



# 2016 Broken Hill Communique

## NSW rural women's challenges & ideas for action – snapshot

This report captures the top five challenges based on experiences of women participating in the Broken Hill Rural Women's Gathering and builds on those identified by women attending the 2015 Glen Innes Gathering. This year's Communique also draws on data from the 1,400 women living in regional, rural and remote NSW who completed the 2016 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

### Five most often mentioned challenges.



#### Improving internet & mobile phone access (83%)

Poor access is a key challenge with many women reporting unreliable, slow speed internet with limited data – and high cost. This has social and economic impacts, affecting women's ability to socialise with friends and family, participate in their community, access services and information, and run successful rural businesses.



#### Supporting rural carers (60%)

Caring for someone who is frail, ill or has a disability is rewarding but also challenging. Rural carers face additional challenges of living long distances from respite care and health services, and often have limited access to support networks.



#### Overcoming isolation (52%)

Difficulty attending social events, seeing friends and family and accessing services, together with long travel distances that increase risk of road accidents, are all challenges associated with isolation. There is concern that rural issues are not understood in the city.



#### Accessing services (44%)

Small populations and big distances means many rural people have to drive a long way, and pay for overnight accommodation, to access services, including health, childcare, education, and professional services.



#### Drugs, alcohol & violence (27%)

Improving support for women experiencing violence, drug or alcohol addiction, and providing support networks for women who are caring for partners or children who have addiction problems, were identified as important for improving the wellbeing of NSW women.

## Ideas for action

### Challenge #1 – Improving internet and mobile phone access

Having poor access to the internet results in a wide range of challenges for people living in the bush. These include reduced opportunity for social interaction, business development, purchasing retail goods, and poorer access to health, education or emergency services. Actions women could take to help improve telecommunications access include:

- # **Advocacy:** Join existing groups who are lobbying for improved access e.g. Better Internet for Rural Regional & Remote Australia. Communicate directly with local parliamentary members.
- # **Investment:** Work directly with providers and local government to help encourage investment in local infrastructure.
- # **Support:** Develop local support groups to provide technical support for internet difficulties. More local community internet drop-in centres for people to download updates and access services.
- # **Offline communication:** Encourage community groups and government to maintain offline communications to ensure women can access key information even when internet access is poor.

### Challenge #2 – Supporting rural carers

Being a carer can be difficult even when it is also rewarding. Carers reported that caring affected their lives in many ways, ranging from having impacts on their mental and physical health, to creating relationship and financial difficulties. Actions women can take to help improve support for carers in rural areas include:

- # **Increasing formal support:** Join networks such as Carers NSW to give carers a greater voice. Work with groups such as local government, local health services, and local volunteer and community groups to create local transport, accommodation and respite resources. Establish new volunteer groups dedicated to providing support for carers.
- # **Informal support:** Establish local social networks that provide access to social support, as well as access to advice and knowledge from other carers.
- # **Employment support:** Educate employers on how they can best support employees with caring responsibilities.

### Challenge #3 – Overcoming social and geographic isolation

Many rural women report feeling socially isolated, whether finding it difficult to travel long distances to attend community events, lacking adequate phone or internet connection to keep up with friends and family remotely, or having a lack of social connections in their community. Gathering participants reported that social isolation had many consequences for them, most of which involved reduced wellbeing or quality of life.

Key suggestions for increasing social connectivity included:

- # **Increase the range of community and social gatherings** available for women to participate in, and make it easier for them to attend events. Set up a 'buddy' system/social network where women pass on news to others in their network. Ensure events are communicated ahead of time to help women organise a way of attending. Organise shared transport, including car pooling and other options.
- # **Provide training** for women to become advocates who promote the value and importance of rural Australia to politicians and key organisations.

### Challenge #4 – Accessing services other than telecommunications

Tyranny of distance is not as simple as the number of kilometres a person travels to access a particular service, but also relates to the relative quality and availability of services that are located in their communities. Lack of access to services can affect women's lives in many ways, from their health to their finances. Women discussed a range of actions to improve access to services, ranging from direct action at the local level, to advocating for change at larger scales. These included:

- # **Establishing more transport sharing options** in rural communities to help address lack of access to public transport.
- # **Advocating for improved access to telecommunications** to enable better access to online service delivery.
- # **Changing the hours of service providers** to better meet the needs of local women, particularly those who have difficulty accessing services during Monday to Friday working hours.

### Challenge #5 – Drugs, alcohol and violence

Drug and alcohol addiction and violence both in the home and the community have significant health, social and financial costs for women. This issue affects relationships with partners, children and family; affects women's health and ability to have strong and trusting social connections, and affects the financial health of the household. Actions suggested by Gathering attendees ranged from strengthening the capacity of local authorities to providing better support for women dealing with the challenges of drug and alcohol addiction or violence in their households. In particular, women felt action could be taken to:

- # **Advocate for greater provision of services** including policing, social services and health services, to provide support for those dealing with the effects of drugs, alcohol and violence.
- # **Develop networks** in which women can share their experiences and knowledge about coping with and addressing this challenge, and provide support for each other.
- # **Develop more early intervention activities** to reduce the numbers of people who develop drugs and alcohol problems.

**More information:** The full 2016 Broken Hill Communique can be downloaded from the Rural Women's Network website: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn)