

# A Response to: Belfast Health & Social Care Trust EQIA

March 2011

## **Introduction**

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by the Department of the Environment.
- 1.2 The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is a regional organisation that works across all areas of Northern Ireland. It includes in its membership community based women's centres, groups and organisations, with a concentration in disadvantaged areas. WSN is a charitable and feminist organisation, which adopts a community development approach. We provide a range of support and services to 62 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups and 22 associate members drawn from across the community and voluntary sector who support women, families and communities. (see Appendix 1).
- 1.2. Our members provide a wide range of women-centred front line services across Northern Ireland, including:
  - Specialist Advice
  - Childcare and Family Support
  - Counselling, Support and Advocacy
  - Complementary Therapies
  - Training & Education
  - Health & Wellbeing Programmes
  - Personal Development & Employment Support
  - Volunteering, Leadership & Empowerment
- 1.3. WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community based

women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

- 1.4. Over the past 30+ years, the community based women's sector has developed a range of front-line services such as childcare, support, advice, and education & training services in response to the needs they identified at a grass roots level. Women's groups continue to meet the particular needs of women and their children living in areas considered to be some of most affected by the conflict, and recognised as some of the most disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland today.
- 1.5. Network members are actively engaged with their local communities, cross-community initiatives and regional structures throughout Northern Ireland.

## **2. Comments**

- 2.1 WSN welcomes the publication of this EQIA which goes some way to identify key areas of potential inequality. However WSN believes that the EQIA should expressly identify the relevant sources of these principles in Human Rights Law. These provisions include: Articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 14 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR);<sup>1</sup> Article 12 and 12.2 of the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR);<sup>2</sup> Article 12 of the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women;<sup>3</sup> and Article 11 of the European Social Charter 1961.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Art 2 (Right to Life); Art 3 (Prohibition from Torture); Art 5 (Right to Liberty and Security); Art 6 (Right to a Fair Trial); Art 8 (Right to respect for Private and Family Life); Art 14 (Prohibition from Discrimination)

<sup>2</sup> Art 12 of ICESR states "Everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health." Art 12.2 "requires parties to take specific steps to improve the health of their citizens."

<sup>3</sup> Art 12 (1) CEDAW "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning."

<sup>4</sup> Art 11 states "Everyone has the right to benefit from any measures enabling them to enjoy the highest possible standard of health attainable."

- 2.1. WSN is disappointed that no consideration has been given in considering equality of health and social care between women and men. Research carried out by the Equality Commission<sup>5</sup> found that most health and social care policies were written in gender-neutral language and that women may be vulnerable when it comes to health and wellbeing.
- 2.2. Further research carried out by the Equality Commission<sup>6</sup> provides examples of the obstacles experienced by women such as access to health care which is limited by caring responsibilities. A report by the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) identified lack of appropriate childcare as the single biggest barrier to women's participation.<sup>7</sup> One of our member groups, the Women's Information Group NI (WIG) recently moved premises opposite the Belfast City Hospital. They are in an ideal position to provide child care assistance to women attending the City Hospital for appointments. WSN call for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trusts to work with WIG to establish childcare support for these women. We would also encourage the Trust to use this as a model of good practice that could be replicated throughout all locations in Northern Ireland.
- 2.3. WSN wish to highlight the need to address barriers faced by disabled women when accessing services. A report by the Equality Commission<sup>8</sup> showed that women who had a disability felt that 'negative attitudes were a major barrier in terms of health service provision.' Also there were other obstacles such as couches not being accessible. WSN ask that guidelines are established and all staff trained to ensure women with disabilities are afforded the same treatment in accessing health services and information.

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<sup>5</sup> Equality Commission (2002) Gender and Health in Northern Ireland: Implications for Statutory Duty

<sup>6</sup> Equality Commission (2007) Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland

<sup>7</sup> H McLaughlin (2009) *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*, Report written on behalf of WCRP, pg 37.

<sup>8</sup> Equality Commission (2003) Disabled Women in Northern Ireland: Situation, experiences and identity

- 2.4. There are real barriers facing women living in rural areas especially those who are required to travel to Belfast for hospital appointments. Rural women are disadvantaged when accessing services in terms of having caring responsibilities, the flexibility of appointments and inaccessible transport. WSN would like to see the needs of rural women addressed within the action plan.
- 2.5. In relation to Theme 1 'Improving access to Services, Communication and Information'. WSN wish to highlight that the dissemination of information needs to be in various formats to ensure those with low literacy levels can access the information. Print is not always the best option. WSN has a diverse membership of women's centres and groups throughout Northern Ireland located in some of the most deprived areas, we would like to see information such as DVDs and easy read leaflets distributed throughout the centres to ensure those who need services can access the information easily.
- 2.6. Unequal pay for women can have a number of negative effects such as reduced economic dependence and greater likelihood of poverty. Further research by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment<sup>9</sup> showed that the ratio between male and female full time median hourly earnings has widened. WSN fully support the actions outlined in Section 3 of the Plan to ensure there is equal pay for work of equal value.
- 2.7. WSN would urge the Trusts to ensure a gender balance when allocating key positions. Considering women are underrepresented in many aspects of life. For example, the number of women in public appointment roles in Northern Ireland was only 449 compared with men at 880.<sup>10</sup> A recent report by Lord Davies showed that only 12.5% of members of corporate boards of FTSE 100 companies are women.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> DETI Women in Northern Ireland September 2010

<sup>10</sup> Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2009/2010

<sup>11</sup> Women on Boards, Lord Davies Review, February 2011

## **Conclusion**

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation document. Whilst welcoming this document, we have offered some constructive recommendations as to how it could be improved. We are happy to further discuss this response if required.

### **For further Information, contact:**

Ellen Finlay - Policy and Research Co-ordinator

Tel: 028 90236923

Email: [policy@wsn.org.uk](mailto:policy@wsn.org.uk)

## MEMBERSHIP 2011

	<u>Member Group</u>
1	All Ireland Mother's Union
2	An Munia Tober (Travellers)
3	Antrim & Ballymena Women's Aid
4	Ardmonagh Women's Group
5	Ardoyne Women's Group
6	ATLAS Women's Centre
7	Al Nisa Women's Group
8	Ballybeen Women's Centre
9	Ballymurphy Women's Group
10	Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid
11	Belvoir Women's Improvement Group
12	Carrickfergus Women's Forum
13	Carew II
14	Causeway Women's Aid
15	Chrysalis Women's Centre
16	Clan Mor Women's Group (Sure Start)
17	Derry Well Woman
18	Derry Women's Centre
19	Falls Women's Centre
20	First Steps Women's Group
21	Footprints Women's Centre
22	Foyle Women's Aid
23	Foyle Women's Information Network
24	Granaghant District Women's Group
25	Greenway Women's Centre
26	Kilcooley Women's Centre
27	Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
28	Lesbian Line
29	Lenadoon Women's Group
30	Ligoneil Family Centre
31	Link Women's Group
32	Manor Women's Group
33	Markets Women's Group
34	NI Women's Aid Federation
35	NI Women's European Platform
36	Fermanagh Women's Network
37	Newry & Mourne Women
38	Newtownabbey Women's Group
39	Older Women's Network NI
40	Omagh Women's Aid
41	Rape Crisis Centre
42	Rasharkin Women's Group
43	Shankill Women's Centre
44	Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
45	Strathfoyle Women's Centre
46	The Learning Lodge
47	Voices Women's Group

48	Waterside Women's Centre
49	Windsor Women's Centre
50	Women Connect Project
51	Women into Politics
52	Women's Information Group
53	Women's News
54	Women's TEC
55	Women 2 Gather
56	Women's Resource & Development Agency
57	WISPA (Women in Sport & Physical Activity)
58	Ardcarn Women's Group
59	OIYIN Women's Group
60	Mossley Women's Institute
61	Mount Vernon Women's Group
62	Coole New Opportunities
63	Foyle Women's Aid
	<b><u>Associate Members</u></b>
1.	Ballymena Community Forum
2.	CiNI
3.	Community Relations Forum
4.	East Belfast Community Partnership
5.	Employers for Childcare
6.	HIV Centre (Women's Support Group)
7.	Mencap
8.	National Women's Council of Ireland
9.	Playboard
10.	RNIB (Women's Group)
11.	Good Morning Newtownabbey
12.	Monkstown Community Association
13.	WAVE Trauma Centre
14.	WEA
15.	Parents Advice Centre
16.	Templemore Community Action Group
17.	Gingerbread
18.	Larne Community Development Project
19.	Community First Coaching
20.	Changing Faces
21.	Sands NI