

National Council of Women of Victoria



“Caring Women Make a Difference”

National Council of Women of Victoria's Marvellous History

The National Council of Women of Victoria (NCWV) founded in 1902

Many issues have confronted women worldwide for centuries with the lack of human rights and equality seen as the major problems.

Towards the end of the 19th century the issues under discussion included:

1. lack of voting rights
2. lack of educational opportunity
3. appalling work conditions and the effects of drugs and alcohol use especially by men resulting in violence against women

After global discussions the International Council of Women- Conseil International des Femmes (ICW-CIF) was founded in Washington, USA, in 1888.

In Melbourne on 19th March 1902 a meeting of women's organizations was called to found the National Council of Women of Victoria. Two women from each of 35 voluntary societies were present and Janet, Lady Clarke chaired the meeting. A decision was made to adopt all the objectives set at the 1895 Great Britain Conference held in London.

Objectives:

- 1. To establish a bond between various affiliated societies**
- 2. Advance the interests of women, children and humanity in general.**
- 3. Confer on questions that related to the welfare of family, state and commonwealth.**

The organizations present at the 1902 NCWV meeting were: Association of Domestic Economy, Austral Salon, Australian Social Improvement Society, Australian Women's Association, Bendigo Women's Literary Society, Collingwood Crèche, Collingwood Girl's Club, Collins Street Independent Church Ladies Reading Society, Convalescent Home for Women, Daughters of

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the Court, Gentle Women’s Aid Society, Hawthorn Ladies Reading Society, Hawthorn Progressive League, Jewish Women’s Guild, Kew Progressive League, Maternity Patients’ Convalescent Home, Melbourne District Nursing Society, Methodist Neglected Children’s Aid Society, Prahran Women’s Progressive League, Princess Ida Club, Queen Victoria Hospital, United Council for Women’s Suffrage, Victoria Alliance, Victorian Infant Asylum and Foundling Hospital, Victoria Lady Teachers’ Association, Victorian Women’s Post and Telegraph Association, Victorian Women’s Public Service Association, Victoria Women’s Political League, Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Women’s Health Society, Women’s Hospital Women’s Progressive League, Melbourne Women’s Writer’s Club and the Young Women’s Christian Association.

Some of these societies have ceased to exist; some have either changed their name or focus, while others have remained virtually the same.

The NCWV’s mission statement declared it was a non-party-political, non-sectarian, not-for-profit, umbrella organization with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives, seeking to raise the awareness of women as to their rights and responsibilities as citizens and encouraging their participation in all aspects of community life.

The objects included:

- 1. To work for the empowerment of women and families and promote equal status for women and men in law and in fact.**
- 2. To maintain and strengthen Council’s relationship with branches and all members.**
- 3. To develop policies and responses on behalf of women on a statewide basis.**
- 4. To act as a voice on issues and concerns of women at state and regional levels.**
- 5. To link with the women of Australia and the International Council of Women-Conseil Internationale des Femmes (ICW-CIF) through the National Council of Australia and contribute to the implementation of their plans of action and policies.**

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Since its formation NCWV has been the only women’s umbrella organization that has truly represented all Victorian women. Its objectives and mission statement has remained the same to this present day.

Sub-committees, now called Standing Committees were a part of the ICW-CIF when it was founded in 1988 - countries affiliating with the ICW-CIF were expected to form standing committees using the same headings. Standing Committees were formed at the inaugural NCWV conference of 1903 to investigate, provide information and report back to council on a large range of pressing issues. Committees established at this time covered health, peace, arbitration, social, legal and economic matters as well as housing, the media and the rights of children and women.

Topics discussed included:

- conditions of women prisoners
- women’s rights to vote and stand for parliament
- the lack of care facilities for epileptics
- need for a Children’s Court of Justice
- need for mothers to learn about health, nutrition and cooking
- free kindergartens
- employment for women
- the preservation of bushlands and the protection of birds and animals.

At the first NCWV congress in 1903 debate on the subjects below

- Equal Pay for Equal Work
- The Rights of the Child
- Technical Education for Women

Are still on the agenda today!

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Early Achievements

Through the efforts of the standing Committees of NCWV alone or with other organisations some of our earlier achievements were:

EDUCATION

Women as School Inspectors (first one in 1914)

Increased pay for Junior Teachers (1920's)

Access to Agricultural Colleges (1967)

LAW

Appointment of first (2) Policewomen (1917)

Women Magistrates (1927)

Women Jurors commenced in 1915 with legislation to amend the Jury Act, passed in 1974 - 60 Years Later

WELFARE

Rights of the Child (1905 8)

Widows Pension (advocated in 1925, introduced 17 years later)

ECONOMICS

Equal Pay for Equal Work

ENVIRONMENT

Pioneer Women's Memorial Gardens (1934)

Advocacy resulting in successful outcomes:

(Note: Significant NCWV events are included and are highlighted.)

YEAR	SIGNIFICANT NCWV EVENTS
1908	Victorian women gained the vote after 19 private members' bills beginning in 1889 but it was 1911 before they could exercise it. The inclusion of women in the polls more than doubled the number of electors eligible to vote. Fear of the effect of the woman's vote would have been an important factor in the resistance to women's suffrage in Victoria. However the results of the 1911 election preserved the status quo, with only 56 per cent of voters eligible to vote doing so.

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YEAR	SIGNIFICANT NCWV EVENTS
	Arguments raised against female suffrage in both Houses were the desecration of the motherhood ideal, destruction of family life, immorality, blight of the fine character of Victorian women, employment displacement and the dangers of introducing biological weakness and feminine attitudes into public life. In a change of heart and with an eye to the women's vote, Premier Tommy Bent claimed to have come to the conclusion that the women of this country are equal, if not superior, to those he had seen anywhere else, and, therefore, he was more inclined to grant them this privilege. It was inevitable that the vote would have to be granted as Victoria was the only state where women could not vote despite having the vote for the Federal Parliament. ¹
1910	Fresh milk supplied to mothers and schools.
1911	The membership of NCWV had grown to thirty-nine affiliates representing over 42,000 women. The majority of women motivated to bring about change.
1913	Baptist Church Women's Guild a NCWV affiliate, initiated discussion on the "White Slave Trade" a problem which still exists.
1915	With many workplace tragedies occurring, the "Prevention of Cruelty to Children Society" was established. Females were appointed to the Charitable and Apprentices Board
1918	NCWV urged that cows be tested for tuberculosis!
1923	"The International Save the Children's Fund" was established through ICW-CIF
1925	Retention of a woman's nationality after marriage passed by the Commonwealth Government. NCWV joined with state branches and the National Council of Women Australia to address the issue.

¹ <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-history-of-parliament/women-in-parliament>

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YEAR	SIGNIFICANT NCWV EVENTS
1927	Female toilets were provided in the City of Melbourne Female police numbers increased for 4 to 8 to oversee cruelty cases against children.
1933	First woman elected to the Parliament of Victoria was Lady (Millie) Peacock. She was elected at a by-election for the Legislative Assembly seat of Allandale, caused by the death of the sitting member, Sir Alexander Peacock, her husband. Sir Alexander Peacock (United Australia Party) had been a member for 44 years, during which time he held various ministerial portfolios, was Premier on three occasions and was elected Speaker in 1928 - a position he held until his death in 1933. ²
1934	Commonwealth Government passed legislation that required men to pay maintenance to deserted wives.
1935	Melbourne's centenary celebrated by the building of the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden. Situated within Kings Domain, the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden was funded in 1935 by the Women's Centenary Council and by public donations as part of Melbourne's centenary celebrations. Hugh Linaker's sunken garden features a canal terminating in a blue tiled grotto containing Charles Web Gilbert's small bronze figure of a woman.
1938	The Commonwealth Government urged by NCWV to provide a widow's pension and care for the fatherless children.
1950	'Good Neighbourhood Council of Victoria' formed to help new migrants.
1951	'Old People's Welfare Council' formed (later called Council of the Ageing)
1953	Child Welfare Association Committee formed Mines Act changed to allow professional women to work in occupations such as a geologist

² *ibid*

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YEAR	SIGNIFICANT NCWV EVENTS
1958	Blood alcohol reading tests for suspected drunk drivers introduced after NCWV lobbying.
1959	Equality Rights introduced - so women could own property.
1960	Reforms to the Immigration Act were passed by the Commonwealth Government allowing non-Europeans to migrate.
1964	Recommended by NCWV that smoking regulations near food be strictly enforced.
1966	Married women were permitted to work in the Commonwealth Public Service. Jury service – legislation was passed to allow women to serve on juries.
1969	Wage justice for women with the first stage of equal pay achieved!
1972	Action taken on the sport of boxing and the danger of death and brain damage. Mothers in custody allowed to have children remain with them.
1974	First Women Mounted Police in Victoria. Maternity leave first recommended
1976	The wearing of approved restraints for children in cars introduced
1979	First woman pilot took company to the Equal Opportunity Board and won the right to work as a pilot.

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YEAR	SIGNIFICANT NCWV EVENTS
	The Commonwealth and State Departments of Office of Women’s Policy established during this decade. Funding for NCWV was received from the State Government of Victoria and was discontinued in 1998. NCWV continued to have an office in the CBD area (71 Collins St., 104 Exhibition St. 15 Collins St.) until shifting to Burnley in 2010. The part-time office person concluded in December 1999. The ability of the NCWV to exert pressure and continue advocacy work was seriously curtailed.
1983	The Sex Discrimination Bill and Equal Opportunity Act passed
1984	Victorian Racing Club and Melbourne Cricket Club permitted female members to join after 140 years.

As women’s rights seemed to improve, younger women were told there were no barriers to workplace opportunities. However in many areas women continue to be disadvantaged – not all women receive equal pay for equal work and opportunities for advancement may be limited.

NCWV have contributed to many positive developments on behalf of Victorian women and their families but now finds a new set of problems emerging.

The woman’s dual role of workplace achiever and mother/care prevents women attending daytime meetings of councils such as NCWV yet these organizations must still represent a woman’s needs no matter what! The challenge for the future is to find ways to bring women’s voices together to debate this new set of problems and continue to successfully advocate for Victorian women and their families.

Reference: *Nine Decades 1902 – 1991* written by Patricia Penrose and compiled from the book *“Champions of the Impossible”* by Dame Ada Norris