we will not settle for short-term solutions for what represents a systemic problem and we will continue to build a model of healing that is worthy of the women we serve.

Who We Are

We are a purpose-built Centre dedicated to the long-term recovery and healing of women who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence. Our work is grounded in lived experience, trauma-informed and client centred care, and a commitment to systemic change.

Our Purpose

To ensure women are supported by a model of care that is informed by lived experience to rebuild their lives with safety, agency and hope.

Our Vision

Women who have experienced domestic, family or sexual violence have access to services that enable them to heal, recover and thrive.

Our Values

Our values guide our decisions, our processes and the way we work together.

Integrity: We are committed to truth, fairness, and ethical responsibility.

Sisterhood: We walk alongside women with compassion and strength, providing care, safety, and unwavering advocacy.

Connection: We cultivate deep relationships grounded in empathy, belonging, inclusion and shared purpose - with self, with others, and with community.

Dignity: We recognise the inherent worth of every woman, upholding her right to choose, lead, and live with self-respect and personal power.

Truth-telling: We value the individual and collective stories of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, and the courage it takes to bring them into the light.



Our Approach

We are building a Centre that integrates evidence-based, trauma informed care with the wisdom and leadership of lived experience. At its core, this model is recovery oriented. Designed not just to respond to immediate trauma and crisis, but to support women as they rebuild and reclaim their lives. Our approach bridges therapeutic, structural, and social support, recognising that healing needs to happen across many facets of life. We are committed to practices that are culturally safe, inclusive, and accessible, with peer support and co-design embedded throughout every level of service delivery. By working in genuine partnership with the wider community, we aim to challenge structural inequalities and ensure that women have the long-term resources they need to recover.



Outcomes We Are Working Towards

In order to fulfil our mission of providing women with the support needed to heal and rebuild their lives after experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence we are focused on delivering the following outcomes:

- Providing women with access to a space where they are safe, connected, and supported to thrive beyond crisis.
- Securing funding for our model of care that is embedded in the public health system.
- Enabling women to influence the systems that serve them through lived experience leadership.
- Offering trauma recovery and healing services that are integrated, effective, and replicable.
- Demonstrating leadership in trauma recovery, healing and systems change.
- Safeguarding the future of the organisation, by demonstrating its impact.
- Ensuring every woman who needs our services has access.

Context and Positioning

Domestic, family, and sexual violence is one of the most significant and sustained threats to women's safety, wellbeing, and autonomy in Australia. The impacts of this violence and abuse do not end when a woman escapes proximate danger, they persist long after, often compounding over time, and across physical, psychological, emotional, financial, spiritual and relational domains.

While there has been some progress in the domestic, family, and sexual violence sector, for example, emergency response, the longer-term trauma recovery and healing needs of women are still not systematically addressed. The current system is fragmented, under-resourced, and crisis-driven, leaving many women to navigate a complex maze of disconnected services. As a result, victim-survivors are too often retraumatised or fall through the cracks, cycling in and out of crisis without sustained support.

This Centre was established to fill this critical gap. It offers a new model of care, co-designed with women with lived experience, that is long term, trauma-informed, wraparound, and holistic. It bridges mental health, therapeutic, legal, social, and practical supports within a single integrated framework. The Centre is not just a service, it is a place for healing, rebuilding, and reclaiming life.

The need is profound. An estimated one in four women in Australia have experienced intimate partner violence, and one in five have experienced sexual violence. For many, this violence begins early in life and is repeated over time. Its impacts intersect with housing insecurity, financial hardship,

poor health outcomes, discrimination, and intergenerational trauma. The current system rarely provides the sustained, safe, and specialised care required for long-lasting recovery.

Women with lived experience have told us clearly what is needed: safety, choice, dignity, long-term support, culturally safe services, and peer connection. The Centre's model reflects this and is underpinned by the principles of empowerment, respect, inclusion, and evidence-based practice.

Backed by a growing coalition of community, clinical, academic, and policy leaders, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre stands as a national first and a beacon for what recovery and healing can and should look like.

Strategic Pillars

Pillar 1: Sustainability - Ensure the long-term viability of our Centre and model of care through effective people, systems, processes and community relationships.

Pillar 2: Advocacy - Amplify the voices of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Pillar 3: Client Services - Provide accessible, trauma-informed care to a diverse community of women.

Pillar 4: Our People - Invest in a workforce and culture that upholds our values, and enables us to deliver on our purpose and vision.

Key Strategic Objectives 2026 to 2029

Pillar 1: Sustainability

Our commitment to sustainability reflects our determination to develop a strong, resilient foundation that will secure the long-term future of the Centre. This pillar is about embedding the systems, structures, and evidence base that will enable us to deliver our unique model of care. It is grounded in a belief that women's healing must be supported by organisations that are stable, transparent, and accountable. Through this work, we aim to honour the trust placed in us by women, community, and partners.

- Build foundational infrastructure: safe workplace, strong HR culture, processes, technology, and organisational structure.
- Develop or enhance, and implement clear organisational policies and procedures.
- Secure stable, public funding with complementary and diversified funding sources.
- Achieve independent service accreditation.
- Prove the effectiveness of the model of care through evidence based evaluation.
- Secure a permanent site for operations.
- Establish systems for monitoring and impact evaluation, and learning.
- Prepare for and carry out transition to an independent corporate entity.

Pillar 2: Advocacy

Our focus on advocacy is underpinned by the conviction that genuine recovery and healing does not solely depend on the individual, it relies more so on political and systemic change. This pillar is about shifting narratives, influencing policy, and ensuring that the voices and experiences of victim-survivors shape the systems meant to protect and support them. By building strong relationships, amplifying lived experience voices and positioning the Centre as a trusted leader in trauma recovery and healing, we aim to contribute to broader cultural and structural change. Advocacy is how we extend the impact of our model beyond individual healing toward collective justice and care.

- Build public and political support for systemic change and accountability.
- Establish a lived experience advisory network.
- Amplify the voices of women engaged with our Centre.
- Develop strategic relationships across sectors (government, NGOs, health, community).
- Build the public profile and credibility of the Centre.

Pillar 3: Client Services

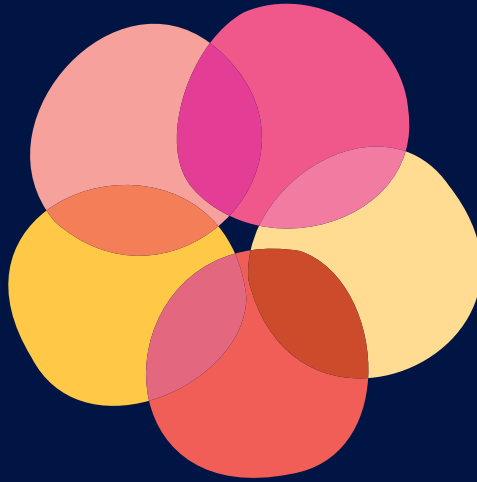
At the heart of our model of care lies a commitment to delivering services that are holistic, respectful, and ongoing. This pillar reflects our intention to create a trauma recovery and healing environment that is shaped by the voices of the very women it serves. We are embedding an approach that is grounded in evidence and lived experience, ensuring that every service, from intake to therapeutic delivery, reflects the complexity of recovery and the uniqueness of each woman's journey. Our aim is to honour the individual experiences of victim-survivors, remove barriers to healing, and continually strengthen the quality, reach, and impact of our support.

- Embed and evidence our model of care.
- Integrate lived experience in governance, advocacy and program delivery.
- Expand the range and capacity of trauma and healing recovery services.
- Strengthen intake and triage processes.
- Deliver consistent, quality therapeutic services and support.
- Increase access for First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, women with disabilities, sexually diverse women and other underserved communities of women.
- Identify and remove Centre based barriers to service access.
- Centre services around client voice and outcomes.

Pillar 4: Our People

We recognise that our workforce, alongside the women they support, must remain at the heart of the Centre. A strong and diverse team is essential to the quality and sustainability of our impact. This pillar reflects our intention to nurture a workplace culture that is inclusive, skilled, and deeply aligned with our values. We are committed to creating a workplace where staff feel empowered, respected, and supported to grow, both personally and professionally. By investing in leadership, wellbeing, and continuous learning, we aim to build a workforce capable of holding space for complex trauma with compassion and integrity.

- Recruit and retain skilled, diverse, and values-aligned staff.
- Provide ongoing training and development.
- Foster a trauma-informed, empowering workplace culture.
- Build leadership capability and accountability.
- Embed continuous improvement in practice and culture.



Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre

Guiding Principles

Respect

Self-determination

Compassion

Integrity

Safety

Equity

Healing

Community

Hope

Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre

1/6 Benson Ave, Shellharbour NSW 2529

Mon-Fri : 9am - 5pm | 02 4243 9800



womenstraumarecoverycentre.org | info@womenstrc.com.au