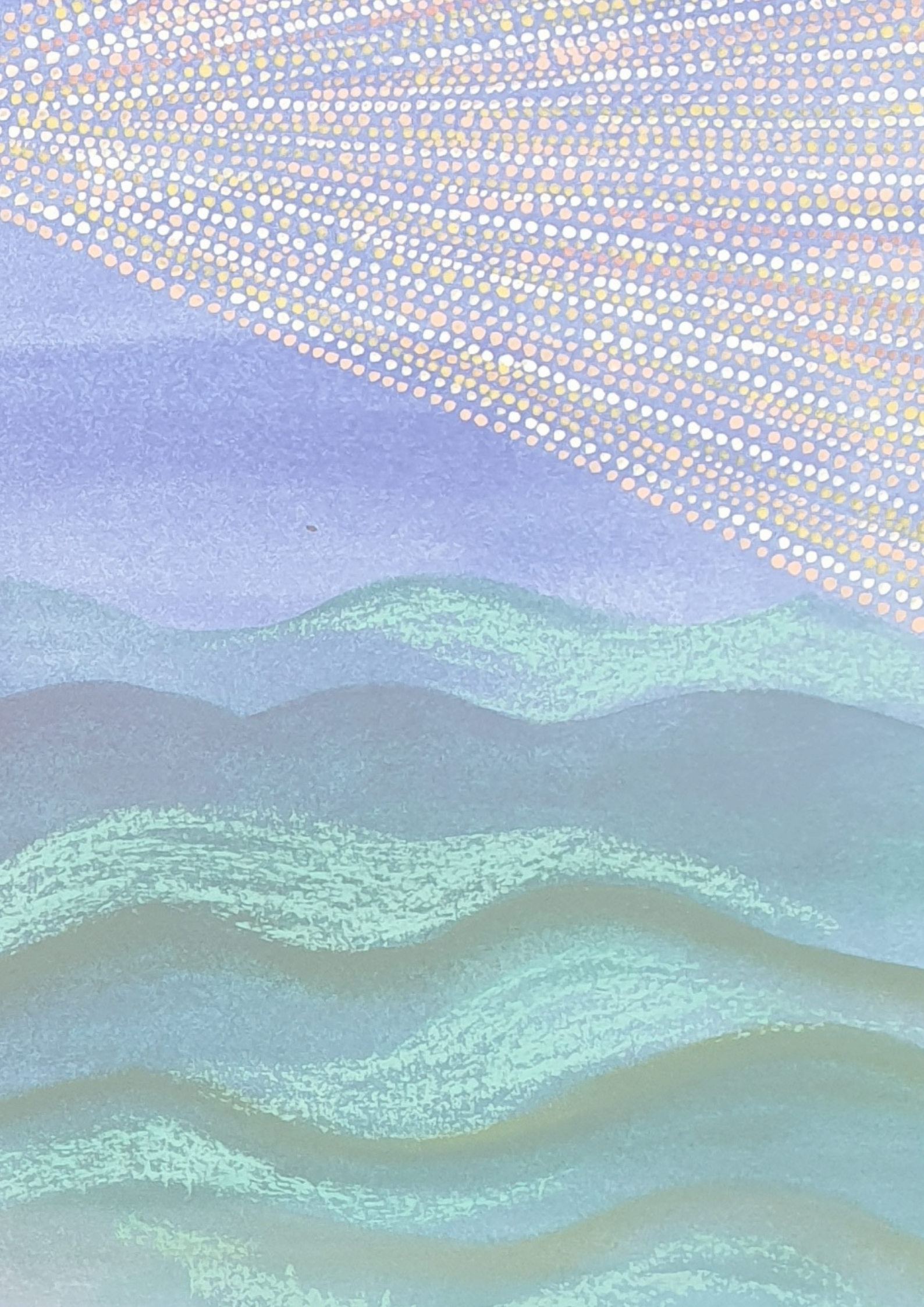


ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights





**Australian Muslim Women's
Centre for Human Rights**
Equality without Exception

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report recognises that gender, race and religion intersect to create multiple forms of discrimination and violence against Muslim women. It also recognises that preventing prejudice in all forms is bound to the struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and before we can successfully tackle issues within our communities, we must address the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and discrimination in this country.

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work, and that sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. AMWCHR is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

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Telephone: (03) 9481 3000

Email: reception@amwchr.org.au

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CEO
welcome

I am delighted to share the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights Annual Report for 2024. This year, under the shroud of global despair and devastation, our work to elevate the voices and needs of Muslim women, children and communities is critical. It is through the telling of our communities' stories that we have continued to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and advocate and agitate for necessary systemic change to address inequality, Islamophobia and discrimination.

Over the past year AMWCHR has joined with a chorus of community organisations and advocates to mobilise our efforts to address the growing inequality and division, advance humanitarian response efforts and inspire local action. We have directed our services to address the changing needs of our communities, while the impact of bearing witness to global apathy as the world watches the unfolding horrors in Palestine, Sudan and Lebanon, impacts our individual and collective wellbeing. Our programs and services have sought to provide safe spaces for women and young people to navigate feelings of isolation and despair and build on community strength and resilience.

Our work with Muslim women and girls has expanded throughout the year, reaching new communities and locations across Melbourne. Delivering evidenced based programs which continued to build capacity, skills and confidence to support women and girls to take leadership of their own lives, become active voices for change and strengthen networks and community connections. More recently, as displaced Palestinian families arrived in Australia, AMWCHR has extended its programs and services to provide intensive support to women, children and families to meet their needs. Our expanded research efforts gathered critical data and insights used to inform our work and develop reports, publications and tools to share learnings with sector and government.

Furthermore, we have continued to fight against gender inequality and domestic and family violence through our specialised and tailored prevention programs and response services. Demand from women seeking support and safety from violence from our

dedicated casework team has increased, demonstrating the importance of tailored services for Muslim women and highlighting a need for expanded investment to support women's safety and recovery.

In addition, the strain on families due to increased living costs and the incredible hurdles and barriers confronting our migrant and refugee communities is further entrenching disadvantage and placing women and families in impossible circumstances. The demand on our client support and settlement casework services has also surged in the past 12 months, with many newly arrived women seeking support to address necessities, while women on temporary visas continue to face even greater barriers to their safety and wellbeing.

In what has been one of the most confronting and distressing years for Muslim communities around the world, I have been heartened by the incredible resolve, resilience and collective strength from our staff, Board, allies and communities here in Australia. In my first year as CEO, I am grateful to be supported by a wonderful Board who continue to champion our cause through their advocacy and guidance, and I am honoured to be leading an incredible team of intelligent, courageous and compassionate women, who give endless dedication and commitment to their communities and their work. It is through their tireless advocacy and support that AMWCHR has continued to achieve its goals to support and uplift Muslim women and girls to achieve their potential, find and maintain safety, and strengthen their capacities.

This work is only possible alongside our incredible community liaison team, our funders and supporters, and our networks of partner organisations who work in collaboration with us to ensure our programs and services reach the most vulnerable in our communities. AMWCHR looks to a future that includes the strong and diverse voices of Muslim women contributing to Australia's political and social landscape, and we hold hope for a society which can embrace the richness of our contributions.

Nesreen Bottriell , CEO

It is with great honour that I welcome you to the 2024 AMWCHR Annual Report. The organisation continues to strengthen its governance and operational structures, advocate for Australian Muslim women, carry out research to inform policies, and provide programs and casework to increased numbers of women in our diverse Muslim communities.

AMWCHR was fortunate to appoint Nesreen Bottruell from within the organisation to take on the role of CEO. Since her appointment, Nesreen has guided AMWCHR with unwavering dedication, ensuring that our programs are impactful, and our advocacy is effective. Her vision for the future is inspiring, and I am confident that under her leadership, AMWCHR will continue to thrive.

I would like to thank the board members who have worked tirelessly over the year to create a strong governance structure. Amidst unrest due to conflict and humanitarian crises that affect our communities within and outside of Australia, our board has been responsive and continues to support Nesreen, ensuring that the wellbeing of our staff and clients remain forefront. We welcomed four new board members over the year: Miran Hosny, Dr Nuzhat Lotia, Aliya Ahmad, and Nazia Ahmed. I am grateful and fortunate to be working alongside experienced and talented Muslim women.

Above all else, I want to express my deepest appreciation to our dedicated staff and contractors. Your hard work and passion are the driving forces behind our success. Without your tireless efforts, we would not be able to achieve our goals or make a difference in the lives of Muslim women.

The world has witnessed unprecedented levels of unrest, with conflicts and humanitarian crises disproportionately affecting Muslim communities. The ongoing genocide in Palestine - particularly the devastating situation in Gaza - the escalating violence in Lebanon, and the displacement crisis in Sudan has had a profound impact on our community.

Chair's welcome



We have responded by providing direct support to Palestinian women and families as they arrive in Australia with dedicated case management and community programs to support families and individuals navigate the complex challenges of displacement, uncertainty, and trauma. AMWCHR also continues to use its platforms to raise awareness of the crisis in Sudan and Lebanon.

The impact of these global events has been felt worldwide, including here in Australia, where Muslim communities continue to face significant challenges. Islamophobia remains a pervasive issue, with political rhetoric and media reporting continuing to portray harmful narratives linking Muslims to terrorism and violence. We continue to advocate for government, authorities, and services to take proactive steps to address Islamophobia, as we also work with communities to address the devastating and long-lasting impacts of Islamophobia and discrimination.

Supporting migrant and refugee women remains a critical focus of our work throughout the year. We recognise the unique barriers and complex challenges experiences of migration and displacement present. Through specialised settlement casework and dedicated programs, research, and advocacy, AMWCHR works to build individual and community capacity and resilience in areas guided by and critical to the needs of our communities.

Family violence continues to be one of those critical issues. The alarming statistics on intimate partner homicide and gendered violence across all communities, both globally and in Australia, highlights the urgency of our work. Our team has been relentless in delivering tailored and specialist support to Muslim women impacted by violence, helping them develop their agency, navigate the complexity of the family violence system, and uphold their human rights. Alongside this our essential prevention programs and research continue to address drivers of violence, shifting attitudes and challenging rigid gender ideals to prevent violence against women.

Finally, our critical work with women, girls, and communities would not be possible if not for the unwavering and continued support of our funding bodies, supporters, partner organisations, and donors. It is with your contributions that we collectively achieve change.

As we move forward, we remain committed to fostering a society where Muslim women are equally respected, and integral to the fabric of Australian life. We will continue to advocate for policies that protect and promote their rights, work closely with government bodies, NGOs, and community leaders, and provide robust programs that support capacity, agency, and leadership.

Together, we will create a future where Muslim women in Australia are not only seen and heard, but are also leading the way towards a more just and inclusive society. This vision is a commitment to action, driven by the belief that empowered women can change the world.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our mission.

Sahar Zaidi, Chair

About us

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights is an organisation of Muslim women leading change to advance the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia. We believe that Muslim women must be the impetus for change in their status as citizens.

In realising our vision, we use a human rights framework to amplify the voices of Muslim women. We acknowledge the inherent agency that Muslim women have. Our work aims to build capacity and raise awareness breaking down structural barriers that exist for Muslim women both within the Muslim community and in broader social and political contexts.

We take a non-religious, non-sectarian approach to our work. We resist versions of Islam used to justify any violations against women and use a social justice lens to push back against harmful narratives. We embrace the diversity and plurality of Muslims that exists in Australia as a strength, ensuring our work is accessible and relevant to all Muslim women.

Our work strives to create spaces to elevate and amplify Muslim women's voices, learnings and supports their rights to self-determine the direction of their own lives.



I N T E G R I T Y

S O C I A L J U S T I C E

E Q U I T Y

C O M P A S S I O N

R E S P E C T

L E A D E R S H I P S H I P

Our vision

We work to achieve *Equality without Exception*.

We contribute to public discourse on Muslim women's issues, advocating for the rights of Muslim women through our programs, casework, research, publications and consultancy.

Our purpose

Our purpose is driven by our unwavering commitment to work for the rights of Muslim Women in Australia. It is what drives our work and what we hope to continue to achieve for the future of our organisation.

We work for the rights of Muslim women in Australia by:

- Empowering women's self-determination
- Bringing a human rights approach to bear on issues of inequality and disadvantage
- Working with individuals, communities and government to advocate and educate for equality within an Australian context.

Our strategy 2022-2026

We are halfway through the implementation of our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, which is dedicated to making a profound impact on the lives of Muslim women and young women, and in turn the broader Muslim community. Our objectives are set out across five strategic goals which together contribute to the realising of our vision.

We continue to solidify ourselves as a leading advocate for Muslim women in Australia, amplifying the voices and needs of Muslim women and young women through our research, national advocacy focus, and strategic partnerships. Strengthening our contribution through consultations and submissions into critical policies, legislation and reform agendas, and working across government, community and sector to ensure the voices of Muslim women are considered.

Within our Community Programs, we continue to provide a place of cultural safety, connection, personal learning and development. Through evidence-based and tested models of engagement, we create spaces for Muslim women and girls to explore their strengths and aspirations, fostering a sense of agency and belonging. Our commitment to evaluation and continuous improvement underscores our philosophy of growth and responsiveness.



By engaging our staff and conducting regular community consultations across diverse community groups and locations, we ensure our programs evolve with the communities' needs.

Our commitment to Muslim women's safety, security and wellbeing remains the foundational pillar of our Client Services, with our approach to delivering intensive case management ensuring that Muslim women can engage in ways which acknowledge their cultural context and needs. Applying an intersectional framework across our services and maintaining the needs of women at the centre of our engagement allows us to work across our diverse communities. Critical to this has been our work to champion inclusivity and equity across the social services sector, where our engagement has bridged gaps of understanding to foster a culture of respect and mutual learning, and ultimately improve outcomes for Muslim women and families.

Our organisational growth strategies reflect our vision of sustainability and national presence. Investments in organisational infrastructure and capacity support this vision, alongside supporting and strengthening our dedicated team with staff wellbeing and professional development remaining key priorities. Together this creates a robust and stable foundation for the organisation's future success.



Context for Muslim women

This year has been one of the most confronting and challenging years in AMWCHR's history. The ongoing genocide in Palestine, the war and humanitarian crisis in Sudan, and the dramatic escalation of bombings across Lebanon and surrounding countries have profoundly impacted our communities, our staff, and our work. Alongside this horror, the political rhetoric and systems that legitimise and enable such violence is a confronting reminder of whose lives, safety, and dignity is valued within these systems. We are pushed to question the meaning of human rights advocacy both globally and within an Australian context, and how we can make AMWCHR's work increasingly responsive to the context in which we exist. We acknowledge that Muslim communities in Australia have already endured violence, subjugation, and forced displacement. In the past year, many have had their trauma and sense of hopelessness re-activated by these ongoing crises. The violence raging in the world today reasserts bitter fault lines of colonial histories and power structures. From an Australian context, it highlights our country's avoidance of our own colonial accountability, and our past and present failures towards First Nations communities.

Muslim women are directly impacted by the politically charged global narratives that associate Muslims with violence. These narratives and mischaracterisations place women in conflicted positions when they do experience violence, as they are faced with an impossible decision: call out the violence within the community, seek help from service systems that are inherently racially and politically charged, or stay silent. For many women there remain barriers at every step, leaving them feeling that inaction is the only option. This is reinforced by experiences of overt and covert Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination, impacting women's safety and ability to participate fully in Australian public life. In 2023-24, the Islamophobia Register of Australia reported a staggering 700% increase in incidents of Islamophobia, with women being the primary victim in the vast majority of cases. Government, media, and services must understand that silence

on genocide has direct impacts on local communities' safety and wellbeing in significant ways, especially for those who are more isolated or newly arrived.

As we absorb the horrors unfolding globally, we also face an ongoing and escalating crisis of male violence against women in Australia. In the first half of 2024, one woman was murdered every four days, an increase from the already unacceptable average of one woman murdered every week.

Like all women, Muslim women feel the threat and impact of men's violence, but face compounding complexities such as visa instability and visa dependence on the person using violence, financial dependence, linguistic barriers, and the absence of local support networks that provide meaningful alternatives to living in a violent relationship.

As an organisation almost wholly staffed by migrant and Muslim women, it has been a profoundly heavy time. We have felt confronted by the absence of political support for our communities and those who uphold international law, human rights, and our fundamental shared humanity. But at the same time, we are grateful to work in a space where we have been free to express our grief and anger, and know that these feelings are shared; this is far from a universal experience, as many people face silencing or retribution within their professional environments. It is from this commitment to speaking out on issues of injustice that our service delivery, reach, and advocacy has grown - online, within community, and in political spaces. We have been strengthened by the solidarity we have seen from across Muslim communities. We have formed alliances with individuals and organisations to come together and collectively push for tangible resources for those who need them most. What always keeps us going amid these challenges is the knowledge that what we do is in service to our communities, especially women and children. We continue our commitment to a human rights framework, despite the very foundations of these rights and international laws being eroded and undermined in the national arena. We continue to believe in the shared goal of eradicating violence against women. This can only be achieved if focus, attention, and action is brought to every context, not just those that suit political and institutional power.



**SUDAN CURRENTLY
FACES ONE OF THE
MOST SEVERE
INTERNAL
DISPLACEMENT
CRISES WORLDWIDE »»**

International Human Rights Law Centre
University of New South Wales

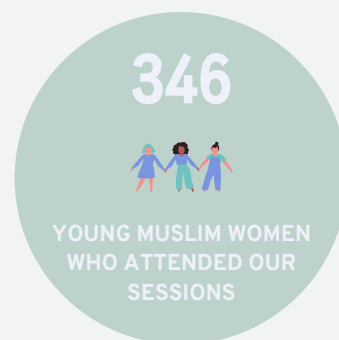


“
Riding public
transport now means
enduring verbal abuse
and hearing the word
terrorist.”

PARTICIPANT FROM OUR
ISLAMOPHOBIA PROGRAM



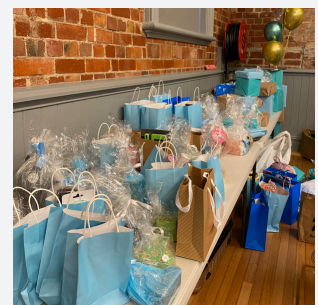
Community programs



Our community capacity building programs work at grassroots levels to reach those most vulnerable within our communities and are delivered Statewide to engage diverse Muslim women and young women across Melbourne and regional Victoria. Our programs are designed using tested models and evidence to respond to the needs of Muslim women, and are guided by our connections with communities, and our ongoing consultations with women and young women.

We support communities by utilising group-based approaches to engaging Muslim women and young women into conversations around topics guided by and relevant to their needs. These conversations are community led recognising that women and young women are experts of their own lives, with considerable lived experience and are best placed to support themselves and their peers shape and shift understanding and attitudes. AMWCHR's programs supports women to make meaning of key issues in ways that significantly strengthens their capacity to advocate for themselves and others in their community.

In 2023-2024, our Community Development team delivered 15 unique community programs across settlement, family violence, Islamophobia, affirmative consent, forced marriage, mental health, parenting and women's economic security.



Supporting migrant and refugee communities

Migrant and refugee Muslim women face a range of complex challenges as they settle themselves and their families in Australia which can leave them at significant risk of isolation. Strengthening community connections is a critical element to supporting women's safety and wellbeing, however literacy barriers can further impede women's ability to interact within civic spaces and expand their social circles. Parenting in a cross-cultural environment presents additional challenges and barriers to the wellbeing of women, and the establishment of positive parenting relationships. Muslim migrant women often face those challenges alone due to limited access and awareness of parenting, health and educational support services.

We are able to see changes in our home now and our relationships are improving with our children

Many women, including those recently arrived in Australia, shared in our consultations that financial insecurity, English language skills, driving lessons, secure housing, parenting and family instability were key areas of concern. A common concern for parents was navigating parenting styles that would be relevant to children raised in an Australian context, and many women requested programs for their sons who were noticeably disengaged and unmotivated to attend school. Others shared their frustrations with the lack of services for Muslim men to support their engagement with settlement issues for the family.



We know what racism looks like, how to educate our children, stand up with them and teach them to respect others as well

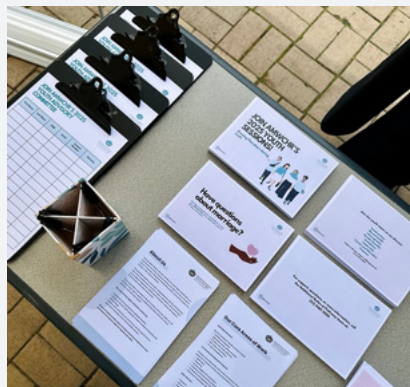
Through a range of programs 846 migrant and refugee Muslim women were engaged to address these concerns including those focused on supporting settlement, parenting and social connections. Programs engaged diverse groups of women and equipped them with knowledge, confidence and skills to advocate for their rights to access equitable services for themselves and their families. Women participated in practical English conversation skills, were provided coaching and networking skills and were supported to build confidence to express themselves and sustain conversations in social situations. While in our parenting programs and workshops we explored topics such as child development needs, communication with children, boundary setting, dealing with racism and bullying, learning challenges in children and preparing children for school.

Young women's leadership development program

Our Leadership Programs for newly arrived young women provide a platform to re-examine notions of leadership, exploring how society, communities and culture has supported or impeded women's ability to exercise leadership in their environments. Many young women felt that leadership was a quality one was born with and associated leadership to positions of power and struggled to find women leaders which represented them or that they could associate with.

Through the program, their understanding of leadership was expanded to explore how individuals were able to step up and take leadership in different aspects of their life whether that be as a daughter, a sibling, a peer, a student, an employee or a mother. Young women subsequently explored their strengths and aspirations to develop plans to further their personal and career leadership goals.

We have gained so much self confidence having these discussions, we learnt that we are not alone in our experiences and struggles



Young women's peer support & study skills programs

Young Muslim women who are newly arrived to Australia are simultaneously presented with new opportunities as well as new barriers. Many young women navigate complex mental health issues as a result of their migration experience, while others have limited awareness of their options for the future including education pathways. Our programs have been important to equip young women with knowledge, skills, and tools to support their informed decision making for their futures.

Our Peer Support program invites female guest speakers from community to share their settlement journeys and success stories to inspire newly arrived young women. Our guest speakers were highly engaging, and participants connected with the session as they recognised the potential in themselves. They shared that low confidence often prevents them from pursuing their goals and ambitions. Others struggled to communicate their aspirations to their families, or could not yet identify the struggles they were facing mentally and emotionally. Hearing the role models inspired newly arrived program participants to re-examine and re-commit to their aspirations and plans for their futures.

Our Study Skills program support women to adjust to school, manage competing priorities and explore further education pathways. The program is tailored to the needs of each group and covers a wide range of subjects. For one group, TAFE options were discussed in depth, to support young women to understand TAFE, the help schemes and pathways available within and outside of TAFE. In another group, participants learnt about the VCE system, how to study and prepare, subject selection, how study scores were calculated, what an aggregate score is, how study scores are scaled, and how subject selection can support them set targets towards their studies of choice.

Primary prevention of family violence

As an organisation which champions women's equality, AMWCHR has a long history of delivering prevention initiatives and has established sound models to engage with community on family violence prevention, grounded in an understanding of the gendered nature of these acts of violence. Our programs in communities have sought to address gender inequality incorporating relevant concepts into much of our community program work. Our tailored primary prevention programs have sought to raise awareness and build capacity to challenge traditional norms and to improve awareness and understanding of family violence, gender equality, affirmative consent and forced marriage to support women's safety, choice and agency.

Throughout our programs, although many women were initially reticent to speak openly about issues of violence, sexual consent and forced marriage, they eventually shared their personal experiences or encounters with violence within their families or communities. As sessions were delivered by trained Muslim migrant program facilitators, women were supported to openly discuss both the cultural and religious myths and misconceptions around the position of women and violence as has been normatively and inter-generationally narrated within societies. Muslim women felt safe and not judged in these spaces to unpack and challenge long held notions of gender, power and control in marriage and family relationships.

As a result, women not only increased their awareness on family violence, consent and forced marriage, but were also equipped with skills to support others in the community facing similar challenges. This was associated with increased knowledge about the importance of speaking against family violence and how their advocacy can support other women at risk.

Enhancing women's financial safety and economic wellbeing

One of our primary prevention initiatives was our Building Pathways project, which sought to build knowledge, skills, confidence and capacity of Muslim women & young women to support their safety through strengthening economic security.

Recognising that women have varying needs and levels of understanding, the program was tailored to work with women in ways which aligned with their needs and readiness. For some this was through our Bennings Conversations initiative, where women unpacked cultural notions of being a woman, economic rights and financial independence. Others participated in the Pathways to Success initiative which focused on job readiness and ways to establish a home-based business. Working in partnership with local services, this program included a Job Fair event hosting local education and employment services and business and program participants to support women to connect and explore available opportunities. These initiatives were strengthened by individualised coaching support through the Planning for Success initiative which focussed on providing tailored tools and mentoring to support women to achieve their specific goals towards financial independence.



Pictured: AMWCHR job fair

Aishah has never worked or studied in Australia and doesn't have any training nor qualifications. She also has limited English. Having attended AMWCHR's Beginning Conversations program, she was motivated to strengthen her financial options and support the family. Upon recommendation by the coach/facilitator, she started her journey by attending and completing English classes and building her confidence. From there, she discovered that others enjoyed the food she would cook for the class and thought of opening a small home-based catering service to friends and her community. Through coaching support, she completed food safety courses, applied for an ABN and registered her food business. She learnt to market her products and eventually started taking food orders amongst family, friends and her local community on a regular basis - an endeavour that has become income generating for her.

Rawdah completed her certificate in childcare services and was keen to start working. This was however the first time she was applying for a job in Australia, and she was unfamiliar with the processes and requirements to do so. Through coaching from Planning for Success, she was supported to design her CV, search and apply for jobs through various portals and drop off her CV at childcare centres in her neighbourhood. She was successful in securing a job thereafter.

Young women's prevention programs

Our Muslim youth prevention programs offered a space for young women to safely discuss topics of gender equality, women's rights, consent and choice. Young women were engaged in ways which created a trusted and safe environment where they were able to raise questions about, and subsequently supported to explore, the intersections of the Australian, cultural and faith aspects of their identities. Many had misconceptions about their rights as women and were often at crossroads between their family loyalties and responsibilities, and the pursuit of personal aspirations. Through tailored and supported discussions and activities throughout our various programs, young women were able to clarify some of these misconceptions, increase their understanding of their rights within both civil and Islamic laws, enhance their capacity to navigate family expectations, and strengthen their confidence to make informed choices and pursue their aspirations.

Programs this year focussed on family violence awareness and understanding, affirmative consent and early and forced marriage, understanding relevant laws and rights, and working through how concepts of choice and consent can be applied into their own personal, familial and cultural contexts and values.

It was interesting to know that coercion is also a form of forced marriage, and someone needs to agree without any influence from others

I never knew how common and shared our mental health issues are. I always felt alone but now I know others are going through the same thing as me

Increasing mental health awareness

Our mental health project delivered a trauma informed program which recognised the impact of migration and settlement trauma on mental health. The program for Muslim women focussed on increasing awareness and understanding of mental health, identifying ways of seeking help, exploring cultural coping strategies, and linking the mind-body relationship to mental health. For young women this was expanded to support conversations around social media, identity and sense of belonging, as factors influencing mental health for young Muslims. Through guided, in-language, group discussions, the program provided a space for women and young women to speak to their experiences, opened dialogue to challenge cultural responses to mental health, and supported women to understand the importance of mental wellbeing.



Throughout the program women shared their frustrations in accessing culturally safe mental health support, with some sharing negative experiences which deterred them from further seeking help. Alongside the program for women, AMWCHR developed a tailored training workshop for mental health sector professionals on “Mental Health Practice with Muslim communities” to enhance their capacity to service Muslim communities better.

Building resilience against Islamophobia

The community’s experiences of Islamophobia have significantly elevated following the escalation of events in Palestine and the media reporting and political rhetoric that followed. These concerns were reflected across all our communities and impacted the many women we work with, alongside their children, partners and families. While the impact of Islamophobia was widely felt throughout the community, its impact on visibly Muslim women remains heightened as they became targets of abuse and hate. The rise in Islamophobia increased anxiety amongst Muslim women who expressed fears and concerns about their safety outside of the home.

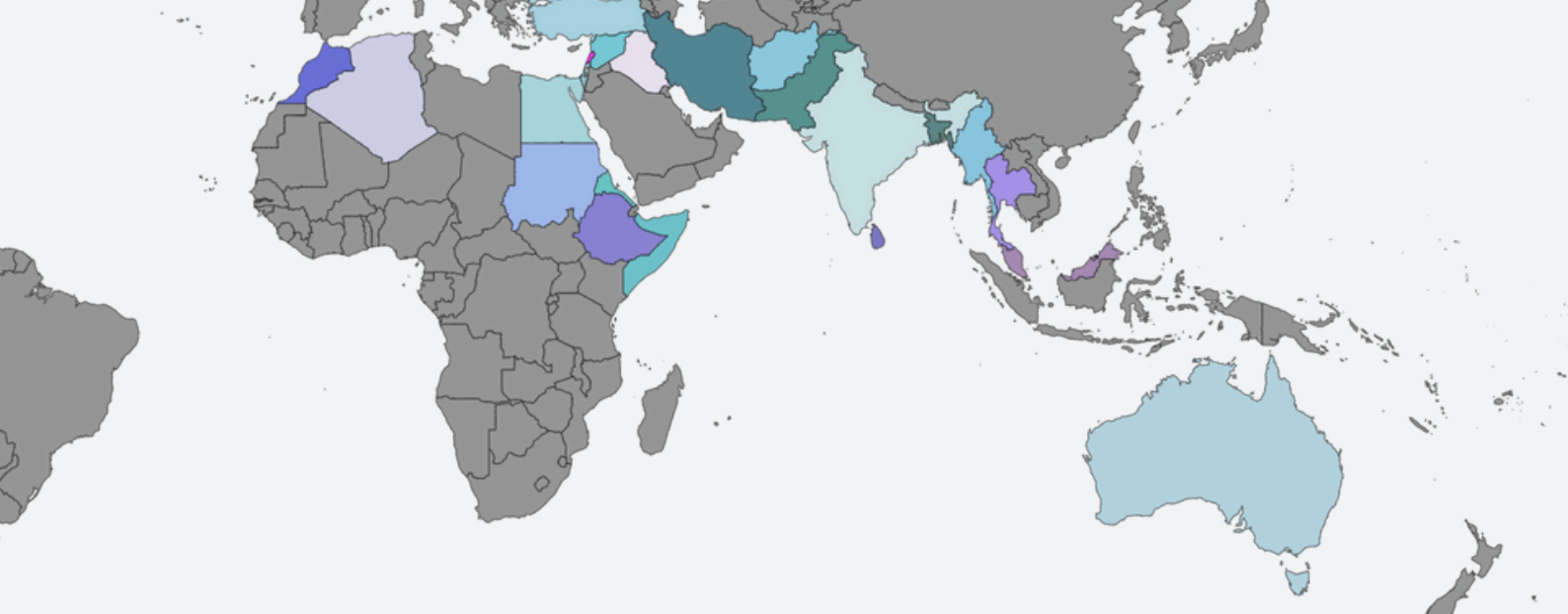
Our Countering Islamophobia project was delivered to women and young women in Victoria to build awareness and understanding of Islamophobia, but further to build confidence and skills to safely call it out, report incidents and navigate the mental health impacts of Islamophobia, racism and discrimination. Women who attended the program reported feeling supported to discuss their experiences, recognising that they were not alone and finding support from being within the group setting. Women reported various examples of Islamophobia with many sharing experiences of verbal abuse on public transport and when

driving, being subject to derogatory remarks when accessing social services.

Some women shared experiences of being threatened by landlords, another was asked by her employer to remove her hijab, and others felt that they were overlooked for job opportunities due to stereotypes about their culture and religion. We heard repeatedly from women that their children were experiencing heightened levels of bullying in the school yard and that there was little support offered by school staff and leadership, with mothers reporting that incidents were often dismissed and at times it was their child who was disciplined.

Despite these experiences, women and young women also demonstrated strength and resolve to challenge Islamophobia, racism and discrimination and to support their children. They also recognised the impact Islamophobia was having on their mental health with many sharing that they felt fearful and anxious and were supported to implement strategies to support their wellbeing and seek support.





Women's casework services



AMWCHR's client services offer different streams of support in response to women's presenting needs. We are proud to offer in-language services through our multilingual team and interpreter support where necessary. Both a specialist family violence and settlement service provider, AMWCHR operates primarily as a phone-based service across Victoria and in some cases interstate. Our model facilitates accessibility for Muslim women and addresses mobility, isolation, and transportation constraints. For those in need we provide some outreach support, particularly for women who are engaging with police and courts.

Over the past year we have seen a continued increase in demand for our one-to-one case management support. Muslim women often self-refer after encountering our programs and events, or after hearing about us through word of mouth within community. Referrals are also received from a broad range of services including housing, mental health, police, child protection, and legal services. This wide network of pathways into our service reflects our expanding profile built from sector advocacy, collaborations, sector training, and of course our position as a trusted service within Muslim communities.

AMWCHR's Client Services team continue to build on a well-established reputation as a personalised and client-centred service offering culturally responsive assessment and planning, advocacy, information, and referral for Muslim women and their families.

We are developing our service capacity to engage on issues impacting families as a whole as a strategy to support the long-term safety of the women and children. Our services aim to overcome structural and systemic barriers while supporting Muslim women through individual challenges. We do this through:

- advocacy to support clients' agency in the context of decision making and service engagement;
- advice and information on a broad range of issues, laws, and systems;
- assessment to identify risks and areas of concern;
- case planning to work towards client safety, wellbeing, and life goals;
- conversations and support for clients to reflect and consider their circumstance, lived experience, faith, culture, and personal choice;
- referral to other specialist services;
- co-case management to offer customised wrap-around support; and
- a range of other supports based on clients' self-identified needs.

We work collaboratively with services across case management, information sharing, and secondary consultation. This way of working serves our clients and communities but also builds sector capacity and accountability to ensure services are accessible and safe for Muslim women and children.

This year we've seen a sharp increase in women and families experiencing financial hardship, homelessness and housing insecurity, and visa uncertainty. These issues were most stark amongst our expanding client base of newly arrived Palestinian communities, who are ineligible for many government services. We are working with Palestinian women and their families to support their stabilisation, access to sustainable income, and development of skills for education and employment to mitigate, as much as possible, the instability of their temporary visa status.

Specialist family violence response services

Our ongoing work within family violence continues across prevention, early intervention, and response. Central to our work in family violence is addressing the drivers of violence. One way we do this is through supporting women to rebuild their personal sense of agency. All too often Muslim victim-survivors have experienced decision making on their behalf; first from the person using violence (PUV), and then from police, court systems, and even family violence services. These decisions often override their choice, lived experience, and expert knowledge on their own situation. As we engage and support our clients, we are always aware of these common experiences, and we bring cultural, religious, and community contexts to work alongside clients in ways that centre their autonomy in the process. In doing so we are able to advocate for clients and promote their rights, safety, and recovery.

We work from a holistic, strength-based position which not only makes our working relationships collaborative and healing, but also builds the trust required to have open and sometimes challenging conversations. When needed, our family violence case managers can support women to consider the accountability of the PUV and the importance of addressing this in order to create sustainable safety and stability.

Outside our core work of providing culturally attuned interventions that meet women where they need support the most, we are also growing our MARAM-aligned capacity.

Central to this is minimising risk by advocating for PUVs to receive improved support, including through Men's Behaviour Change programs (MBCP), and by addressing stressors that can compound their use of violence such as homelessness, mental health, and addiction.

We offer specialised support including crisis brokerage, Islamic divorce advice and advocacy, and forced marriage case management and referral. Through our case management, we help to build clients' capacity to reclaim their rights and live free from violence. The benefits of this work extend to clients' wider families and communities, reducing both the direct and intergenerational impacts of violence.

Our work to respond to forced marriage continues, although we see fewer numbers seeking explicit support for forced marriage intervention as their primary concern. Rather, women are seeking support for other issues, and through our risk assessment process, we identify they may be in or are at risk of a forced marriage. We prioritise safety and the needs identified by women. Casework engagement offers opportunities to talk about forced marriage, coercion and consent, rights within marriages, and the options available.

When forced marriage cases are referred to us, or where women access our services related to a forced marriage, we are able to offer specialist support as experts in this area. Some cases are local, although this year we have seen a rise in Exit Trafficking, with more cases involving Australian residents either travelling or located overseas. AMWCHR has worked with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) when women have requested intervention.

For many years, access to programs and resources designed to support forced marriage victim-survivors has been contingent on engagement with Australian Federal Police (AFP). AMWCHR and other advocates have long called for changes to this system, as we know many people do not feel safe engaging with police and rarely want to pursue criminal charges against family members on issues of forced marriage. AMWCHR is now a partner organisation, in a consortium led by The Salvation Army, providing a new pilot program called the Additional Referral Pathway (ARP). The ARP offers a service system-based referral to specialised supports and resources for people at risk of or currently in a forced marriage, without the requirement of engaging with the AFP. This crucial program provides victim-survivors with improved access to support, to stabilise themselves and establish alternatives to a marriage they do not want.

Brief intervention services

Many Muslim women face considerable barriers to accessing services to respond to issues that are likely to escalate to the point of crisis if left unaddressed. This year we have increased our capacity to deliver brief intervention, providing vital support that builds foundational knowledge, reduces trauma, and prevents women re-presenting in the system after crisis.

There tends to be several categories of women that access this short-term service. Some women are recovering from family violence, having had specialist support but remain at risk of falling back into the cycle of violence, poverty, or homelessness. Other women may be experiencing risk factors for violence or early signs of abuse, such as restrictions on their financial independence, and/or very little decision making power within their relationship.

These women usually need information, advice, and sometimes referral. Others still are those who are not yet ready to leave a violent relationship. It is our job in these situations to provide information about rights and services to support women to put interventions in place and reduce risk of escalation. Where women are not yet ready to engage fully, we begin conversations to encourage agency, in the hopes that if and when ready, women will reach out on a basis of this established trust and familiarity with our service.

The final cohort is women who engage us for brief intervention support who have compounding issues, such as insecure or temporary visa status. This cohort experience significant vulnerabilities that go largely unaddressed by the family violence service system due to ineligibility or lack of resources to offer sustained and impactful support. Whilst there is growing awareness from government alongside strong sector advocacy on the additional risks that visa instability presents to women, many services and vital supports remain unavailable. These issues also challenge AMWCHR's brief intervention service, which is short term. However, we often find ways to provide the supports our clients require, within the limitations of these structural barriers. We utilise brokerage where appropriate and/or facilitate access to flexible support packages. A strength of our service is in our commitment to filling the gaps in service structures that leave many women behind.

Settlement support services

Our Settlement Support Services seek to equip Muslim migrant and refugee women with knowledge and tools to support their settlement process. This includes through building social and economic participation and community connectedness. Our trained caseworkers deliver in-language, culturally tailored services that focus on developing independence, agency, confidence, and wellbeing throughout the settlement journey.

Over the past year, AMWCHR's Settlement Service (SETS) has seen a growing cohort of women from Middle Eastern countries including Syria, Iraq, and Iran, along with high numbers of Afghan women. We see larger families needing support with the challenges of accessing appropriate and affordable housing. Overcrowding is common and access is often impeded by language, literacy, and technological barriers, difficulty viewing properties without transport options, and experiences of overt and covert prejudice and discrimination.

Once families have a home, adequately furnishing it presents a further challenge for our clients. Many clients require financial and material aid referrals to access basic necessities. New migrants remain in precarious positions around maintenance or negotiations with landlords, and there are significant gaps in the funding and resourcing for newly establishing families. In addition to material needs, many families arrive with unaddressed issues and concerns impacting family members. In particular, we have provided support to new migrant families related to children's undiagnosed or untreated mental illnesses, physical and mental disabilities, or other health issues. Our caseworkers provide information, referral, and advocacy to access appropriate assessments, case management, and healthcare.

Hala was referred to AMWCHR by Victorian child protection services after they removed her and her children from their home due to family violence safety risks. When allocated to a specialist family violence case manager, Hala disclosed that the trigger event for child protection involvement was the upcoming release of her husband (the children's father) from prison. Hala shared that prior to her husband's imprisonment, he had been using violence against her. However, she wished to maintain contact, and while he was incarcerated, she and the children had been visiting him in prison. Hala's husband was due to be released to live in the home with his family. Upon learning of this, child protection urgently relocated Hala and her children to a hotel due to the risk her husband posed. Despite child protection having a responsibility to put supports in place to ensure the safety and stability of the family unit, they had failed to use the time during the husband's imprisonment to build those preventative supports. Instead, Hala and her children were removed from their home to face isolation in a hotel, uncertainty, and distress surrounding the potential for forced removal of the children.

AMWCHR's case manager listened to Hala and engaged in difficult but necessary conversations about her husband's accountability for using violence and his commitment to recovery. They were able to develop a plan that involved working toward her goals of safety, support, and ultimately reunification. The caseworker also provided advocacy support to safely engage with the child protection practitioner and address concerns. In spending time conducting a thorough risk assessment they identified the need for greater support in their care for the children, including NDIS assessments. The case manager advocated to build supports for the person using violence to address addiction, homelessness, and promote behaviour change. Through accessing resources, using our advocacy skills, and most importantly listening to Hala, we built an invested and engaged working relationship. In doing so we were able to de-escalate statutory interventions and avoid a possible family violence crisis. We co-created a more stable environment that eventually led to the husband/father gaining access time with children and beginning his own accountability and recovery process.

We find that working with cultural context and nuance allows for less judgement and therefore less defence and disengagement. Instead, it builds a more productive working relationship based on mutual respect of all parties.

After hearing about our organisation through word-of-mouth, a newly arrived family contacted AMWCHR's settlement casework services seeking urgent support. Najwa was a mother of seven children under the ages of 18 and had been in Australia less than 12 months on humanitarian visas. Despite being engaged with AMES services and in the public health system, the family was experiencing financial hardship in addition to housing, transport, educational, and health challenges. Our caseworker worked tirelessly to address the most urgent needs identified by Najwa. Vouchers were provided to enable immediate access to food for the family while our caseworker worked to facilitate longer-term supports, such as engagement with a Centrelink social worker and the social work team at the Royal Children's Hospital. These linkages were crucial to aid access to the full financial supports available to the family.

After this initial work, Najwa engaged in broader casework planning, continuing to build trust and assess priorities. Alongside her caseworker's support, Najwa was able to address the family's housing needs and connect with material aid providers. Najwa's caseworker also advocated for her new landlord to complete necessary maintenance on the home. During this challenging settlement period, our caseworker initiated and maintained contact with the children's school to support their participation and ensure Najwa and her husband were likewise supported to engage with the education system. After being connected with healthcare teams, one of Najwa's children was able to receive a diagnosis and treatment for their physical disability, while sadly, two of Najwa's other children were diagnosed with cancer. These confronting health issues further compounded the family's challenges.

Our caseworker was able to support the process for NDIS assessment and coordinate with the hospital social worker to meet the family's practical needs. For example, through arranging transport to and from the hospital for treatments, and to provide necessary documentation to ensure a safe and supported start to school. These supports allowed the family to focus on the important task of prioritising their family's health and emotional wellbeing.

There are often so many unaddressed and pressing needs in families, and due to language barriers, it can be overwhelming or near impossible to navigate services and systems alone. AMWCHR's settlement support provides the opportunity to engage newly arrived migrants with foundational resources and assistance to avoid any of these needs escalating to a crisis situation. The ease of doing so in-language with a caseworker that understood cultural and migration context made a significant difference in supporting Najwa to fully engage and participate in the process.

Advocacy, policy, & research



Advocacy



As one of our key strategic goals, AMWCHR continues to advocate for the rights of Muslim women and girls across various domains. In 2023-24 our advocacy efforts expanded in response to the shift in global and local contexts and emerging issues facing our communities. In particular, we built new alliances and relationships to advocate for Government action and accountability on Palestine.

Over the past year, we presented to a range of audiences and stakeholders including at the Ministerial Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery, Department of Education's Respectful Relationships Workshops, Victoria Police's Multicultural Reference Group, Women's Mental Health Alliance, and the Municipal Association of Victoria's Free from Violence Forum. In addition, we attended meetings with senior government officials and ministers overseeing both state and federal government portfolios that intersect with our work.

We participated in over 60 network and sector meetings related to parenting, settlement, family violence, Palestine, mental health, forced marriage, and Islamophobia as we continue to foster connections across sectors to strengthen understanding and foster collaboration. AMWCHR continues to establish and nurture existing alliances to support advocacy across a variety of issues impacting Muslim women and children including as members of:

- National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence
- Women's Mental Health Alliance
- Harmony Alliance
- Settlement Council of Australia Road to Belonging Research Working Group
- Department of Home Affairs Multicultural Women's Reference Group
- Victoria Police Multicultural Priority Reference Group
- Settlement CEO Leadership Forum
- National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery

As we head into 2025, we aim to build further strategic partnerships and alliances to support our advocacy for the benefit of Muslim women, children, and families.

As part of our advocacy strategy, we amplified our messages across our key platforms and through our website to share resources and information to increase awareness of issues impacting Muslim women. This year we saw strong growth in our social media engagement with followers increasing by 28% across all platforms.

Policy

This year we have continued to contribute to the shaping and development of policy and reforms on issues impacting Muslim women, children, and families through our government submissions. The recommendations within our submissions were developed through consultation across AMWCHR teams and individual staff who have direct insight into emerging issues on the ground. We also drew from the 12 community consultations held this year, as well as existing evidence and data from our more than 30 years of experience working with Muslim communities.

In 2023-2024, we provided feedback to governments through the following submissions:

- Submission into Australia's Multicultural Framework Review
- Submission to the Inquiry into Capturing Data of Family Violence Perpetrators
- Submission to the Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia
- Submission on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2024-2025

Research

AMWCHR has continued to steadily build its research function to identify and address systemic barriers impacting Muslim women in Australia. We have a long history of researching across issues that inhibit Muslim women's self-determination, building the evidence base to advocate for policy and practice change.

In the past year we have delivered research reports, commenced new research initiatives, and participated in research networks. We have built and strengthened partnerships with community organisations, universities, and experts relevant to our work. As our research capacity grows, we continue to welcome collaborations with like-minded research institutions.



Barriers to Access: Migrant and refugee women's experiences of the online family violence intervention order process

Delivered in partnership with the Northern Community Legal Centre (NCLC) and funded by the Victorian Law Foundation (VLF), this research explored the barriers experienced by migrant and refugee women when using Victoria's new online system to apply for family violence intervention orders (FVIOs).

We found that the new FVIO system was often complex, confusing, and inaccessible for women – especially those who had no literacy in English. This necessitated women seeking out support to obtain an FVIO, though accessing this support could be challenging. Although courts are funded to provide application support, we found that many women were instead being supported within the community sector, with no additional resourcing. The experience as a whole was difficult and sometimes traumatic for victim-survivors. We recommended that the Magistrates Court of Victoria review their application system and forms to ensure consistency, transparency, and accessibility for all court users. We also recommended increased resourcing for the sector to accommodate the extra administrative load of providing intensive application support.

We launched the Barriers to Access report alongside our partners at an online sector event with Minister Vicki Ward providing opening remarks. NCLC and AMWCHR have also continued with advocacy activities, including appearances on the radio, the Victoria Law Foundation website, and presentations at research networks. NCLC was also funded by Victoria Law Foundation to travel to Canada to present our research at an international conference attended by researchers, practitioners, and legal experts from around the world.

Following the publication of the report, the Magistrates Court of Victoria has made changes to parts of the application system, which align with our recommendations. We look forward to seeing further improvements to the system.

If you would like to read the full report and recommendations, you can do so at www.amwchr.org.au

Our Health, Our Mind: Mental health needs in Muslim migrant and refugee communities

This report, published in December 2023, highlighted mental health needs in Muslim migrant and refugee communities. We reported on themes and findings from the delivery of our mental health program for Muslim women to highlight service gaps and produce recommendations for addressing these gaps.

We found that many of the women in the program had direct experiences of mental illness, with migration and displacement being a common exacerbating factor. However, gendered pressures, discrimination, and low-quality services were inhibiting access to adequate supports. Alongside these barriers, many women did not feel ready to engage with mental healthcare in a one-to-one setting.

We identified that these issues could be addressed through increased and sustained funding for community and group-based therapeutic mental health programs, incentives to increase supply of multicultural, multilingual mental health professionals, and strengthened partnerships between community organisations and culturally appropriate mental health providers.

Following the publication of this report, we have presented at network events and utilised the findings within our capacity building trainings, grant applications, and advocacy meetings.

This project was funded by the Victorian Government. If you would like to read the full report, you can do so at www.amwchr.org.au

Ongoing research

In addition to the projects that were completed in 2023-2024, we have continued work on a number of other research projects, including:

- Safer Systems, Safer Families: Addressing systemic disadvantage for Muslim communities during child protection interventions;
- Voices for Change: Engaging Muslim men in the prevention of family violence; and
- Why Yes Matters: Understanding Muslim communities' knowledge and needs surrounding affirmative consent



We look forward to sharing more information about the above projects in the months to come.

Sector engagement & training



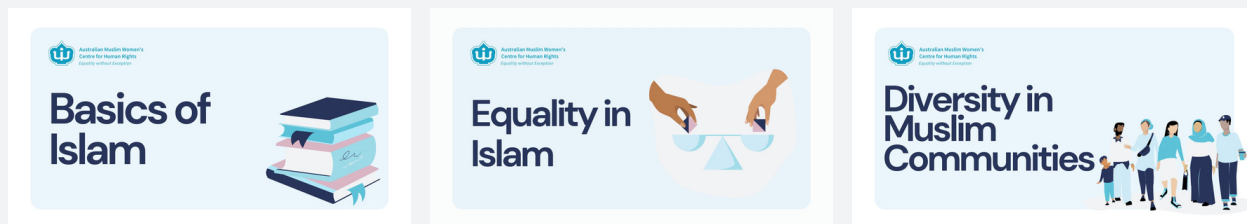
Strengthening collaboration

This year AMWCHR was funded to deliver a project under the Victorian Government's Working Together initiative to strengthen family violence response to Muslim communities via a partnership approach. This initiative recognises that multicultural services are the experts in engaging and supporting the many victim survivors who are unlikely to engage in the mainstream family violence service system.

Our project was designed to address the specific issues we were seeing in child protection and police engagements, where Muslim victim survivors and families were not receiving culturally responsive or safe services. To address this, we designed customised training programs across different child protection regions and with Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police officers. Through our partnership approach, we worked collaboratively with services to enhance their understanding of Muslim communities, challenge stereotypes and bias, and promote practices that support rather than alienate Muslim families.

We subsequently saw a significant increase in consultations and engagement with our service, including referrals and secondary consultations. In addition to delivering training sessions on family violence, forced marriage, and working with Muslim communities in Australia, AMWCHR developed pre-training modules, enhanced our online resource library, and published resources to support learning outcomes for training participants. We look forward to continuing this work building capacity in partnership.

Training & education



I thought it was a great and comprehensive training and definitely made me think about how I would approach work with a Muslim client in the future

Our commitment to strengthening sector knowledge and understanding remains an important and ongoing part of our work. This year we have invested in our education and training services as we look to expand our reach to enhance cultural understanding and literacy across various service sectors. This work is crucial to support safer engagement and inclusive services that can respond to the needs of Muslim women, children, and communities.

Over the past 12 months we have delivered capacity building training on Islam and working with Muslims communities, recognising and responding to early and forced marriage, and responding to family violence in Muslim communities to a range of diverse stakeholders. Some of these services include: Northern Legal Community Centre, OzChild, Juno, Lighthouse Foundation, Australian Red Cross, Safe and Equal, Australian Federal Police, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Education, and Victoria Police.

We believe that through investing in this training, organisations will foster shared understanding and compassion, which will contribute to a strong and inclusive sector capable of supporting all members of society in ways that are relevant and meaningful to their needs.

I wish I would have done this training many years ago, especially when I was working with families at risk of homelessness where many of the families I was supporting were Muslim

Our supporters

Department of Social Services
Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet
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Attorney-General's Department
Victorian Legal Services Board +
Commissioner
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communication &
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Families,
Fairness
and Housing

**Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER**



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts



Financials

The Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights ensures robust financial management and controls are in place which is further supported by the Board and its Finance and Risk Subcommittee. The organisation performed consistently and strongly in 2023/24 reporting an end of year surplus of \$77,847.

Income remained steady in 2024 with consistent funding from government and philanthropy, while operating costs remained stable ensuring adequate staffing, resources and infrastructure to support the delivery of our programs and initiatives. Surplus funds are redirected into supporting the organisation to continue its delivery of programs and services for our communities. While all donations received throughout the year are 100% distributed to women and children facing hardship.

Income Statement Summary

	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
<u>Income</u>		
Grant Income	2,404,787	2,434,889
Other income	65,009	35,549
TOTAL INCOME	2,698,121	2,680,123
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Staff salary, wages and oncosts	1,886,647	1,967,198
Program delivery expenses	538,347	464,854
Other operating expenses	195,280	222,464
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	2,620,274	2,654,516
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	77,847	25,607

Financial Position Summary

	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
<u>Assets</u>		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,999,668	1,431,655
Trade and other receivables	27,518	31,481
Property, plant & equipment	47,543	48,277
TOTAL ASSETS	2,074,729	1,511,413
<u>Liabilities</u>		
Trade and other payables	265,272	213,157
Deferred income	1,205,942	759,563
Employee entitlement provisions	183,681	196,730
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,654,895	1,169,426
NET ASSETS	419,834	341,987

