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WOMEN'S HEALTH WEEK

CAITLIN McARTHUR

SWAN Hill's Well Women's Clinic is using Women's Health Week to remind women to make their health a priority.

Community Health Nurse and McGrath Breast Care Nurse Leanne Bibby said the week is a good reminder for women to stop worrying about others and take a look at themselves.

"Women's Health Week is about focusing on you as a woman and making your health important," Mrs Bibby said.

With two and a half years experience as a breast care nurse and 10 with the Women's Health Clinic, Mrs Bibby said she finds the women most likely to put off health checks are the young and busy.

"Trying to get women from a younger age to start thinking about initiating a health check and just enforcing the importance, not only of breast awareness, but in accessing screenings," she said.

Women should look at having a check-up, even if they're not feeling particularly unwell, said she said, adding cholesterol, emotional well-being and lifestyle balance are all areas that can be easily let go.

Established in 1996, the Well Women's Clinic aims to offer a comprehensive women's health service in a sensitive, confidential and welcoming environment.

The clinic has qualified sexual and reproductive health nurses and an all-female staff.

A big part of its operation is to provide information on accessing screening programs.

"Empowering women to take the next step and access services that they might not have been comfortable reaching out to previously and that they may not have felt comfortable seeking prior to coming to us," Mrs Bibby said.

There are three national screening programs women can access: bowel, cervical and breast.

The mobile breast screen service visits Swan Hill every two years, with the next van due early next year.

The clinic has a strong focus on prevention, Mrs Bibby said, with many women avoiding screenings due to the awkward nature of some of the procedures.

"Cervical screening for a long time was difficult, there was a well-known barrier of a lack of female providers and the embarrassment of the procedure," she said.

Although Swan Hill as a region have really

developed the amount of access to female doctor and nurse practitioners, a move that's

really benefited local women, Mrs Bibby said there is always room for improvement.

Running from September 4 to September 8, Women's Health Week was started by Jean Hailes in 2013.

Jean Hailes is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving women's lives.

Each day runs with a different focus: Monday is ticker time, highlighting heart health.

Tuesday is all about taking time for yourself and addressing your mental health. Wednesday talks about bone health. While Thursday's topic is physical activity, and Friday looks at sleep and fatigue.

The 2017 Jean Hailes' Women's Health Survey found that of the more than 10,000 women surveyed, 60 per cent did not meet the recommended two and a half hours of weekly physical activity.

Two out of five women considered themselves slightly overweight, while 20 per cent said they were quiet overweight.

Additionally, only a quarter had been screened for sexually transmitted infections in the last five years.

Of the women surveyed, those between the ages of 18 and 25 were found to have the highest anxiety scores.

In an effort to motivate women to take action and improve their well-being, the Well Women's Clinic will be running a few promotions throughout the week.

There will be a gift bag giveaway for any women attending a number of Swan Hill District Health services during the week.

The Clinic is also running a competition, with prizes yet to be finalised, but to include vouchers for local businesses.

"If you ring up for a pap test you go in the draw to win prizes, it's all about encouraging women to come in and book a pap [smear]," Health Promotion officer Elise Kelly said.



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Swan Hill District Health's Health Promotion officer Elise Kelly and Community Health Nurse and McGrath Breast Cancer Nurse Leanne Bibby promote Women's Health Week. **Picture: CAITLIN McARTHUR**