

HEARING BENAMBRA

Hearing Benambra

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.

My perspective is informed by that experience and the values of the Animal Justice Party--Kindness, Equality, Rationality, Non-violence--and my intention is to continue to advocate for vulnerable members of our community, whether elected or not, whenever I can.

I see education as a human right and a key to providing more opportunities for people.

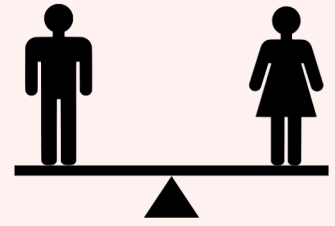
HOUSING



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!"

A human right and one whose existence is under threat by current economic dynamics which are making it unaffordable, forcing more people into homelessness. This is shameful development. More public housing with regulations amended to allow transitional accommodation must be actioned.

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.

There is much more work to be done and confronting patriarchal systems and culture is part of this. The fact that this is still an issue in 2022 is unacceptable.

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.

Public infrastructure is essential to allow a greater number of options, as is thinking differently about how transportation will occur in the future. (See Jeremy Rivkin’s presentation ‘The Third Industrial Revolution’ and the information on the ‘sharing economy’—where vehicle ownership is diminished and autonomous vehicles driven by artificial intelligence systems that are shared gain popularity)

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.

Urgent changes are needed to repair broken ecosystems, threatened species, increase biodiversity and to address anthropogenic climate change. Decarbonization needs to be given high priority.

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”.

A value in Benambra and Indi, championed by both former MP Cathy McGowan and Helen Haines, in which with them I am in lockstep.

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?

We heard about the importance of farming being a part of the political discourse

Indeed. Farming faces many challenges and many people on the land struggle in their enterprises. Disruptive systems have emerged and will continue to grow in response to market changes. I don't think life on the land is going to get easier for many. However, being aware of these changes and disruptions may provide options for primary producers to plan ahead. These may be difficult discussions, but they need to be had and not avoided.

The significance of prioritising healthcare and funding mental health support

Certainly these are important and services need to be robust. But so too does primary prevention and early intervention. Otherwise we risk being reactive and capitulating to a never-ending demand.

The importance of Indigenous rights and voices in Victorian politics

Certainly. Reconciliation Victoria provides a clear path of self-determination for First Nations People and I and my Party will support this.

How are you assisting women

As above, I hope my commitment is clearly articulated.

Gender diverse

People need to feel comfortable 'in their own skin' and deserve the same rights, protections and supports afforded to all in our community.

Elderly & vulnerable people in our rural/remote area

As someone who has cared for an elderly mother and seen our aged care system struggling against dysfunction, there is much to be overhauled. If people are living longer, we need to provide education from an early age about how to live healthier and independently into later life. Our care systems are chronically underfunded and understaffed.

I will add one more to your list

Gambling harm

There is an intersection here with homelessness, financial insecurity and domestic violence, and how women over 50 years of age are now the largest number of homeless people represented. Women may be victims of partners who gamble but the converse is also true. Gambling industries target different demographics: online gambling apps targets young men but electronic gambling machines (EGMs) in so-called 'clubs' are targeted at older women. Their addictive nature, on par with cocaine, is well-documented and there is good research available from Deakin University, led by Prof Samantha Thomas into the social costs and intersections. I remain eternally hostile to the erosive harm pedaled by this predatory industry as 'fun.'