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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Attack on woman in Ringwood highlights prevalence of violence against women

The recent assault on a local woman at Mullum Mullum Creek in Ringwood highlights how common violence against women is. One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.

As this data shows, violence against women is serious and common. The impacts of violence are devastating and long-term, affecting women's mental and physical health and wellbeing, and for many women the impacts can include homelessness, mental health issues and financial insecurity.

However, unlike this attack, most violence against women occurs in the home, with the majority of perpetrators known by the victim. In fact, intimate partner violence contributes to more ill health and premature death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than high blood pressure, obesity or smoking, VicHealth data shows. The biggest risk factor for becoming a victim of sexual assault and/or family violence is being a woman.

Women's Health East CEO, Kristine Olaris, stresses however that while violence against women is a common and serious crime, it is also preventable. "The evidence is clear that violence against women is preventable. Preventing violence against women is about gender equality. Every woman has the right to reach her full potential with equal access to opportunities, and to live in safety, free from violence."

Melbourne's East is home to an innovative program known as the Eastern Media Advocacy Project which is helping to change community attitudes to violence against women and prevent further women from becoming victims. The project trains women who have experienced family violence or sexual assault as advocates to speak publicly about their experience and to lift the lid on the shame and stigma that continue to shroud this all-too-common issue in silence.

This innovative project has been steadily bringing awareness of the reality of violence against women to Melbourne's East. By making it possible for women to speak about their experience, this project not only supports women to come forward and report their experiences of violence but equally challenges the attitudes which make this violence possible.

As Jennifer, an advocate from the Eastern Media Advocacy Project, says "*Anyone who has experienced violence, or seen it occur in their family or friend's lives, will know the devastation that it produces. My goal as a media advocate for the prevention of violence against women is to be a voice for those who are experiencing violence and have been silenced by their situation; it is to be a light to expose violence and abuse for what it really is; it is to be a part of the resolution of the issues surrounding violence and the liberation of women from destructive and demeaning lives.*"

If you or someone you know is or has experienced family violence contact the **Eastern Domestic Violence Services (EDVOS)** on **(03) 9259 4200**. If you or someone you know is or has experienced sexual violence contact the **Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault** on **1800 806 292**.

For media enquiries contact Kate Ravenscroft, 8873 3704 or [kater@whe.org.au](mailto:kater@whe.org.au)

## **About Women's Health East**

*Women's Health East* is a regional women's health promotion agency working across the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Melbourne. A not-for-profit agency funded primarily by the Victorian Department of Health, we advocate for gender equity and work to support the women and girls of the EMR to live the lives they want. Our health promotion priorities include:

- Preventing violence against women
- Promoting mental health & wellbeing and
- Enhancing sexual & reproductive rights