

HEARING BENAMBRA

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Hearing Benambra is a project undertaken by Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) which seeks to understand the experiences and priorities of local women and gender diverse community members, identifying the issues that they wish to be brought to you - our local candidates. We have taken our survey postcards to events across Benambra and spoken with residents over the past weeks, collating the information gathered in this document.

We ask that you, as a local candidate in the upcoming state election, take the time to respond and highlight what actions you intend to take to address these concerns.

We will be sharing your responses directly with the women who left their details with us, as well as across our social media.

How was the data collected?

Members of the WHGNE team were present at events across Benambra in order to instigate conversations, answer questions, and engage in conversations about the concerns and needs of the local residents. Postcards were created to facilitate the data collection process, allowing residents to respond with key demographic information alongside what matters to them in the upcoming election. The quantitative and qualitative data was then collated by a member of staff, and has been presented in this document.

Who responded?

We had responses via the postcard survey from 33 individuals, along with two more in depth conversations with local residents. While there were 3 respondents who do not live in the Benambra electorate, they work and/or study in the region and we felt that it was relevant to include their voices in this piece. 70% of the participants were from the Towong shire, with others representing the Wodonga and Indigo shires respectively. Responses were gathered from a broad range of ages, from under 18 to 85 years of age. All of the respondents in this survey identified as women. All of the respondents in this survey identified as women.

What now?

This document contains a summary of our findings, centered on six key areas: education, housing, gender equality, transport, environment, and integrity, alongside a space for the additional contributions made by local women.

We invite each candidate to respond using this document, considering how they intend to address each issue raised if elected as the representative for Benambra in the upcoming election.

Please send your response to whealth@whealth.com.au by November 16th

EDUCATION



Education was listed as a key concern for over 60% of the respondents, with ages ranging from under 18 to over 85 showing that this is a vital policy area for the residents of Benambra. One respondent spoke about the importance of 'educating young minds', while others spoke of the value of an informed community. Another respondent asked us to consider accessibility, with apprentice wages proving a barrier to further education.

All young people must have the opportunity to access education opportunity. I have been and will remain supportive of the collaborative Wodonga Project. The Wodonga Project is an early intervention model, bringing together local schools, health, mental health, housing, family violence and other services, to provide wraparound support to young people at risk of educational disengagement, homelessness and mental ill health.

I will advocate for an education-based model Youth Foyer, to provide accommodation and support for study for young people at risk, which they can access for up to 2 years.

I will be fighting to ensure local educational resources and subjects connect with job gaps in our region. It is important for our economy that we educate young people with a focus on our regional skills gaps.

It is clear to me that early childhood education and care services and professionals need government support, investment, resourcing and attention in Benambra.

I will fight for Victorian Government support of local, integrated, community-led early childhood education and care models and infrastructure, particularly in the Upper Murray. I will advocate for Investment in early childhood education facilities in Wodonga and surrounding towns as part of existing government commitments to 50 new facilities across Victoria. And for the prioritisation of early childhood education and care jobs, now and into the future, in skills and employment planning at both state and local levels;

I will support ongoing investment and incentives, such as scholarships and subsidised training at regional universities and TAFEs, and support of subsequent career pathways, to ensure early childhood educators can live, access training and qualification, find support and work in their local communities; and a federal pay rise for early childhood educators, to bring conditions and salaries in line with those of school educators.

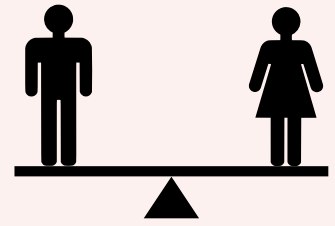
HOUSING



Housing was one of the most frequently expressed areas of concerns for the residents of Benambra, being a key area for almost 75% of the respondents. The lack of affordable rental properties across the electorate is intensified in outlying communities where housing support services provide limited outreach. We heard stories of aging parents being forced to camp in their children's front yard due to the lack of suitable housing. As one woman wrote, "housing is a basic right and must be addressed!"

Everyone has a right to a roof over their head. I will advocate for investment in Beyond Housing and Not-for-Profit partnerships in delivering community-led solutions for secure, affordable housing for local communities; push for a State Government commitment to set a target for social, worker and essential housing in each region of Benambra over a rolling 10-year period; planning incentives for and investment in integrated housing developments and social and public housing for Wodonga and surrounds; investment in a Wodonga youth foyer to support young people at risk of homelessness; retention of modular housing in the Upper Murray to support future housing needs; and support investment in community led planning to support older residents in downsizing.

GENDER EQUALITY



The issue of Gender Equality was considered a key policy area for over 45% of respondents, with particularly strong responses from women under 35 living in Benambra. We heard about the need for more Family Violence education and outreach in the community of Tallangatta, with community members unaware of resources to support their own safety. Another respondent spoke of the lack of gender equality in healthcare, and a need for the conversation about women's health to include menopause.

International and Australian research links gender inequality, gender stereotypes, sexist jokes and harmful cultural norms that express a belief that women are not equal with men, with gender-based violence. I will work with the community on ways to increase awareness of existing services for women's safety. I will be active in any working groups at government level that look to address these concerns, providing feedback from the Benambra community, and lobby hard for additional resources especially for outreach services. I will fight for Specialist Family Violence Court services offering both victim-survivors and perpetrators purpose-built environments designed to maximise their safety, such as separate entrances, safe waiting spaces and interview rooms and remote witness facilities. I will also advocate to secure the Specialist Family Violence Court and Legal Aid Office for north-east Victoria.

I will be a conduit between health department officials and the community on concerns around conversation about menopause and other women's health issues. I am keenly aware of the need to set an example of inclusion and respect and have ensured my website and social media pages are free of sexist, racist or inappropriate comments. And I'm committing to using my platforms in ways that model respect and care for all people in our communities.

Victoria was the first state in Australia to legislate a Gender Equality Act. And it was designed not only to guide behaviour and culture across our public sector, but also to promote broader cultural change in our communities. It's something that I embrace as a valuable guide, as a candidate working towards representing the diversity of our community in parliament.

TRANSPORT



The issue of Transport was chosen by 45% of respondents as mattering to them, because “keeping community connected in rural/isolated areas is important”. The lack of public transport in outlying areas of Benambra was a concern for residents of the Towong and Indigo shires, and the lack of reliability when travelling to Melbourne was cited as causing significant stress for respondents. The condition of roads was also mentioned by multiple residents, and is of particular concern following our recent weather events.

There exists huge potential for more accessible, reliable and connected public transport across Benambra to support local people to not only access work, education, medical care and participate in public life, but also to reduce living costs associated with car use. Reliable and sustainable freight transport and logistics models, particularly in the form of rail, are essential for sustaining our local economies and enabling communities to meet their needs.

If elected I will work to :

- Establish a Regional Transport Advisory Group to provide advice on improving bus and rail services across Benambra.
- Advocate for greater bus connections between urban and regional bus services and collaborate with my cross border colleagues to ensure better integration connectivity for border residents.
- Fight for investment in our regional roads, pushing for reinstatement of the Fixing Country Roads program and adequate funding to repair and make our roads safe.
- Advocate for a more frequent train service with adequate carriage capacity and hold V/Line to account on punctuality and reliability of the service.

ENVIRONMENT



The Environment was chosen as a key area for over 70% of respondents, with a broad variety of input as to what that meant to them: support for solar energy, housing developments that encourage self-sufficiency, more playgrounds to encourage outdoor play with kids, and better and safer footpaths. The environment was an issue that drew responses from Benambra residents between 18 and 85, highlighting how vitally important this issue is across demographics.

With Benambra communities impacted by bushfires and flooding in the past three years, it's critical they are supported to generate and store their own renewable energy to build resilience to disaster.

Energy resilience will become increasingly important in Benambra, as these natural disasters become more prevalent.

I will lobby hard for the government of the day to not only invest in community renewables projects but also take ambitious, evidence-based action on climate change.

Together we must ensure that as we transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewables, regional communities like Benambra are at the forefront of the action and share in the economic benefits of a renewables revolution.

I will:

- Support an ambitious renewable energy target and dedicated renewable energy plan to build our economy and provide jobs for regional Victoria
- Support an emissions reduction target of at least 75% by 2030
- Support investment in local community energy projects to build resilience and enable communities to better respond to disaster and lead their own recovery journeys
- Increased domestic battery subsidies with interest free loans, to expand access to batteries for lower income households.
- No new fossil fuel projects and the phasing out of existing fossil fuel projects, with clear transition pathways to support alternative jobs for workers in fossil fuel industries, particularly those in regional and rural areas.
- Investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Benambra and in tourist hot spots and electric vehicle rebates.

INTEGRITY



Over 55% of respondents selected integrity as one of the core issues that mattered to them in the upcoming election, highlighting the importance of having a representative government with accountability. One woman from Towong felt so strongly about this issue she circled it repeatedly, and commented that “without integrity, the rest doesn’t matter”.

Transparency and honesty are key to the democratic process. The community deserves to know our elected representatives are held to account and that taxpayer money is invested wisely and in the public’s interest.

- I will push for the increased, secure, adequate funding of our state’s anti-corruption body, the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC), and Victorian Ombudsman. And I will also advocate for budgetary independence of IBAC. It is vital that funding for IBAC be independent and not at the whim of the government of the day.
- I will ensure our elected representatives are held to account and that taxpayer money is invested wisely and in the public interest.
- As an Independent I am not beholden to a party, or lobby group or other factional interests. As an independent I have the freedom to question everything across party lines.

AND MORE...

In gathering information from the residents from Benambra, we gave space for women to contribute further issues that mattered to them.

We heard about the importance of farming being a part of the political discourse, the significance of prioritising healthcare and funding mental health support, and the importance of Indigenous rights and voices in Victorian politics.

And perhaps most importantly - how are you assisting women, gender diverse, elderly & vulnerable people in our rural/remote area?

I will engage in the process of pathway to Treaty. I understand that Treaty is an opportunity to reframe how the people of Benambra all view ourselves and our culture.

- **I will support the aspirations of Victoria's First Peoples.**
- **I will work with Benambra's First Peoples to deliver long-term, sustainable solutions through Treaty.**
- **I will also continue to engage with the service providers to our First Nations people and advocate for secure funding and support that will provide opportunities for advancement.**
- **I will work with First Nations People across the region.**

Finally, we have a vibrant and diverse culture in Benambra with refugees and migrants adding to the richness of our region. I will work with groups such as Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council and others groups to advocate for their concerns in Parliament.