



Submission in relation to

Review of the Coroners Act 1995 (Tas)

27 July 2026

Engender Equality is Tasmania's statewide specialist family violence organisation.

For more information please contact:

ceo@engenderequality.org.au

0438 788 291

Acknowledgements

This Submission was prepared in Lutruwita/Tasmania, on stolen Palawa-Pakana land. Engender Equality acknowledges Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners of the land, water and air of Lutruwita/Tasmania. Engender Equality acknowledges that Aboriginal sovereignty was never ceded, and the continuing hurt caused by colonisation.

Engender Equality acknowledges the ongoing leadership role of Tasmanian Aboriginal community in addressing and preventing family violence.

Engender Equality acknowledges all people who have experienced family violence, and all forms of gender-based violence. As a specialist family violence service, the contributions in this discussion paper have been informed by the lived and living experiences and expertise of victim-survivors who we work alongside every day.

Introduction

Every homicide, suicide or other death linked to family violence is a tragic loss of life. All family violence-related deaths are preventable. Every death is also a lesson: an opportunity to understand where our responses can improve, and a reminder that preventing violence requires more than a crisis intervention. It requires sustained action to address the underlying drivers of violence to create a Tasmania where all people can live free from violence.

Engender Equality welcomes the Tasmania Law Reform Institute's review of the *Coroners Act 1995 (Tas)* and the opportunity to contribute to reforms that strengthen Tasmania's response to family violence-related deaths. We strongly support the recent legislative changes that recognise deaths where family violence has materially contributed to the death as matters warranting heightened coronial scrutiny through mandatory inquests.

We also recognise that family violence-related inquests can place significant emotional pressure on affected families, friends and communities. Engender brings extensive experience in delivering trauma-informed therapeutic services and supporting people impacted by family violence, and this expertise can contribute meaningfully to a coronial response that is both rigorous and compassionate.

Engender offers four recommendations to support the Coronial Division's capacity to respond to, learn from and prevent family violence-related deaths. We welcome any future opportunities to work collaboratively with the Coronial Division or Tasmanian Government to advance this important work.

Recommendation 1

Partner with specialist family violence services to create guidelines for identifying when family violence has materially contributed to a death, including suicides and other non-homicide deaths, to support consistent decision-making and reporting across the coronial system.

Specialist family violence organisations, like Engender Equality, can support the development of guidelines that incorporate understandings of:

- Appropriate family violence language and terminology
- The gendered drivers and dynamics of violence, including men's use of violence against women
- How gendered drivers of violence relate to substance use, problem gambling, mental ill-health and trauma histories
- Family violence risk assessment and indicators of homicide
- Coercive control and pattern-based understandings of family violence
- Post-separation family violence
- Substance coercion
- Sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse within the context of family violence
- The relationship between family violence, suicidality and suicide
- Deaths where family violence-related injury has contributed to long-term physiological harm, morbidity or mortality, including deaths arising from delayed complications of non-fatal strangulation.
- Predominant aggressor identification and the risks associated with misidentification
- The ways family violence can present across diverse communities and relationships

Engender also has extensive experience working in partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations. We understand what it means to work collaboratively with different communities to ensure projects reflect the diverse experiences of family violence across Tasmanian communities. For example, in 2025 Engender published *LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Practice Guidelines*, which were created in partnership with Working It Out.

Engender strongly encourages the Coronial Division to partner with specialist family violence services to ensure that the identification, investigation and reporting of family violence-related deaths reflect contemporary evidence and best practice understanding of family violence.

Recommendation 2

Require the Coronial Division to consult with relevant specialist family violence services during investigations and inquests where family violence is suspected to have materially contributed to a death, to assist in understanding victimisation and perpetration

experiences, patterns of coercive control, risk factors, service interactions and prevention opportunities.

There are a range of mechanisms through which this consultation could occur, including:

- Formal partnerships between the Coronial Division and specialist family violence services.
- Secondary consultation arrangements to inform investigations and inquests.
- Commissioned expert advice or consultancy services on specific matters involving family violence.

Engender has a range of experiences offering specialist family violence expertise. For example, Engender currently provides secondary consultations and capacity building activities to general practitioners and Aboriginal Health Services through the Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence Program, delivered in partnership with Laurel House. This work demonstrates the value of specialist family violence expertise in supporting health professionals to better recognise and respond to family violence.

Engender encourages the Coronial Division to establish formal mechanisms for engaging specialist family violence expertise throughout investigations and inquests involving family violence-related deaths. This would support more consistent and informed decision-making, enhance the quality of coronial findings and strengthen opportunities for improving system responses to family violence.

Recommendation 3

Establish formal information-sharing and reporting mechanisms that enable and resource specialist family violence services to provide evidence about service contact, experience of family violence and any other issues relevant to the coronial investigation.

Specialist family violence services often hold information that can assist coroners to understand the context of a person's death, patterns of family violence, risks that were present prior to death and service system interactions. These services should be supported to provide reports and other evidence to the Coronial Division where family violence is suspected to have materially contributed to a death.

Engender has extensive experience preparing reports and providing evidence for a range of legal processes, including Family Court proceedings, Victims of Crime applications and criminal matters. These reports draw on specialist family violence knowledge and can assist decision-makers to understand the context, dynamics and impacts of family violence.

It is important that any information-sharing arrangements hold the safety and dignity of victim-survivors as the primary concern. Specialist family violence services have expertise in managing the risks associated with information sharing, including circumstances where

information may inadvertently increase risk to victim-survivors, children or other family members. This includes understanding how people who use violence may gain access to victim-survivor information and how information can be shared safely to minimise the risk of further harm.

Engender suggests that coronial investigations are not overly reliant on subpoenaing counselling case notes from specialist family violence services. Case notes may contain highly sensitive information that is not relevant to the coronial investigation, including personal information about victim-survivors, children, family members and third parties.

Instead, where information from specialist family violence services is required, the Coronial Division should request reports or expert statements that respond directly to the matters under investigation. This approach would allow relevant evidence to be provided while empowering the specialist service to manage any risks to victim-survivors.

To support meaningful participation, specialist family violence services should be appropriately resourced and remunerated for providing reports, expert advice and evidence. Existing models already demonstrate how this could operate in practice. For example, Victim Support Services within the Department of Justice currently maintains fee structures for reports. Similar arrangements could ensure specialist family violence expertise is available to support coronial investigations when required.

Recommendation 4

Resource specialist family violence services to provide specialist therapeutic supports, such as counselling, to family and friends impacted by a family violence-related death throughout a coronial inquest.

Family violence-related deaths can have profound and lasting impacts on families, friends and communities. Investigations and inquests may provide important opportunities for accountability and learning, but they can also be lengthy, emotionally demanding and retraumatising for those affected. People participating in the coronial process may be navigating grief, trauma, ongoing safety concerns and complex family dynamics arising from family violence.

Specialist family violence services are uniquely placed to provide support that is both trauma-informed and family violence-informed. This is particularly important following family violence-related suicides, where counselling and suicide postvention responses should recognise the role that coercive control, abuse and cumulative harm may have played in the person's death.

Prior to 2025, Engender regularly provided therapeutic support to people experiencing family violence from other family members, as well as to friends and family members impacted by a loved one's experience of family violence. Due to overwhelming demand for services, Engender

narrowed its therapeutic service scope to align with *the Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas)*, which defines family violence as intimate partner violence. This experience demonstrated both the significant need for specialist support for those affected by family violence and the importance of adequate resourcing to ensure these services are available when needed.

Engender also has recent experience establishing, trialling and evaluating a brief intervention counselling pilot program. Similar models could be adapted to provide a cost-effective, flexible, specialist support to families and friends involved in family violence-related coronial investigations and inquests. Adequately resourcing specialist family violence services to deliver this support would help ensure affected families are not left to navigate grief and family violence impacts without appropriate support.

Conclusion

To realise the full prevention potential of these reforms, it is essential that lessons arising from coronial investigations are connected to the evidence base on family violence as a form of gender-based violence and to Tasmania's broader primary prevention efforts. Every family violence-related death provides an opportunity not only to strengthen system responses and accountability, but also to better understand how gender inequality, rigid gender stereotypes and unequal power relations create the cultural foundations for violence to occur.

Engender welcomes any future opportunities to contribute further to this important work.