

New Specialist Service Supports Primary Care Response to Family and Sexual Violence in Tasmania

A new pilot initiative is underway in Tasmania to improve how General Practices and Aboriginal Health Services respond to family violence, sexual violence, and child sexual abuse. The service is being delivered by Engender Equality (family violence service) in partnership with Laurel House (sexual assault service - north and north west) and the Sexual Assault Support Service (sexual assault service - south). This program is supported by funding from Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) through the Australian Government's Primary Health Networks Program.



Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence Pilot Manager Jess Drew at the Tasmanian Primary Health Leadership Conference 2025

Jess Drew, Manager of the pilot explains, “the initiative acknowledges the critical role general practitioners and other primary care providers play as a first point of

contact for victim-survivors. GPs are often the professionals that people feel safe to speak to, particularly in rural and regional areas where options for disclosure and support may be limited”.

This pilot brings in-depth specialisation and practical support directly into primary care settings. It is designed to complement the role of GPs and build long-term capacity within General Practices and Aboriginal Health Services across the state.

Research conducted by Professor Kelsey Hegarty from the University of Melbourne found that;

- **1 in 10 women** attending general practice, experienced DV in the last 12 months – for every full-time GP, that is around **5 women/week**
- **BUT** most are not identified, as **9 in 10 women** have **never been asked** by a GP
- **1 in 4 women** attending a GP with current depression experienced DV in the last 12 months.

(Hegarty 2012)

At the centre of the pilot is access to a highly skilled team of specialists, operating across the whole state, who offer targeted support to general practice staff. This includes secondary consultations, information on referral pathways, risk assessments, and practical advice tailored to the complex realities of family violence, sexual violence and child sex abuse.

The specialist team has expertise in areas that are still emerging as practice considerations for general practices. These include reportable conduct, child sexual abuse disclosures, non-fatal strangulation, coercive control, and the ethical considerations around mandatory reporting.

By offering secondary consultations and follow-up support, the service aims to increase confidence and clinical capacity across Tasmania's primary care workforce. This ensures that patients disclosing abuse are responded to in ways that are both trauma-informed and safe, with a clearer path to appropriate follow-up support.

GPs are the most common first point of professional contact for women experiencing intimate partner violence.

(RACGP White Book – Abuse and violence: Working with our patients in general practice 5th edition, 2021)

A key feature of the pilot is its collaborative approach to working alongside Aboriginal Health Services. The team at Engender Equality seeks to support Aboriginal-led services with flexibility, responsiveness, and respect for existing community relationships.

The Primary Care Response to Family and Sexual Violence team has had contact with most practices in the state and continues to build relationships through targeted outreach.

Some practices have already established regular contact with the service, seeking support when they have concerns about a patient, advice about referrals, or need help understanding legal obligations related to mandatory reporting or documentation of risk.

Family Violence Service Engender Equality is the lead agency overseeing the pilot. CEO, Alina Thomas explains the purpose of the pilot, “to improve early identification of risk and streamline access to specialist services. Many GPs see patients regularly but may not have the tools, time, or confidence to ask the right questions or know what to do with the answers.”

“Through practical support and case-based consultation, GPs are supported to assess safety, identify red flags (such as signs of coercive control or child harm), and take appropriate steps to link patients with ongoing help.”

“This includes referrals to family violence services, sexual assault counselling, and child safety or mental health supports when needed. The service does not duplicate these supports but helps primary care providers use them well.”



*Jayla Sainty (Aboriginal Health Service Support Specialist), Alina Thomas (CEO, Engender Equality)
Sam Goss (Hobart GP)*

The collaboration between Engender Equality, SASS, and Laurel House ensures statewide coverage and a consistent, high-quality service model. Each partner brings a depth of experience in sexual violence, family violence, and trauma-informed care that is critical to making the service effective and trusted.

Ms Thomas shares that, “while still in the early stages, feedback from primary care providers has been encouraging. GPs have expressed appreciation for having somewhere to turn when faced with difficult situations that require more than clinical treatment alone.”

Ultimately, the success of this pilot will be measured by how well the primary care sector is supported to respond safely and effectively to family and sexual violence and improve outcomes for all victim-survivors.

More information including how General Practices and Aboriginal Health Services can connect with the service is available at 03 6268 1663, admin@pcfsv.org.au and at [Tasmanian Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence \(PCFSV\) Support - Engender Equality](#).

Helpful contacts

03 6268 1663 - admin@pcfsv.org.au - [Tasmanian Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence \(PCFSV\) Support - Engender Equality](#)

1800 737 732 - 1800RESPECT – National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service

1800 697 877 -1800MYSUPPORT - Tasmania’s Sexual Assault Support Line – supported by SASS in Southern Tasmania and Laurel House in north and north west Tasmania

1300 766 491 - Men’s Referral Service – support for men who are concerned about their behaviour

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