

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23





FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the 2022/23 Annual Report. It is my honour and privilege to chair this organisation and present our work over the last 12 months to you. We are at a critical point in our organisation's history. The needs of our community have changed, and we must change with them. We have spent the last few years preparing for that change through getting our policy, structures and governance in the right place and ready for our evolution.

By now many members, war widows, veterans' families and those in the veteran community ought to be noticing these changes, with increased communication, greater transparency and accountability, and more opportunities to connect to each other and with the organisation, either online or in person. I am proud of the work that we have delivered over the last couple of years and how far we have come as an organisation in such a short period of time.

One of the most important roles for a board is to look ahead, be future-focused and guide the organisation along its strategic pathway. With our next big change upon us, I want to assure members, war widows and the veteran community that although the public name of our organisation will change and we are confident the timing of this is right, our commitment and service to war widows does not change – it stays the same. In fact, ensuring Australia never forgets its war widows or the families of veterans is what our evolution is about.

We thank our members for their continued support and strong engagement with us as we take our rightful place as a leader in the veteran community. To learn more about why we are changing, I encourage you to scan the QR code and watch the video prepared by our team explaining our why.

*Why are we
changing?*



TRICIA HOBSON
BOARD CHAIR



CEO & OPERATIONS REPORT

Last year our operations returned to ‘normal’ levels following the pandemic. There was a step up in activity across all areas, from commemorations to programs and services, media and communications, and strategic plan implementation.

Our output over the year was significant from a small core team of staff operating across all areas of the organisation, and I couldn’t be prouder of everything they do every day to support our members and veteran families. Over the course of the 12 months, we strengthened our recruitment practices and worked hard to ensure that we have the right people in the right roles in the organisation to deliver to and for the families of veterans.

Our achievements over the 12 months are numerous, but by far one of the biggest was the establishment and delivery of the inaugural War Widows Day in NSW.

The delivery of War Widows Day 2022 was a moment of pride and honour. It was a day that we could come together and acknowledge the decades of effort and thousands of voices that had led to this moment. Everywhere I looked on War Widows Day, I saw strong, resilient women who stood stoic, proud and tall while supporting each other.

I was reminded of this again just two months later when our volunteers handwrote over 2,000 Christmas cards for war widows around the State. And again over the last 12 months, when volunteers made nearly 7,000 calls to socially isolated war widows through our Friendship Line and Birthday Calls, providing comfort, care and peer connection.

The gift our community provides to each other through their friendship, support and unspoken understanding is powerful and something that isn’t found anywhere else. It is on that foundation that we build the next layer of our organisation.

2022/23 HIGHLIGHTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

The year just gone was incredibly busy for the team and we achieved a lot. Over the course of the year we have:

Improved the operations of the Friendship Line and Birthday Calls service.

The Friendship Line is a popular AWWNSW service. Originally set up to help combat the social isolation felt by regional war widows, the Friendship Line now provides a sense of community and is an opportunity for war widows to share their stories and seek emotional support and comfort from one another.

This year we improved the operations of the service, resulting in more war widows being added to the program and more calls being delivered. Volunteer support, recruitment and checking also improved throughout the year.

This work resulted in more than 7,000 calls being made throughout the year, a reduction in the waiting list and an additional 10 volunteers recruited. More information on the Friendship Line can be found on page 18 of this report.

Reinvigorated the activities of guild and social clubs

AWWNSW has a network of 50 Guild and Social Clubs throughout Sydney and New South Wales, providing a place for war widows to meet and join with others who have been through similar experiences. Last financial year, we focused on reinvigorating the activities of the club network by bringing clubs together from different locations, supporting special activities and anniversaries, and visiting and engaging with 40 clubs, including 23 in regional NSW.

2022/23 also saw two clubs reopen following the investments we have made in improving their operations and support.

Our work supported the delivery of more than 750 club gatherings throughout the financial year across the state. In total, 1,073 war widows are connected to our guild and social clubs, ranging in age from their 50s to well over 100 years! More information on our clubs program and achievements throughout the year can be found on page 17 of the report.

Increased financial support to our clubs

Our clubs are the foundation of our organisation and provide our direct connection to our community, so we know it is incredibly important to keep bring them together and supporting the costs of their gatherings. Throughout the financial year we removed caps on annual allowances provided to clubs, and applied for \$58,000 in local club grants to fund their gatherings, doing our best to keep costs of gatherings as minimal of possible for war widows. These funds cover the costs of transport to and from club meetings for elderly war widows, and also cover room hire and catering.

Club funding was also boosted through the War Widows Day funding campaign, *Buy a Widow a Coffee* which raised \$1,525 and was allocated across all 50 clubs, buying war widows coffee, tea and morning tea.

Our sincere gratitude to each and every donor who contributed to this campaign for their generous support and contributions.

Advocacy

It may have taken more than 70 years but now War Widows in NSW have a day on the commemorative calendar that is about honouring them, their service and their sacrifices for Australia. Declared on our founder's birthday, 19 October, the annual War Widows Day is the culmination of decades of work and advocacy. This wasn't our only achievement on the advocacy front for the year but it was by far the most significant.

This financial year we also advocated on behalf of war widows and veterans' families across all levels of government ensuring their voices are heard in all areas impacting them, including changes to the veteran's legislative framework. We have also represented the interests of individual members and war widows where there were issues with accessing DVA entitlements, including GP acceptance of Gold Cards and issues accessing Gold Card-related concessions.

More information on our advocacy activities throughout the year can be found on page 24 of this report.

Commenced the delivery of social work services and case management services

Supporting those families in need of service connection, navigation and assisting them through times of crisis or need is what it is all about. This year, we employed a qualified and experienced Social Worker and commenced the delivery of social work services.

Though the service has recently been established, throughout the year our Social Worker assisted 23 families of veterans, including widows, navigating challenging circumstances, and accessing support and services. Our Social Worker was also able to resolve 20 complex issues raised with us by war widows and veteran families throughout the year.

Commenced a new program called Our Space

Last financial year, we started piloting new models and pathways toward social connection, specifically targeting non-war widows through the Our Space program. Currently, the Our Space Program has two main instruments for social connection: a Facebook group with almost 100 members, and social events taking place across Sydney and Canberra. Through this program, we are seeking to provide avenues for peer connection and social support to the families of veterans.

The program is targeted at the families of veterans and widows under the age of 50. It is in its early stages of development and will mature over the coming years.

Started introducing ourselves to the families of deceased widows and veterans

We have commenced writing to the homes of deceased widows and veterans to introduce ourselves to their families, offering our support and condolences. This initiative aims to ensure that families of veterans and war widows know they are not alone in their time of grief and loss and that we are there to walk with them.

Throughout the year we wrote to just over 300 homes, and this resulted in a small number of direct engagements (7) and connections to our social worker.

Supported members and veterans' families in their engagement with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Like last financial year, this year we continued to support members, widows and veteran families connect with the Royal Commission by providing thought leadership, delivering town halls to explore experiences and test our thinking on our advocacy within the Royal Commission and making direct referrals to the Royal Commission and the Defence and Veterans' Legal Service.

As an organisation, we have now made two submissions to the Commission, with the most recent submission delivered in October 2022.

Our submissions have helped raise the voices of widows and families impacted by veteran suicide. We hope, in turn, recommendations made by the Commission will have veterans and their families at the centre of future support services.

We have also been directly engaging with the Commission and the Commissioners through active participation in the Royal Commission's Stakeholder Reference Group.

Increased collaboration and cooperation with the veteran sector

We know we co-exist in the veteran community with other support organisations. We aim to strengthen how we collaborate and cooperate with these organisations to make sure the families of veterans get the support they need, when they need it.

This financial year, we engaged with the veteran sector to facilitate better cooperation and collaboration at all levels of the system. For example, we built and repaired relationships with key stakeholders, including RSL NSW and Legacy Club Services, and we established new networks and relationships with other veteran-based organisations such as Invictus Australia, RSL ACT, and RSL National and RSL Lifecare.

Continued to be a trusted voice on issues affecting war widows and veterans' families

In the last 12 months, we undertook 25 separate media engagements covering seven different topics across radio, print and broadcast media with average potential reach of 5.2 million people. Our media engagement saw us represent the interests of war widows and raise awareness about matters affecting war widows and veteran families.

Concluding remarks

2023/23 was a great year as we established our team, learned what the organisation required to succeed, learn about its members and community and started our modernisation initiatives.

When I look at where we were when I started in November 2020, the organisation today looks very different. It continues to go from strength to strength and while there is a lot more to do, to be done and many improvements that can be made it is important to acknowledge and appreciate the distance we have travelled in this short period.

When you do so you can see we have truly stabilised the organisation; we have a plan for the future and we are executing it. We have ever-improving systems and structures in place that enable us to deliver and do more and better for members, widows and veterans families. We know where our gaps are and we are working to fill those.

I am so very proud of how everyone on this journey with us this year, from staff and directors to members, contractors and volunteers, has come around our mission and purpose and helped us achieve so much in just 12 months. A very sincere thank you.

RENEE WILSON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



ABOUT OUR CEO

Renee joined AWWNSW in 2020 to lead its development into an organisation that supports all veteran families. Renee has made a significant impact since joining, and has been pivotal in setting and implementing our future direction. Renee joined the organisation following a career in the public sector, where she led several significant projects and legal matters that focused on delivering positive and strategic change within government for organisations such as NSW Crown Solicitor's Office and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Renee has served on the Boards of the Australian International Military Games (Sydney Invictus Games), the Advisory Council for the National Centre of Veteran's Health at Concord Hospital and the Veteran Community Business Chamber. Renee also sits on the ACT Government's Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and Families and was a member of the Federal Government's Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service.



Renee holds a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) and a Bachelor of International Business from Griffith University. She also holds a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice from ANU and a Graduate Certificate in Business (Public Sector Management) from QUT. She has also recently successfully completed Strategic Perspectives in not-for-profit Management at Harvard Business School.

Renee is the spouse of an Afghanistan veteran who was severely wounded during operations in 2010 and she has been a passionate advocate for veterans and their families ever since. Recently she shared her experiences with members. An extract is below.

“

For the last 13 years I, personally, have been living with the aftermath of the Afghanistan War. My husband, Gary, and our two children live in the shadow of that war. Our children will never know their father absent a brain injury or chronic pain. While that breaks my heart at times, I remind myself of my gratitude that they exist at all, because Gary shouldn't have survived the injuries he sustained.

While Gary has no memory of the Black Hawk accident that nearly claimed his life, I remember everything.

My motivation here at AWWNSW is simple: to bring what we do and how we do it to a new generation of women and veterans families that need it. Since starting here I have been utterly inspired by how members help others, whose loved ones are gone, manage the burdens, carry the load, and work through their grief. I can tell you first-hand this gift is needed today, well before a veteran passes away. I can also tell you that so many other spouses of veterans out there, like me, need an organisation like this now more than ever before. Because no family member of a veteran ought to ever feel alone, insignificant and left behind. A veteran shouldn't have to pass away before their families are supported, and that is why the changes we are making at AWWNSW are so needed and important, and I am so passionate about this organisation.

GOVERNANCE REPORT



AUSTRALIAN
WAR WIDOWS NSW LTD



BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

Over the last financial year, the Board has maintained a strong financial position and robust governance standards. In addition to governing the organisation and ensuring the implementation of its strategy, the Board has:

- Lifted the standard of board reporting, resulting in the Board's ability to make better and more informed decisions.
- Lifted the standard of governance, financial and asset management and reporting.
- Reduced staff turnover and stabilised the organisation's operations.
- Documented and published a comprehensive plan to guide advocacy work.
- Increased media exposure and activity to raise awareness of the organisation, its work and the unmet needs of members, war widows and veteran families.
- Reviewed compliance with ACNC governance standards and implemented policy changes as a result.

Our Board takes its role very seriously. Our Board's Charter and Code of Conduct can be found here:



Over the last 12 months, the Board has met seven times, and the Finance Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC) has met seven times, as has the Investment Advisory Committee.

The Board also welcomed three new directors – Ms Bree Till, Ms Lynne Sullivan and Dr Rachel Martin – who were elected to the Board at the last AGM.

As with many organisations, the composition of the board and the leadership at management level are critical to the success of the organisation. The Board has lifted the standards relating to director election and nomination, resulting in a good mix of skills and experiences. The Board has a clear understanding of the skills and experiences it has and those it needs to guide it into the future. Maturing over the last 12 months, the Board will continue to ensure accountability, strong financial management, strategy execution and strong governance.

The Directors all give their time so freely, with each of them bringing a range of expertise, skills and knowledge, and AWWNSW is grateful for their time and commitment.

AWWNSW is a company limited by guarantee, and its constitution can be found here:



ABOUT OUR BOARD

Ms Tricia Hobson, Board Chair

Appointed Director; partner with the law firm DLA Piper; former partner at Norton Rose Fulbright. Tricia served as the Norton Rose Fulbright's first female Global Chairman after spending more than 6 years on the firm's global board and Australia's local board. Tricia is a well-respected authority on ESG-related matters, insurance, boards and governance.

Tricia has numerous skills and qualifications including CEO Global Program:

A Transformational Journey; a joint school program with China Europe International Business School, Shanghai (Module I); Wharton, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (Module II – Strategic finance); and IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Barcelona (Module III) (2017/2018); Follow up program in Silicon Valley (July 2019); Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), Company Directors Course, 2015; Harvard Business School, Authentic Leadership Course, 2015; University of New South Wales, Bachelor of Science BSc, Physics and Mathematics major, 1990; University of New South Wales, Bachelor of Laws LLB, 1990.

Tricia is pictured here (right) with life member Norma Arden (middle) and Stuart Clark, Deputy Chair (left)



Mr Stuart Clark AM FAICD, Deputy Chair

Appointed Director and Deputy Chair; a solicitor and former partner in Clayton Utz, a large Australian law firm, for some 30 years. He is a former President of the Law Council of Australia and has served as both director and chair of a number of not-for-profit boards. Stuart is currently Chair of VRA Rescue NSW Limited. He is involved in a range of other activities in the community, including serving as a captain in the NSW Rural Fire Service and an Adjunct Professor of Law at Macquarie University Law School. Stuart is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. His late mother, Helen Clark, was a member of the War Widow's Guild. Stuart holds a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (Hons) from Macquarie University.

Ms Lynne Boyd, War Widow

Elected Director and member; member, Vietnam Veterans & Peacemakers Association; President, City Saturday Guild Club, and now

Co-ordinator since becoming Social Club Friendship Line Volunteer. Successfully completed Board Director training with the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Lynne holds her high school certificate, and has undergone the following key training courses throughout her career: hospitality training, HR and payroll training, and governance training for not-for-profit directors. Lynne is pictured here (right) with war widow, member and volunteer Jenny Ware (left).



ABOUT OUR BOARD

Ms Jennifer Collins AM

Appointed Director and member; past member of Finance, Risk & Audit Committee; Contemporary Widows Committee; Extensive experience in executive leadership roles for State and Federal Governments, with postgraduate qualifications in health, management and counselling; Member, Australian Institute of Company Directors. Jennifer has been actively involved in the ex-service community since 2004 and is the Chair of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway Foundation. Jennifer holds a Master of Management and a Graduate Diploma in Interpersonal Skills and Counselling. She is also a Registered Nurse and Midwife. Jennifer is pictured here on the right with life member Meg Green (centre) and State President Queen Dunbar (left)



MAJGEN Susan Coyle AM CSC DSM

Elected Director and member; MAJGEN Coyle is a senior officer in the Australian Army and member of AWWNSW. MAJGEN Coyle initially joined the army as a reservist in 1987 but, following training at the Australian Defence Force Academy, was commissioned into the Royal Australian Corps of Signals in 1992. She has commanded the 104th Signal Squadron (2003–04), 17th Signal Regiment (2009–10), Task Group Afghanistan (2015) and the 6th Combat Support Brigade (2017–19), and has deployed on operations to East Timor, the Solomon Islands and Afghanistan. She was appointed Commander Joint Task Force 633, with responsibility for all Australian operations in the Middle East, from January to November 2020. MAJGEN Coyle was the Head of Information Warfare for the Australian Defence Force and Department of Defence, and is now the Commander of Forces Command.

MAJGEN Coyle holds numerous qualifications including a Bachelor of Science; a Master of Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College; a Master of Organisational Development and Strategic Human Resource Management from the University of New England; and a Master of Management in Defence Studies from the University of Canberra. She is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Australian Command and Staff College, Distinguished Graduate of the United States Army War College, the United States Combined Joint Force Land Component Commander Course, has completed the National and International Security course for Senior Executives at Harvard Business School. MAJGEN Coyle is pictured here (right) with State President Queen Dunbar (left).



ABOUT OUR BOARD

Ms Lynne Sullivan, War Widow

Elected Director and member. Lynne is a War Widow who holds an academic qualification in science. Lynne's husband, Patrick, served with the Australian Army in the Royal Australian Engineers for 25 years, seeing active service in Borneo and Vietnam. Mrs Sullivan has participated in focus groups and social events, and currently assists with meeting organisation within the Younger Members Social Club. As a member of the North Ryde RSL War Widows Social Club, she assists with meetings and outings for its predominantly senior WW2 widows and visits the meeting of two other War Widows Social Clubs. Lynne is pictured here (left) with member, war widow and volunteer Fran Brock (right).



Ms Bree Till, War Widow

Elected Director of the Board and member. An Afghanistan War Widow, Bree is an experienced educator, mental health clinician, youth mentor, artist, lived experience advisor, paediatric palliative disability and aged carer, community volunteer and mother. Bree has been a passionate advocate for war widows and veterans' families since losing her husband, Brett, to the Afghanistan War.

Bree holds a Master of Art Therapy; Graduate Diploma of Counselling (2019); Bachelor of Art Education (2006); Certificate IV Workplace Training & Assessment (2004); Certificate III Frontline Management (2004); Certificate III Multimedia (2007). Bree is pictured (left) with Jessie Vasey's great niece Ms Pru Bennett (right).



Dr Rachel Martin, Veteran Spouse

Rachel Martin is an intensive care doctor, holding qualifications in medicine, microbiology, palliative care and science communication. Rachel is a passionate advocate for veterans and their families, serving on advisory bodies including the Commonwealth Government's Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service.

Rachel grew up in a military family, and she experienced first-hand the impacts of service life on veterans' families and the important role her mother played to enable her father's service. Rachel is married to a veteran wounded during the Afghanistan War. Rachel holds a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology and Immunology (2009); Graduate Diploma in Science Communication; (2010) Cross Cultural Training Programme (2010); Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (2015); Clinical Diploma in Palliative Care Medicine (2020). Rachel is pictured here with her husband, Curtis McGrath OAM, at an Our Space function.



OUR STRATEGY

March 2023 marked the two year anniversary of AWWNSW's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan. Implementing the strategic plan is an ongoing activity. The focus of the 2021/22 financial year was on providing stability within the organisation and resourcing it appropriately to facilitate growth. The second year (2022/23) was about trying new initiatives and ideas to see what worked within the organisation. This coming year (2023/24) is about improving, evolving and growing. The 2023/24 financial year will also see the organisation review its strategic plan to ensure it still suits the needs of the organisation and meets our charitable and company purpose.

Strategy overview

AWWNSW's challenge is to build an organisation that addresses current system gaps, and is future-focused while continuing to honour and respect where it has come from. To fully realise the potential of this organisation and embrace its future, a series of work had to be undertaken. This was organised in our strategic plan into five work areas and four goals.

Our strategic goals

Our goals over the course of our strategic plan are to:

1. Grow the organisation, engagement and strategic partnerships.
2. Be a leading voice for veterans' families in Australia.
3. Maintain effective investment and financial management.
4. Become a model citizen in the veteran support sector.

Strategic pillars

Work under our strategy is organised under the following areas:

1. *Brand and identity* – ensuring we have a brand that reflects the support base, and improving our communications and engagement.
2. *Programs and Services* – refreshing our existing offer and building new programs to meet current and emerging need. Establishing partnerships to enhance support to support base.

3. *Advocacy and recognition* – advocating for the support base, engaging the support base in that advocacy, and building community awareness about the role of veteran's families and their needs.

4. *Finance and investment management* – reviewing and improving our financial management practices with a view to sustainability in service delivery model, and developing and implementing a new funding plan.

5. *Governance and structure* – ensuring the organisation has the right people in the right roles working effectively, and has the right structures in place to achieve its strategic objective.

This is the plan that we have been implementing since March 2021. Now, halfway through, the Board will review not only progress, but the plan itself to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, and will update the plan if necessary, noting not only progress but changes in the strategic environment. An update on progress to date is noted on the next page and a link to our strategy on a page is below.

AWWNSW 2021–2025
Strategic plan
on a page



While activities continue under each pillar, 58 per cent of the activities in the Strategic Plan have been implemented since 2021 and are now classed as ongoing activities, another 27 per cent of activities are in progress, and 15 per cent are yet to commence.

Key activities implemented and ongoing include:

- All of the activities under the advocacy pillar. During the year AWWNSW published its first advocacy plan, which seeks to prioritise advocacy activity based on community needs.
- Most of the activities under the financial pillar, including the reviewing and implementation of AWWNSW's investment policy, director upskilling, ACNC compliance and enhancing annual reporting.
- Most of the activities under the Governance pillar, including recruiting staff, restructuring the organisation, reviewing our constitution and organisational memberships.

Key activities currently in progress include:

- Work under the branding and identity pillar, including the brand update, streamlining membership processing and experience, and enhancing communications and marketing.
- Work under the programs and services pillar, including reviewing and refreshing existing programs and services, diversifying delivery options, and establishing new partnerships and collaborations.
- Work under the financial pillar aimed at increasing the number and volume of revenue streams to sustain the activities of the organisation and support its growth.

Key activities yet to commence include:

- Formalising case management and social work function.
- Structuring our approach to volunteer support, management, recruitment and roles.
- Reviewing the membership model and options for the organisation.

Priorities for 2023/24

Year 3 of the strategic plan is focused on improvement and growth as the organisation embraces its new charitable purpose.

Priorities for 2023/24 financial year include:

- Delivering on the brand update to reflect the strategy in the brand name and open the opportunities to the organisation.
- Developing a funding model for the organisation, including a funding plan to ensure responsible spending and sustainable growth.
- Demonstrating our commitment to good governance through responsible resourcing, professionalisation and modernisation initiatives.
- Reviewing the model of membership to ensure that the options that exist best serve the needs of members and the organisation's charitable purpose.

"The changes we are embarking on as an organisation are hard, but we can do this together because at AWWNSW we are leaders. Leadership requires commitment and courage, and we'll act with both as we take these next steps and write this next chapter in the organisation's history."

OUR STRATEGIC JOURNEY

How our strategy developed

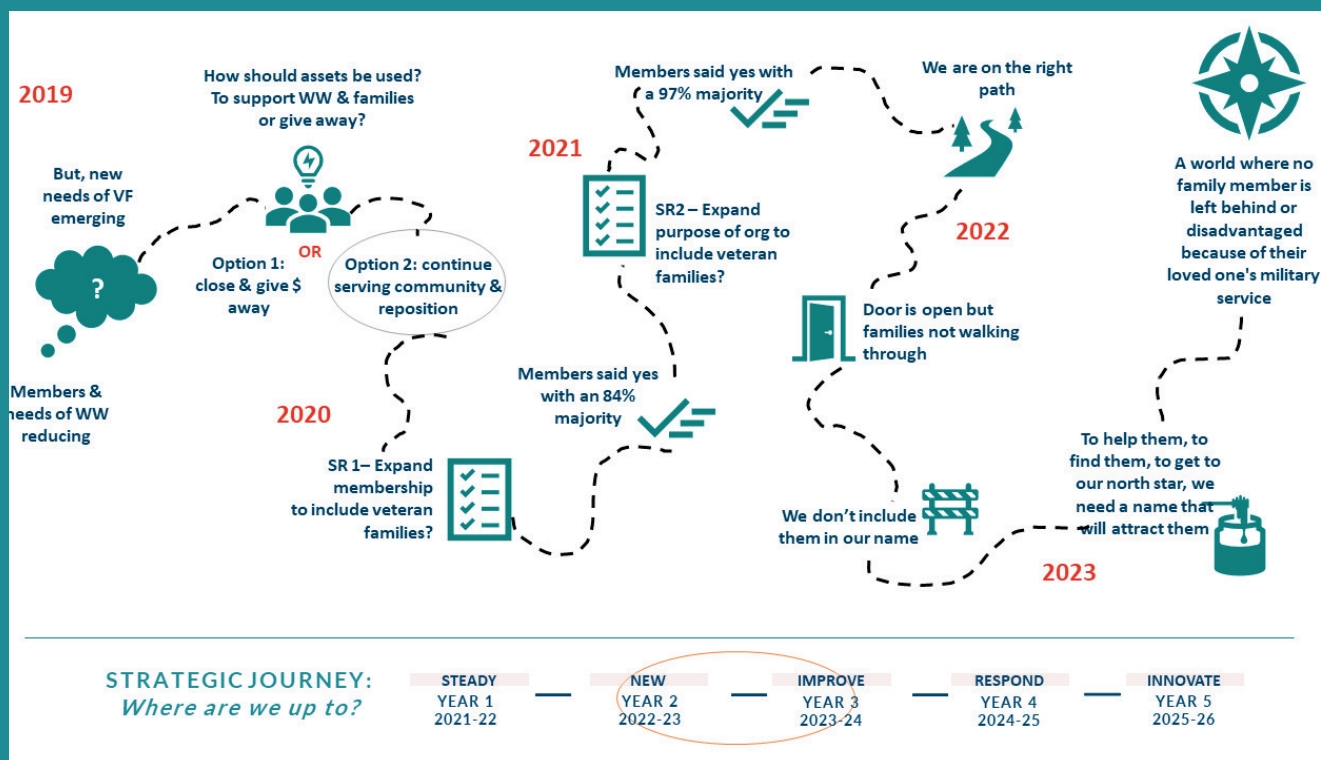
In 2019, the then board was assessing the future of the organisation and noted the projections in member numbers and in the population of war/defence widows in Australia. A fundamental decision faced the board: does it trigger the winding up provisions within the constitution or does it reposition itself to continue its mission? Continuing on its mission meant that it needed to go where the need was emerging, and expand its membership and charitable purpose to use what it had to fill gaps in the veteran community sector.

With a significant pool of assets and the absence of an organisation that would be able to fulfil the organisation's mission and continue to deliver emotional and social support as well as advocacy, and having regard to the strategic environment and the unmet needs of families of veterans, the Board decided that in service of the company's mission, it would seek to fill gaps in the veteran community sector and provide support to the families of veterans before the point of a veteran's death.

The first steps along this journey involved proposing two special resolutions – both of which passed with over a 90 per cent majority and expanded the company's membership provisions and the purpose of the organisation. In casting their votes in favour of these changes, members spoke of the need for the legacy of this organisation to continue, they spoke of wanting to extend the hand of friendship to others who find themselves un-and-under supported.

Importantly, they spoke of their will to see this organisation continue well into the future. This gave the Board and management confidence that the ideals on which the strategic plan was built were supported by the majority of members. That is, the organisation will not wind up and it will expand and support the families of veterans before they are bereaved.

Putting AWWNSW on the pathway toward ensuring that no veteran family is left behind or disadvantaged because of their loved one's service.



ACTIVITY REPORT





ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Over the course of the financial year, we have improved and expanded our programs and services. The infographic above provides a snapshot of the output for the programs and services provided in 2022/ 23.

Across all areas there has been a significant step-up in activity. Most notably, there have been:

- An additional 1,872 calls made on the Friendship Line
- An additional 156 people receiving Friendship Line calls
- An additional 10 people volunteering their time on the Friendship Line
- An additional 1,200 welfare calls made by staff
- An additional 67 people now registered and using community transport.
- An additional 98 people engaged through Our Space.

These numbers speak to the heart of AWWNSW's values: providing support, connection and empowerment.

The main concentration of activity over the course of the year was in the established program areas. New programs were established, but built on the same core foundations of social connection, peer support and social work.

The performance of existing programs is expected to improve as frameworks guiding the delivery of the programs are documented and formalised, and data tracked.

Growth areas for programs are in the broader veteran family space. Work has already commenced with the introduction of the Our Space program. This program is in its very early stages and is expected to grow and mature with the needs of the families it is connecting.

New areas being explored through the generous support of a benefactor, Mrs Pauline Hutcheson, include leadership and personal development training to improve career outcomes for the spouses of veterans. This program will expand through the provision of an additional three scholarships in 2023/24. Thank you Pauline ♥

GUILD AND SOCIAL CLUBS

Our Guild and Social Clubs play important roles in connecting war widows and veterans families. The clubs provide an opportunity to meet face-to-face and connect with others who have been through similar experiences. AWWNSW maintains a network of 63 Guild and Social clubs around NSW, engaging 1073 war widows through 750 meetings/ gatherings throughout the year. Through this program, AWWNSW is seeking to increase engagement with social and guild clubs in order to deliver broader health and wellbeing benefits to senior war widows.

Club Activity 2022/23

Throughout the last 12 months, AWWNSW has been engaging heavily with its network of guild and social clubs. Supporting the operations of monthly meetings for 63 clubs, refreshing and updating membership lists, supporting special events, and applying for and winning club grants to support the costs of delivery and offsetting expenses for clubs.

Key to supporting the guild and social clubs is coordinating gatherings, funding their meetings and events, and assisting elderly and frail war widows to attend gatherings through the funding of transport. The transport program administers more than \$30,000 annually to support war widows to attend monthly gatherings. support for war widows to attend monthly gatherings.

A key initiative under this program over the last 12 months has been to connect more war widows with community transport to expand their access to funded transport beyond just attending clubs or AWWNSW events. This involves working with war widows one-on-one and getting them connected and registered with My Aged Care. Throughout the year, 67 war widows were registered and connected with community transport.

Funding the guild and social clubs involves not only transport assistance and centralised allowances and fund raising as noted on page [x] but also applying for grants to assist the clubs in funding room hire, catering and transport.

Throughout the year we applied for 26 Club Grants valued at \$58,000 to assist six AWWNSW clubs. Up from eight Club Grants from last financial year. Connection with the clubs is fundamental to their operation, keeping them informed about matters affecting them, providing in person support and engaged with the organisation. Our staff undertake a program of outreach involving regular visits to clubs all around the state. Throughout the year staff visited 40 clubs, 23 of which were based in regional NSW.

The re-establishment of regional visits has been a key achievement for the team throughout the year and has involved bringing clubs in the same region together to help them expand their peer support network and undertake joint outings and luncheons together.

63

guild and social
clubs around NSW

750

meetings and
gatherings annually

1,073

widows connected
to a club

67

widows connected to
community transport

WAR WIDOWS FRIENDSHIP LINE

The Friendship Line is a popular AWWNSW service. Originally set up to help combat the social isolation felt by regional war widows, the Friendship Line now provides a sense of community and an opportunity for war widows to share their stories and seek emotional support and comfort from one another.

AWWNSW member volunteers provide understanding and warmth to other widows who may be experiencing difficult times, heading to the hospital, celebrating birthdays or are housebound. Over time the Friendship Line has expanded to include birthday calls to war widows over the age of 90 years.

2022/23 Program Summary

Throughout 2022/23 the program expanded, and the waitlist was reduced to zero. 456 war widows were engaged with the program throughout the year, up 156 from the previous year. 40 war widow volunteers staffed the line and made 6,970 calls, which was an increase of 1,500 from the previous year. The year saw an additional 10 war widows volunteer their time to make calls on the Friendship Line.

More volunteers are always needed as more and more war widows subscribe to the service. Though our waitlist throughout last financial year reduced to zero, more widows are now subscribing than can be serviced and the waitlist is currently sitting at around 50.

The widows on the waitlist receive regular calls from our staff to support their welfare.

Our staff conduct welfare calls throughout the year to widows with whom the organisation hasn't engaged for a while or where there is a particular need, for example following natural disasters.

Over the year our staff made 3,600 welfare calls, checking on the psychosocial wellbeing of war widows around the state. This can result in referrals into our case management/ social work service. This was an increase of 1,200 from the previous financial year.



456

war widows engaged
on the Friendship Line

40

war widows volunteer
on the Friendship Line

6,970

calls made to war widows
through the program

3,600

welfare calls made by
staff throughout the year



OUR SPACE

Throughout the year, the organisation secured a grant that enabled it to develop a new program focused on younger war widows and veterans families.

Through Our Space, AWWNSW is extending its social connection and support programs to new locations and demographics, responding to unmet community needs and filling a fundamental gap in the veteran support system.

The aim is to build a scalable model of social connection and support for veterans' families that unites the community of peers around their common experiences – model that is not limited by geographical dispersion, but that unites veterans' families around Australia.

Currently there are very few projects focused specifically on building connections and establishing informal peer-to-peer support networks for veteran families and contemporary widows. As a result, families of veterans and contemporary widows struggle to find community, connect to services and have their needs met, and are generally isolated within the veteran community.

Lessons from the Honouring Women and Families United by Defence Service initiative led by AWWNSW showed that families of veterans and contemporary widows need a place to find each other and a reason to connect. The reason to connect (e.g. learning a skill, receiving information, developing knowledge) reduces the inherent barriers individuals face when they are in a group of strangers, and allows new bonds and connections to form.

Service within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has impacts well beyond the serving member. Families are the primary support network for ADF members throughout service and beyond, and families are affected directly by the service of their loved ones. Families of ADF members are geographically and socially isolated. Unless they have also served, they can struggle to 'belong' anywhere, and they can struggle to find their community of peers. Through Our Space AWWNSW is seeking to address that.

In March 2023 the program was launched in the ACT with a family fun day. The program has since launched in Sydney and Online. The program is currently in its infancy and is focused on building the community and following before it takes the next steps in its evolution.

SOCIAL CONNECTION

AWWNSW programs and services are built on the foundations of Social Work. For more than 70 years AWWNSW has provided social connection, peer support, service connection and navigation and a voice for war widows and veteran families.

The power of social connection

There is a strong body of evidence that demonstrates the positive effect of social connection on individuals through physical and psychological determinant of wellbeing. Social connection is recognised as an important determinant of health and wellbeing, with social connection having positive mental and physical influences on the individual.

Social connection has been shown to be a very strong protective factor, guarding against depression, ill mental health, burnout and elder abuse.

People crave social connection. Connection is strengthened when a group shares a social identity resulting from a 'sense of meaning, purpose, support and efficacy, and there can be positive outcomes for the individual and the group.

Our ability to maintain social connections is challenged in the veteran and defence community because of the demands of that lifestyle and the caring responsibilities placed on the families of veterans.

That is why programs like our Social Connections program are so important and have been the foundation of our organisation for more than seven decades.

Bringing those with similar experiences together to support one another and raise their voices is in our DNA. Providing an organisation for the families of veterans built by and for the families of veterans is the unique place AWWNSW has fulfilled in the veteran sector since 1946.

AWWNSW has always existed to empower those connected to a veteran to find their voice and community, providing avenues to reduce social isolation. Through its programs and services, AWWNSW has been able to unite those with like experiences and create a deep network of social support which has had beneficial wellbeing outcomes.

- War Widows Guild and Social Clubs
- War Widows Friendship Line
- Veteran Families 'Our Space'.

Together, these initiatives enhance wellbeing outcomes for war widows and veterans' families through the provision of social connection, reduce social isolation among war widows and veterans' families, and enhance knowledge and understanding of support and services available to war widows and veterans' families.

To find out more, including how to volunteer to run a community lead group, connect to a group near you or stay up to date with our programs, please contact us: guild@warwidowsnsw.com.au or call (02) 9267 6577.



ENGAGEMENT

Keeping members, war widows and veterans' families informed and engaged are the fundamental drivers of our communications and publications work. Not only does AWWNSW want to increase awareness of the organisation and its work, but it is also our duty to keep the community we support informed about issues, services and programs important to them.

Achievements for 2022/23

Throughout the financial year, we continued to work hard to not only improve the quality of our communications but also increase its frequency and relevance. Throughout the year we published four editions of *The Digest* (our main publication), including a special edition in February that documented the inaugural War Widows Day.

Twelve newsletters were published during the course of the year and an additional 22 e-communications were sent. Subscribers to electronic communications averaged 835 for the year, with e-newsletters being the highest. We also welcomed an additional 50 newsletter subscribers throughout the year. Average open rate for the year was 60% across all e-communications with an average unsubscribe rate of just 0.3%.

With the average age of war widows registered with AWWNSW being over 80 years, electronic communication is challenging, and the organisation is still using traditional forms of communication to engage those without access to technology. AWWNSW is also slowly working with this demographic to increase their digital skills and confidence.



Throughout the year, in addition to the four editions of *The Digest* sent to all war widows registered with us, four bulk mail outs were completed, sending on average 2,500 letters around the state or a total of 10,000 individual letters for the year. This kept our elderly war widows informed and engaged in news from the organisation, providing membership cards, and engaging about our advocacy work and War Widows Day.

We also worked hard with our media partners to increase exposure of the organisation through media outlets. More achievements in this area are detailed on page 4.

What else did we do for war widows throughout the year?

Throughout the year, 33 war widows turned 100 and were recognised through the award of life memberships. Online health and wellbeing programs continued with the provision of Chair Yoga classes to 30 war widows around the state, up from 15 the year before.

2,200

social media followers

835

e-communications subscribers

34

e-communications sent out

10,000

letters sent out throughout the year



COMMEMORATIONS

2022/23 was also a big year for commemorations. With events back in full swing, the invitations came in quickly, with over 41 invitations received throughout the year. The State President, Queen Dunbar, was able to attend 18 of these events in person, with AWWNSW representatives from the Board and executive team representing the organisation at the remainder.

As the chief mourners of our veterans, the attendance of widows and veterans' families at these events is critical to ensuring that Australia never forgets the costs of war.

Field of Remembrance

As an organisation, our leading commemorative activity is the Field of Remembrance. This has been a tradition and mainstay of AWWNSW for more than 70 years. For the 70th year, war widows from around Sydney and NSW gathered at St Andrew's Cathedral in the centre of Sydney to pay their personal respects to their lost loved ones.

Widows in Coffs Harbour also joined together with other regional clubs to watch the service live and hold their own cross laying ceremony. The Men's Shed in Habberfield once again handmade over 2,500 crosses for war widows around NSW, enabling them to lay their own personal tributes on ANZAC Day or on the day of the Field of Remembrance itself.

Ever the inspiring event, the Field of Remembrance occurs five days before ANZAC Day on the 20th of April annually. 2022/23 saw it return to its traditional format following interruptions caused by the pandemic.

The Field of Remembrance is the only event that allows war widows representing only themselves and their families to participate and remember their loved ones. They take centre stage in this event and come together to support each other as they navigate the ever emotional ANZAC week.

2,500

handmade crosses for war widows made and distributed

200

war widows participated in the ANZAC Field of Remembrance

41

commemorations throughout NSW where AWWNSW had a role

18

events attended by the State President



WAR WIDOWS DAY 2022

War Widows Day was announced by the NSW Government in August 2022. The purpose of this day is to recognise War Widows and Widowers, and honour their contributions and sacrifices in defence of Australia. War Widows Day now takes place in NSW on 19 October annually.

147

pieces of media
coverage about the
day

300

wattle lapel pins
sold to recognise
the day

\$1,525

raised through the Buy a Widow
a Coffee campaign

33

stakeholders
engaged with the
day

100

war widows attended
inaugural ceremony
in honour of the day

13

registered
community events
on the day

11

compliments
received about the
day and its events



What is
War Widows Day?

ADVOCACY WORK

Advocacy, as always, remains a big part of what AWWNSW does and what it is known for. Throughout the year there was growth in the advocacy work undertaken by AWWNSW, including public engagements.

Achievements for 2022/23

Throughout the year, AWWNSW partnered with Sefiani Communications to commence building a public profile for the organisation, showcasing its work and impact. Through out the year, 23 separate media engagements took place across regional and metro media outlets. These engagements saw AWWNSW discuss matters affecting war widows and veterans families including:

- Impacts of the cost of living on war widows
- The role of veterans' families and their support needs
- Commentary and analysis on the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide interim report
- War widows recognition through War Widows Day
- Commentary on the federal budget and the lack of support or relief for veterans families and war widows.

The media reach throughout the year was national and covered all channels including radio, broadcast and print media. The average potential reach throughout the year was around 5 million.

This wasn't the only arm of advocacy work throughout the year, with AWWNSW represented on:

- DVA state and territory advisory bodies
- NSW State Government consultations
- Royal Commission's Stakeholder Reference Group
- ACT Government's Veteran and Family Advisory Council.

In addition, the CEO held multiple meetings across the sector at community and government levels to ensure the voices of war widows and veterans' families are included. The CEO also gave evidence during the Royal Commission's Brisbane hearings.

Toward the end of the financial year, AWWNSW published its Advocacy Plan, which outlines how it consults with its community, forms its views and identifies its priority work areas.

Achievements under this plan to date have been noted on page 3 of this report.



Event to recognise pain of war widows

Tim Barless

The first War Widows Day to honour war widows is not just a day of remembrance today, more than a century since casualties in World War I generated the first widows. There are 15,000 war widows in NSW, and the occasion will be marked with events and fundraising campaigns. Australian War Widows NSW will be hosting a public service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park at 3pm followed by an official reception at Parliament House. Speaking of the 75 years it had taken to establish the day, state president Queen Dushar said "we

will leave that to the Royal Commission (into Defence & Veteran Suicide). "I miss him, I miss his advice, I miss him being there for me. The grief never leaves you. Every year this is something we mark. I never wanted to mark a person's death. I sit there and mark the worst day of my life. "I am working two jobs to make ends meet. The cost of living is pushing a lot of widows who have to decide between going out with a friend or pay the extra \$50 on their electric bill. "The war widow pension is \$3004.70 per fortnight. In addition to this, there is also an additional income support supplement of up



Australian war widows call for pension review, as costs rise

Thousands of Australian war widows are being forced to go to extreme lengths to get by from working three jobs to going to bed early just to keep warm.



Julie Cross National Social Affairs Reporter

Follow

QUEEN'S STORY...

Queen is the member-nominated State President of AWWNSW and also sits on the Board of Directors. Commencing her role in 2022, Queen is a war widow herself. Her husband, Adam, enlisted in the army in 1996, reaching the rank of Major in the Artillery Corps before transferring to Intelligence and later medically discharging in 2015 due to his PTSD.



Adam saw active duty in the Solomon Islands in 2003, in Iraq in 2006 and in Afghanistan in 2011. Tragically, Adam passed away in 2017. Queen is a mother to two teenage children, Joshua and Sarah, is a high school English teacher and has over 20 years' experience as a flight attendant. She comes from an extensive line of strong women. Queen has found her home at AWWNSW, inspired that all women are empowered to live their best lives, no matter their circumstances.

Queen holds a Master of Education and a Bachelor of Arts, both from the University of Western Sydney.

Since commencing in the role of State President, Queen has attended countless commemorations, sits on a War Memorial Advisory Council and the National War Widows Council, has attended the Female Veterans and Families Forum, and met with AWWNSW members all around the state. She also serves the Board on the Finance Risk and Audit Committee and the Investment Advisory Committee, playing a key role in the organisation's governance, direction and decision-making. Queen is pictured above with her son, Joshua. Recently she shared her experiences with members. An extract is below.

“

When my husband was medically discharged from the army, he handed me a booklet he received from DVA titled “Living with someone with PTSD”. I remember looking at that booklet and being so angry. I felt I was being abandoned. I gave 17 years of my life to being an army wife, moving from post to post, from one end of the country to the other, to then receive a booklet? Where was the support for me and my children? Who did I turn to for basic information and navigation of this post-defence space? Was there even an organisation that offered support to the families and not just the veterans? As these questions swirled in my mind, I can tell you that I would have loved to have known about the War Widows. However, in my limited understanding, my husband was alive and as such, I didn't think I could belong and be a member of such an organisation. The name alone was an obstacle. I felt that if I belonged to an organisation with the name of War Widows, I would have been jinxing myself and wishing death on my husband.

I want to be there to help and support others who were like me, who had nowhere to go until my husband died. I hope you do too.

FINANCE & MEMBERSHIP



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE – FINANCIAL REPORT

Throughout the course of the financial year, economic volatility and investment in the organisation's future impacted the overall financial position of AWWNSW. AWWNSW received an unqualified audit for the year, and this is a reflection of all of the hard work occurring internally within the organisation to improve financial reporting, metrics and monitoring.

In 2021, the Board has made a strategic decision to invest a small proportion of its capital reserves in the transformation of the organisation, allowing it to professionalise what it does and how it does it, and importantly ensuring it has the resources to deliver. This was and is only intended to be a short-term plan to allow the organisation to set the conditions for future growth. The Board monitors expenses and revenue closely to ensure they remain within tolerable and affordable limits.

Currently, it costs the organisation around \$2 million per annum to deliver its programs and services to war widows and veterans' families. This also includes governance, strategy and administration expenses.

The return to charitable purpose is calculated based on the costs associated with direct service and program delivery to its charitable base, including war widows, veterans' families and stakeholders. Internal financial reporting has been aligned with three key delivery streams, of which 100% of the funds expended are on the delivery of programs and services to the charitable base. These streams are:

- Advocacy and Recognition
- Social Connection and Peer Support
- Social Work and Community Support.

Administrative overheads have an indirect benefit to the charitable purpose and include costs associated with:

- Governance
- Strategy
- Administration
- Fundraising.

Pleasingly, the results for the 2022/23 financial year indicated that more than 50 per cent of the company's expenses are directly related to the delivery of its charitable purpose, while the remainder provides an indirect return. For the 2022/23 financial year, the organisation spent \$1.68 million on programs and services that directly benefited war widows and veterans' families, with only \$0.42 million being spent on governance, strategy and administration. The end of the financial year saw the company make a planned trading deficit.

The main driver of the overall deficit recorded on AWWNSW's financial statements was the economic volatility experienced within investment markets throughout the year. As investment income currently accounts for 89 per cent of total revenue, movement within these portfolios has a direct impact on the organisation's bottom line.

Importantly, the losses sustained by the investment portfolios throughout the year did not impact the principal amounts invested and in the main were unrealised, meaning that as the portfolios were not liquidated, the losses were not realised in the sale of the assets. Much of the unrealised losses sustained throughout 2022/23 have since been recovered.

Throughout the year, the organisation finalised its investment and cash management plan, and reduced the overall investment and cash risk by modifying asset classes and portfolio construction with the assistance of fund managers, to insulate the portfolios from as much volatility as possible while still making agreed returns on the funds invested. 2022/23 was a tough year economically, but the active management of AWWNSW's assets through its Investment Committee meant that the organisation was able to withstand the volatility.

With the organisation's funding mix currently limited to three main streams, the need to diversify revenue streams, in particular

trading revenue, is well known by the Board and its committees.

To achieve sustainability in the organisation, AWWNSW needs to significantly grow revenue streams in value and volume. AWWNSW also needs to ensure that its operations are optimised and that its programming and fund expenditure are strategically aligned and disciplined.

To this end, AWWNSW is currently developing a funding plan that will set out the key principles driving the raising and expenditure of funds. The plan, including key metrics and step-downs in reserve expenditure, is currently being developed as a priority.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

AWWNSW has two main committees which monitor its financial performance and manage its investments. The first is the Finance Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC). The role of this committee is to assist the Board in setting financial policies, assess the overall financial position, monitor expenditure, and ensure the financial and governance risks are managed. The FRAC oversees the annual audit on behalf of the Board and provides advice on all matters noted above, specifically on the operating budget, and company expenditure and annual audit results. The FRAC also assists the Board in maintaining oversight of all company risks.

Importantly, the FRAC is not a decision-making body of the organisation. The FRAC must report to the Board following its meetings and propose recommendations and/or resolutions in relation to items brought before the FRAC.

The second is the Investment Advisory Committee (IAC). The role of this committee is to assist the Board in setting and updating AWWNSW's Investment Strategy and manage risks associated with those investments.

The IAC reviews and monitors the operation of the Company's Investment Strategy to assist the Company in achieving its strategic outcomes. The IAC advises the Board of any new, emerging, and significant risks to investments and management strategies. Again, the IAC is not a decision-making body of the organisation and the IAC reports to the Board following its meetings.

Together these committees provide detailed oversight of key financial operations of the company and provide advice to the Board.

As AWWNSW is a registered charity, it is regulated by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC). To maintain its charitable status, AWWNSW must comply with the ACNC Governance Standards and produce publicly accessible and available annual reporting, including audited financial statements and the Annual Information Statement. The purpose of this reporting and the governance standards is to maintain public trust in the charitable sector and increase accountability for charities. AWWNSW's public ACNC profile can be found online, along with key documents such as the aforementioned annual reports and the Company's constitution.



MEMBERSHIP

AWWNSW's members are those who join the organisation to exercise a vote at the AGM and be part of the organisation's decision-making, future and governance. AWWNSW members are mainly war widows living in NSW.

AWWNSW's members are its shareholders, though it cannot and does not pay dividends. Members support the organisation and, in many instances, have played a key role in its development, evolution and leadership.

For the year ending 31 March 2023, AWWNSW had 2,409 members, of which 87 per cent were financial. This means the gap between financial and non-financial members closed compared to previous years.

Sadly more than 630 members passed away throughout the year. Since 2020, more than 1,630 members have passed away. This has caused a significant decline in membership over the past several years.

Throughout the course of the financial year, a number of members came back to the organisation for the first time in more than three years. This is an encouraging sign that the work AWWNSW is doing is having an impact.

Key facts about members

- The average age of our members during the year dropped by 1.2 years and is now 85.8 years.
- Throughout the year, AWWNSW organically attracted 77 new members, which is the highest number since it commenced implementing its strategic plan. Since 2020, AWWNSW has organically attracted 206 new members.
- 75 per cent of new members are war widows and 25 per cent are not widowed. 50 per cent of them have a connection to the Army, 15 per cent to the Navy and 12 per cent to the Air Force.
- 100 members volunteer their time with AWWNSW through the Friendship Line, birthday calls and in coordinating social and guild clubs. This is a significant number, for which AWWNSW is very grateful.

THE YEAR AHEAD



THE YEAR AHEAD

The year ahead is exciting for AWWNSW as it takes the next key steps in its evolution. The organisation's priorities for the coming year focus on:

- Introducing a new trading name for the organisation that reflects its strategy and opens the organisation up to new opportunities.
- Developing and implementing a new funding model for the organisation to ensure that its growth and strategic objectives are sustainable in the long term.
- Demonstrating its commitment to good governance through responsible resourcing, professionalisation of the organisation, and delivering modernisation initiatives.
- Reviewing the organisation's strategy to ensure it remains current and fit for purpose.
- Reviewing its membership model to ensure that the options that exist best serve the needs of members and the organisation's charitable purpose.
- Developing and implementing new key performance indicators for the organisation to objectively measure and monitor its performance.

For more than 77 years, AWWNSW has provided a place of belonging and understanding to a group of veterans' families, the widows of veterans. Over time, AWWNSW has grown this community to include widows of current and former serving defence members and their families – continuing its aspirational mission to improve the financial and social circumstances for women impacted by Defence Service.

The time has come to expand this again, this time to include all families of veterans. To provide our unique support and services to groups of families who need us well before bereavement because the environment around us has changed.

Not too long ago Australia's model of veteran family support, which had its foundations in the battlefield promise of World War I, seemed all that was required. AWWNSW's model of waiting until a veteran passed seemed to be enough to meet the need.

But with the changing nature of service, warfare and technology, and the rate of change in society increasing rapidly, the needs and expectations on and within the veteran support system have shifted significantly. As a leader in our community, AWWNSW must respond to what it is seeing.

Veterans are now surviving their service and injuries that in the early to mid 1900's they wouldn't have. They are living longer and more complex lives. The challenges related to caring for and supporting a veteran during and beyond their service are now very visible. The need for what AWWNSW does, and how it does it, has grown and exists much earlier in the life journey of veterans' families.

AWWNSW's point of difference is what it does and how it does it. It is the value it adds to the system, it is the perspective it provides, the practical assistance, the community it creates and the leadership it exercises to get others to stand up and take notice.

The year ahead will see AWWNSW carry these points of difference forward, creating a place of belonging for veterans' families throughout their entire journey, beside their veteran and beyond. Helping them navigate the complex life circumstances that they can find themselves in from time to time, connecting them with those who understand, helping them manage the emotional and mental loads they can face, and helping them connect to information and services that benefit them.

It is going to be an exciting year and we can't wait to get started.

WHY SUPPORT VETERAN FAMILIES?

In Australia, we have become so used to our way of life and sheltered from the horrors and dangers of the world that we don't even think about what the price of our everyday peace is. While that is a good thing and many an ADF member has reflected that shows they are doing their job properly, it does have an unintended consequence, and that is a lack of awareness and engagement.

Australia isn't just the safe, secure, and prosperous nation it is because of luck – it is because of what our ADF does every day to keep it that way and protect Australia's interests.

Australian veterans are not only responsible for maintaining Australia's strategic interests, protecting Australian assets, her citizens, democracy, and culture, but they are there to do what the government of the day asks of them. They freely relinquish their rights and freedoms to serve Australia.

There is a cost to Australia's way of life, prosperity, welfare system, healthcare system and the opportunity available to every Australian. That cost is a financial and a human cost. That cost is borne by our veterans and their families – because without people willingly putting the uniform on and their families supporting them to do so, the freedoms and prosperity that most Australian's enjoy wouldn't be as readily accessible.

Families of our veterans help them join, stay in, serve, and when the time is right, transition back into civilian life.

Families care for veterans if they become unwell due to their service, and are the ones left behind and left out when a veteran passes away.

Families in all their forms are the constant in a veteran's life. They are without doubt a protective factor and have positive impacts on transition and wellbeing outcomes for veterans.

However, in Australia, only a small segment of the veteran family community is supported or provided for within the veteran system. Even then, the support is limited and does not properly recognise the role they play, the burdens they bear and the impacts the unique nature of military service has upon them.

There is limited relief offered for veterans' families, yet the system and the institutions within the system continue to expect families to take on more and more when it comes to enabling ADF service, and caring for and supporting veterans following that service.

The expectations are great. To enable their loved one's service families need to be able to:

- be periodic single parents
- move around the country
- have long-distance relationships
- maintain employment
- not get sick
- meet the veterans' every need
- support veterans emotionally and sometimes financially
- manage the emotional and mental load of their families, and the list goes on.

At AWWNSW, we are not content with the 100-year-old model of family support and service, and will do all we can to build a new model that meets the needs of our resilient, stoic, and dedicated defence and veterans' families, who are along for the ride despite not being the ones who wear the uniform.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Want to join us in our endeavours or show your support and gratitude for what the families of veterans bear for Australia? Here are some of the many ways you can help us.

Donate

Make a one-off or regular tax deductible donation to AWWNSW, with 100 per cent of donations going toward the cost of delivering programs and services outlined in this report.

Remember us in your Will

Make a gift to us through our Will, ensuring that we can continue to deliver our programs, services and support to war widows and veterans' families well into the future. Bequests can be made for a specific value or can be made up of the residue of an estate.

Invest in our future

Support our transformation activities by helping us meet the costs associated with our strategy implementation, administration improvements and overheads.

Volunteer your time or talent

We are always welcoming of those who can spare some of their time to help us out at events, in the office and with welfare calls to war widows and veterans' families.

Become a member

If you are a member of the veteran community you can become a member of our organisation, joining this growing group of passionate people keen to see a better future for the families of our veterans.

Partner with us

Partner with us to deliver our events, our programs and services, or in the development of new programs and services that align with our strategic direction and support the families of veterans.

Sponsor us and our work

We welcome conversations with corporates or philanthropists regarding sponsorships and how you can best contribute to our work and mission.

To find out how you can help, please contact us at guild@warwidowsnsw.com.au or call us on 02 9267 6577.

Potential sponsors and partners are encouraged to contact ceo@warwidowsnsw.com.au



CLOSING REMARKS & THANK YOU

We are at a critical point in our organisation's history. The needs of our community have changed, and we must change with it. We have spent the last few years preparing for a big change – getting our policy, structures and governance right.

There is much more in store for 2023/24 Thank you for being on this journey with us and helping us do more and do better for the families of Australian Veterans. As always we leave the final word to our community.

"Having lived with the consequences of veterans' service, partners and children have had experiences not known to the general public. We are a strong family unit that often struggles to maintain the family unit so we remain strong, and joining groups like War Widows creates another family and support mechanism."

View our Financial
Statements and ACNC
report here



"Families are the fundamental support to our veterans. Families are the network Veterans can rely on for unconditional love and support."