The Women’s Mental Health Network Victoria Achievements & Involvement:

- Gender Sensitivity and Safety Project 2008
- *Chief Psychiatrist Guidelines and Service Guidelines to promote sexual safety in mental health services* (November 2009)
- *Service Guidelines on Gender Sensitivity and Safety* July 2011
  - The creation of separate areas for women in Adult Acute Psychiatric In-Patient Units.
  - Lobbying government provision of $6 million to establish gender specific mental health spaces in existing mental health services including women only corridors
  - Commitment by State Government to a women’s only Prevention & Recovery Care centre (PARC)
  - License for provision of gender sensitive training statewide 2015
  - Presented at international, national and statewide conferences
  - Raising awareness of gender sensitive issues in the Australian context with World Health Organisation 2016

Further reading on topic for Gender sensitive care for women

NETWORK PUBLICATIONS

- Building in Safer and More Productive Outcomes for Consumers & Mental Health Workers: Key Findings of the Network’s 2016 Hospital Experience Survey
- Julie Dempsey (2011) Outrage to Determination...Real Women Right On!!! VWMHN Action for Change
- Victorian Women and Mental Health Network (2009) Increasing Safety and Gender Sensitivity in mixed sex psychiatric units
- Victorian Women and Mental Health Network (2007) Nowhere to be safe – Women’s Experiences of mixed-sex psychiatric wards

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As recent media reports highlight, women continue to experience a lack of safety when admitted to acute in-patient psychiatric units.

**Surveys conducted by Women’s Mental Health Network Victoria:**

➢ 68% of women experience harassment or abuse while inpatients. Male patients are responsible for the majority of these assaults.

➢ 56% of staff working in inpatient units noted that women patients felt unsafe.

➢ 85% staff had worked with inpatients who had witnessed or experienced harassment, abuse or intimidation.

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**The Victorian Adult Acute Mental Health System – an overview from a woman’s perspective**

Women in adult acute mental health units are significantly more likely to:

- have experienced physical, sexual or psychological abuse as children or adults
- be socio-economically disadvantaged and experience homelessness
- be socially isolated

Vulnerable women, when acutely ill, are:

- admitted to mixed gender mental health units
- may have to share bathroom facilities with men (on older units)
- often not able to lock bathroom doors and have showers without curtains
- will often be required to sleep in mixed gender corridors
- bedroom doors have locks which may be left unlocked by staff

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**The Women’s Mental Health Network Victoria (WMHNV)** promotes safety & gender sensitivity for Consumers who identify as women in mental health services.

The aim of WMHNV is to embed a culture of gender sensitive care into our mental health services, promoting a healing environment for women.

WMHNV is a unique Network which ensures that the voice of women consumers of mental health services is heard.

WMHNV is an independent collaboration between consumers, carers and workers. A collaborating body working in partnership with many community organisations and government bodies.

For 30 years WMHNV has advocated for cultural and structural change to promote safe and gender sensitive environments. It is imperative that we maintain a focus on the safety needs of women in the mental health service system to sustain a gender sensitive and safe environment.