

**Building in Safer and More
Productive Outcomes for
Consumers & Mental Health
Workers:
Key Findings of the
Network's 2016 Hospital
Experience Survey**



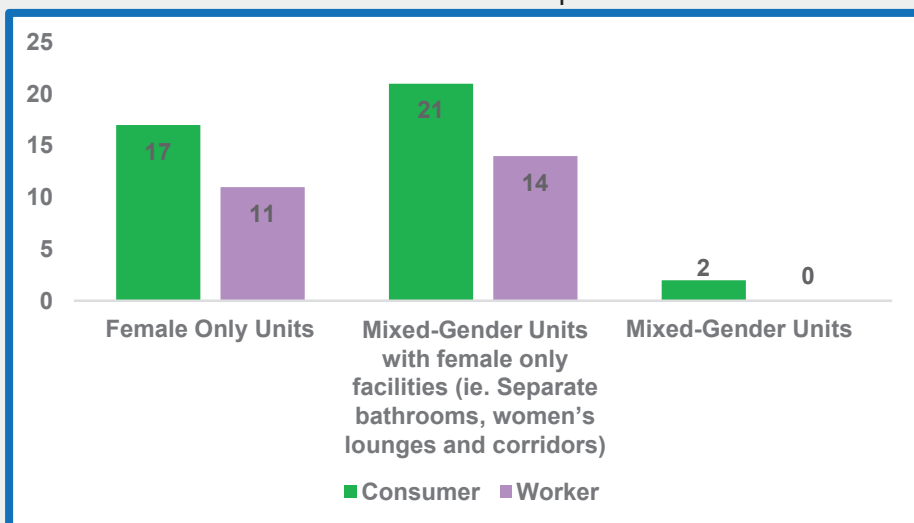
Why women Consumers still feel unsafe in Inpatient units

refer 'WMHNV hospital experience: have your say' Survey Report 2016

The Women's Mental Health Network Victoria (The Network) promotes awareness of women's mental health and the development of services that are safe and effective. We are an organisation of consumers, carers and workers who aim to make services and policies more responsive to women. Our 2016 report draws on the insights of 42 Consumers and 27 Mental Health Workers into why women Consumers continue to experience intimidation, sexual harassment and assault whilst receiving inpatient care.

Whilst mixed gender units have too often been identified as not meeting women consumer's safety needs; the efficacy of Women-Only corridors were also called into question by our survey. Statistics such as the following cannot be ignored: a decade after the last hospital survey, too many women still experience fear in what should be safe and healing environments.

Consumers Preferred Model of Care for Inpatient Units



Reported by Consumers:

- **68% Felt Unsafe** during inpatient unit stay
- 54% **WITNESSED** harassment, intimidation or abuse of another patient
- 55% **EXPERIENCED** harassment, intimidation or abuse by other patients
- 45% reported **not feeling supported** by staff
- 43% felt they were **not treated with dignity**
- 60% said their hospital experience was traumatic

Reported by Mental Health Workers:

- 56% noted that women patients felt unsafe
- 85% had worked with inpatients who had **witnessed** or **experienced** harassment, abuse or intimidation
- The medical management direction on appropriate practice is ambiguous
- Staff do not endorse mixed gender units unless they include female only areas
- Impacts from inadequate staffing levels and lack of resources inhibits ability to protect consumers
- Frustration with inadequate physical environments and policies that do not facilitate women's privacy and safety

Here's why women are vulnerable in women only corridors:

- 65% of women were not given the option of care in a female only corridor
- 57% said that male patients could access female only corridors and other female only spaces
- 32% found working locks were installed on their bedroom/bathroom doors
- 67% were not given the right to lock their bedroom/bathroom doors when occupying them
- Women say they find it destructive when staff don't act on their reports of feeling unsafe
- Women feel vulnerable when staffing levels are inadequate
- Women feel a lack of dignity and insecurity when they have to share bedrooms or have shared bathrooms
- Women feel that there is ambiguity about how staff need to respond to support their care

Our 2016 survey responses have highlighted:

- Women still feel unsafe in mixed gender units due to lack of privacy & safety consistently
- Women still experience harassment and violence towards them by male patients
- The culture of justifying males intimidating behaviour as a result of illness inhibits staff responses to reporting
- Past trauma is compounded by hospital admissions
- Worker attitudes have a negative impact on empowerment
- Containment and restrictive practices need to be utilised as the last resort
- Disturbing hospital experiences can lead some women to consider suicide
- Women only corridors become ineffective when they house men

POLICY MAKERS NEED TO:

- *Be fully aware of evidence-based strategies that promote safety in mixed gender units*
- *Base their decisions on the broadest possible consumer input within mixed units*
- *Fund consistent staff training across all public and private sectors, supported by Duty of Care statements in all guidelines*
- *Strengthen endorsement of rights and responsibilities of all consumers, carers and workers*
- *Have clear consequences for patients involved in inappropriate sexual behaviour or aggression*
- *Introduce practice standards that clearly reflect recovery frameworks, including WHO Quality Rights*
- *Fund sustainable Gender Sensitive workforce training, including in-depth trauma Informed care*
- *Prioritise women-only spaces in mixed gender areas.... Single rooms with ensuite should be standard*
- *Provide, as an urgent measure, separate male and female high-dependency areas*
- *Fund capital works and other practical resources to ensure women (and their children) are safe*

ORGANISATIONS SHOULD:

- *Ensure that men should NOT be accommodated in women only corridors, under any circumstances*
- *Insist that reports of bullying, harassment and intimidation be formally logged by treating staff and reviewed by senior staff*
- *Mandate commitment to recovery-focused care and address desensitisation of staff through consistent clinical practice*
- *Support self-determination for consumers and encourage staff to assist women to participate in decisions about their own risk*
- *Promote ongoing connection between staff and consumers, based on respect for women's dignity and human rights*
- *Consult regularly with consumers about their hospital experience and work to minimise restrictive interventions and containment*
- *Provide more robust admission interviews to inform recovery planning, including trauma informed care (e.g. family violence)*
- *Upskill staff to engage more therapeutically with consumers, in terms of positive communication and perceptions of safety*
- *Ensure that timely maintenance of safety equipment, such as locks, is undertaken*
- *Emphasise environments that reassure women, including women-only programs that emphasise safety*

INPATIENT UNITS MADE SAFER

CURRENTLY, 2014 MENTAL HEALTH ACT PRINCIPLES ARE NOT BEING RIGOROUSLY APPLIED

The Women's Mental Health Network Victoria has worked strenuously to see that these Principles provide a solid base for improving care for all women consumers. This report has covered the key outcomes of the Principles and the Network encourages organisations, staff and trainers to be diligent in protecting women and enhancing their hospital experience.

**clear and concise
policy guidance**

**fund more women- only
beds**

**mandate women- only
corridors & spaces**

**log all bullying,
harassment and
intimidation incidents**

**admission processes
inclusive of trauma
informed care**

**strengthen alignments
to Mental Health Act
2014 recovery
principles**

**consistent
staff training & practice**

**consult women about
their hospital
experience**

**staff engaging more
therapeutically**

The information in this report is made available on the basis of confidential feedback from Consumers and Mental Health Workers.

Women's Mental Health Network Victoria has exercised due care in analysing survey feedback ensuring accuracy for this Report; and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Network.
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