



DHHS Framework for the Commissioning of Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support Program Services

2015 – 2018

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Sexual Violence in the Community	3
National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022	5
Safe homes, Safe Families: Tasmania’s Family Violence Action Plan 2015-2020	8
Relevant Tasmanian Legislation and Standards	9
DHHS Framework for the Commissioning of Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support Program Services	10
Notes	13

Introduction

The Tasmanian Government believes that violence against anyone in any form is unacceptable and recognises sexual violence as a very serious community issue. Therefore, preventing sexual violence in the Tasmanian community is a top priority for the Tasmanian Government.

The provision of specialist sexual assault support services through the Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support (TSAS) Program is a major component of commissioning for services for the Department Housing Disability and Community Services (DCS).

DCS, through the TSAS Program, commissions the provision of specialist services for people affected by sexual assault and the provision of training, community awareness and education strategies that assist professionals and the wider community to better understand and respond to sexual violence.

The *DHHS Framework for the Commissioning of Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support Program Services* (Framework) provides an overarching vision and direction for the delivery of accessible and contemporary specialist services, community awareness, education and training.

Sexual Violence in the Community

Due to an increasing prevalence of family violence, there is a strong National and Tasmanian focus on preventing and addressing family and domestic violence.

It is important however, to understand that whilst there are consistencies between the family violence and sexual assault sectors there are also differences that must be recognised. For example, people experience sexual violence at the hands of friends, strangers, and public or authority figures as well as their intimate partners.

The National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV) defines sexual violence as including a “*range of violent behaviours including, unwanted touching, sexual harassment, coerced sexual assault, rape and other physical violence and threat to life,*” (*NASASV Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence 2nd Edition*).

The true impact of sexual violence in Tasmania is difficult to measure due to the significant flow-on effects it has, including physical, emotional, psychological, economic, legal, and social and health consequences for individuals, families, friends and the whole community.

The impacts of sexual violence are multifaceted, often further compounded by factors such as gender, age, socio economic status, culture and religion. Therefore, individuals who experience sexual violence in the form of sexual assault face multiple and complex barriers to disclosure with very few people reporting sexual assault to police. These barriers include, but are not limited to, the individual’s relationship to the perpetrator, fear of the perpetrator, lack of trust in the justice system from previous experiences, shame, trauma and stigma and the widely held attitudes within the community that places the blame on the victim.

Sexual assault in the family violence context can have additional complexities to disclosure or reporting, including the nature of an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator, being financially dependent on the perpetrator, possibility of homelessness, presence of children and impact of violence on children. Barriers to children disclosing sexual assault include fear for own safety, fear of

family breakdown, feeling of responsibility for siblings or other family members and fear of not being believed and supported.

Sexual violence is universally acknowledged as a crime. The impact of sexual violence in some cases can last a lifetime with a high number of adult survivors of child sexual abuse experiencing mental health illnesses some resulting in death (often by suicide).

Quantifying the number of sexual assault incidences in Tasmania is also difficult as it is a hidden form of sexual violence due to the barriers to disclosure. Research in Australia has found that 58% of women who have experienced sexual or physical violence had never contacted the police and 24% of women had not sought any information or support.

“Important to remember when attempting to determine the extent of sexual assault. A range of factors such as barriers to disclosure, the low rate of reporting to police, varying definitions of sexual assault and abuse and the complexity of recording and counting such information make this a particularly hidden type of violence.” (The Nature and Extent of Sexual Assault and Abuse in Australia, 2012).

Consequently, it is important to remember when viewing statistics that incidences of sexual assault are under-reported.

Research and statistics show that in Australia both men and women experience significant levels of violence with men, women and children more likely to experience violence from a male rather than a female. Overwhelmingly, sexual violence is committed by men against women.

Research from the 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey and Australian Institute of Criminology found:

1 in 5 Australian women had experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 years.
1 in 6 Australian women had experienced sexual violence or physical violence from a current or former partner.
36 per cent of women had been experienced sexual or physical violence by someone known to them.
15 per cent of women had experienced sexual or physical violence from an ex-partner and 15 per cent of all Australian women had been sexually assaulted by a person they know since the age of 15 years.
23 584 of all Australian women aged between 18 -24 years reported having experienced sexual assault in the 12 months prior to the survey.
Twice as many women in the 18-24 age bracket experience sexual assault compared to all other women.
Australian women are most likely to experience sexual violence in their home.

Additionally, Women with Disabilities Australia found 90% of women with an intellectual disability have been subjected to sexual violence.

As of June 2015, the current year date statistics for family violence incidents recorded by Tasmania Police was 2 606. In 2013-2014, Tasmania Police recorded 217 sexual assaults. This was an increase of 33% from the previous year with females accounting for 85% of the sexual assault victims.

In the same year, a total of 1 694 people accessed services provided through the TSAS Program with 1 304 or nearly 75 per cent of the total number accessing services being female. Program data over a nine month period showed a significant increase from the year prior in both the total numbers of people including females accessing services. A total number of 1 954 people accessed services of which 1 531 or 78 per cent were female.

The 2013 *National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey* found that whilst there had been a reduction in the people surveyed excusing domestic violence since the previous survey in 2009, there was in fact an increase in the people surveyed excusing incidences of sexual assault. Most concerning is that a sizeable group surveyed believed sexual violence against women can be accepted in certain situations including if the perpetrator is affected by alcohol or if sexual assault results from a man not being able to control their need for sex. Although it is recognised that acts of sexual violence, which includes rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse, are usually pre-planned crimes.

Findings from research and statistics on sexual violence against women in Australia continually demonstrate the need to understand sexual violence against women in the context of the attitudes and beliefs regarding gender equity that exist in the community. This does not in any way dismiss the experience of men who have experienced sexual violence. However, it does validate an approach that addresses gender inequality, including the attitudes and beliefs generated by traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

“men are subject to stereotypes and the dominating social expectations around traditional models of masculinity;...both sexes can experience detrimental consequences resulting from these gender expectations and the violent use of power.” (NASASV Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence 2nd Edition).

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022

The vision of the 12-year *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (National Plan)* is that all women and their children live free from violence in safe communities.

The *National Plan* brings together all Australian state and territory governments to drive lasting change and provides the framework for a coordinated national approach to reducing violence against women and their children. It is supported by an understanding that all Australian governments need to take action and work alongside each other to achieve the primary goals of the *National Plan* which are to:

- reduce violence against women and their children
- improve how governments work together
- increase support for women and their children
- create innovative and targeted ways to bring about change.

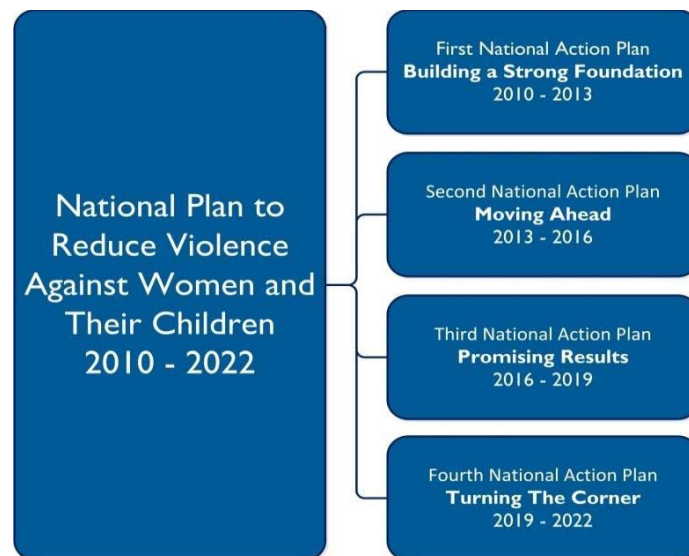
“By working together and challenging the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to occur, all Australian governments are saying a very loud “no” to violence” (National Plan 2012).

The Tasmanian Government is working collaboratively with the Commonwealth and other state and territory governments to achieve the following six national outcomes by 2022:

1. communities are safe and free from violence
2. relationships are respectful
3. Indigenous communities are strengthened
4. services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence
5. justice responses are effective
6. perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

The delivery of the six national outcomes will be directed by a series of four, three-year *National Action Plans* to be implemented over 12 years. Each state and territory will develop and deliver their own implementation plans with outcomes that align to those of the *National Action Plans*.

There have been two National Actions Plans to date: *Building a Strong Foundation 2010-2013* and the Second Action Plan *Moving Ahead 2013-2016*.



Tasmanian Implementation Plan: Building a Strong Foundation 2010-2013

The first *Tasmanian Implementation Plan*: - *Building Strong Foundation 2010 -2013* (first Implementation Plan) established a strong platform for Tasmania to achieve the objectives of the *National Action Plan 2010-2013*. The first Implementation Plan identified Tasmania's strategic actions for the long-term and prioritised actions that were required in the short-term.

The first Implementation Plan also outlined how the Tasmanian Government would achieve the agreed national priorities:

- Building Primary Prevention Capacity
- Enhancing Service Delivery
- Strengthening Justice Responses
- Building the Evidence Base.

Recognising the attitudinal and cultural changes that are required to reduce violence against women and children will occur overtime, an action of the *Implementation Plan* was the development of *Taking Action: Tasmania's Primary Prevention Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2022 (Taking Action)*.

Taking Action was informed by consultation undertaken with the Tasmanian community and delivers a public health approach for the coordination of primary prevention initiatives to address violence against women and children across Tasmanian government and community service sectors. *Taking Action* will continue to be updated and implemented over the life of the National Plan. Tasmanian Implementation Plan: *Moving Ahead 2013 – 2016*.

The second *Tasmania Implementation Plan: Moving Ahead 2013-2016* (second Implementation Plan) continues the vision for prevention of violence against women and their children. It considers what worked well in the delivery of the first Implementation Plan *Building a Strong Foundation* and ongoing and new priorities for the years 2013-2016.

It continues the strong focus on primary prevention building knowledge and skills to address community attitudes and behaviours towards violence against women and their children. *Taking Action* will continue to be implemented along with other strategies to address the priorities for the second *National Action Plan* which are:

- driving whole of community action to prevent violence
- understanding diverse experiences of violence
- supporting innovative services and integrated systems
- improving perpetrator interventions
- continuing to build the evidence base.

The second Implementation Plan has identified strategies to achieve the national priorities as including:

- understanding diverse experiences of violence – working with specific communities including Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people
- education, counselling and support for children – continuing relationship education programs in schools
- raising awareness of the incidence and impacts of family violence – working with White Ribbon and the development of a public safety audit toolkit, both actions arising from *Taking Action*
- perpetrator programs – contributing to the development of national outcome standards for perpetrator programs
- improving our research and evidence base – by continuing support for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and the developing of a biennial Women and Girls in Tasmania Report.

Safe homes, Safe Families: Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan 2015-2020

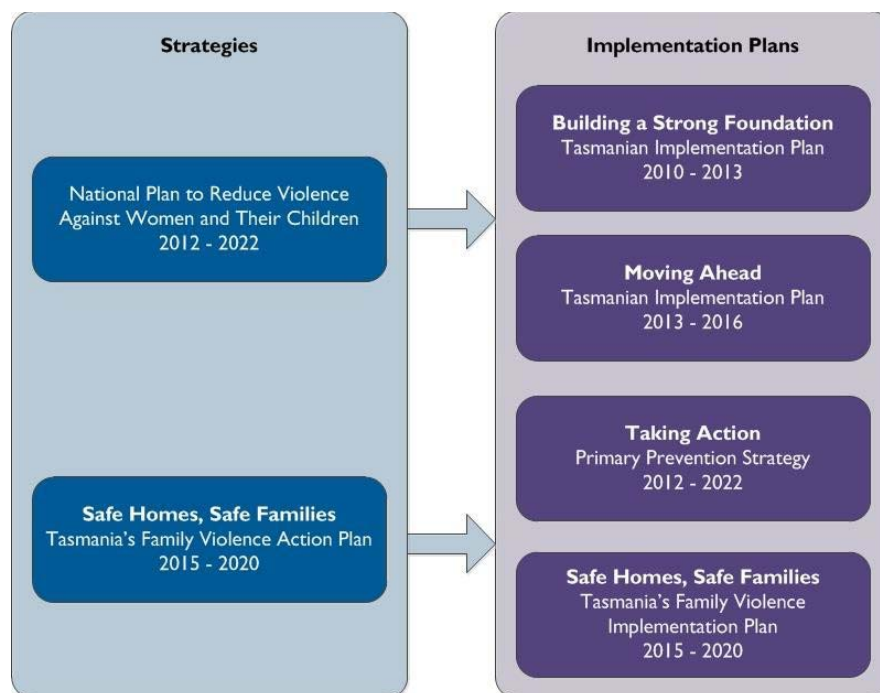
Safe Homes, Safe Families (Action Plan) provides the government's response to reduce family violence, including sexual assault, in the Tasmanian community.

The Action Plan reflects the Government's understanding that to address family violence and sexual assault, a coordinated whole-of-government approach is required. The approach includes short, medium and long term initiatives that aim to fully support those impacted by family and sexual violence and to change attitudes and beliefs about family violence across the community.

To achieve outcomes for those experiencing family violence the Government has committed through the *Action Plan* to:

- take action to prevent family violence occurring
- support a whole-of-society response to end family violence
- prioritise the safety and wellbeing of those affected by family violence, particularly women and children
- address the short and long term harm caused to children who are affected by family violence
- invest in family violence prevention and early intervention
- hold perpetrators accountable and support them to change their behaviour
- use flexible, integrated, coordinated and collaborative approaches
- listen to those who have experienced family violence and base actions on what is proven to work
- monitor and report publicly on progress because outcomes matter.

The Tasmanian Action builds on and complements the vital work that is already being done under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.



Relevant Tasmanian Legislation and Standards

Legislation

The TSAS Program service provision under the Program is guided by several Acts including:

- *Family Violence Act 2004* provides the legislative foundation for Tasmania's 'Safe at Home' criminal justice response to family violence
- *Criminal Code Act 1924* is the Tasmanian legislation for sexual offences that sit outside the *Family Violence Act 2004*
- *Children Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* is the legislative base for child protection and service provision for children, young people and families in Tasmania
- *Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013* provides the legislation for a comprehensive background checking and screening process for people working with children in Tasmania, either as employees or volunteers
- *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* regulates the collection, maintenance, use, correction and disclosure of personal information relating to individuals
- *Right to Information Act 2009* allows members of the public the right to obtain information in the records of Government and public authorities and for related purposes.

Standards

In 2015, DCS adopted the *National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence Standards of Practice Manual* within the Tasmanian context for community-based funded services.

The Manual developed in consultation with sexual assault services in all Australian States and Territories provides current best practice for the sexual assault service sector, based on worldwide best practice. The objectives of the Standards are to provide:

- services with a tool that assists to provide high quality services across the sector
- guidelines for service development, planning and quality assurance across the sector
- a framework for quality assurance and consistency of quality across the Australian sexual assault sector.

To ensure a consistent state-wide practice approach and the best outcomes for people accessing the services, there is a requirement that TSAS Program funded services align organisational policy and practice to the Standards.

DHHS Framework for the Commissioning of Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support Program Services

In an environment in which levels of family violence are disturbingly high, the Tasmanian Government recognises and acknowledges that the incidents of sexual assaults are also disturbingly high. The Department understands the importance of a service system that has a high level of understanding of the impacts of sexual assault and the expertise, capacity and resources to respond to the immediate and long term needs of those impacted. The Framework ensures the commissioning of services that achieve consistent approaches to service provision and continual high quality outcomes for people impacted by sexual assault and the Tasmanian community. It provides a clear vision and articulates the principles, objectives and outcomes that underpin the TSAS Program's service system into the future.

Primary and Strategic Objectives of the TSAS Program

The Framework establishes a strong foundation towards achieving the primary and strategic objectives of the TSAS Program:

The primary objective of the TSAS Program is the delivery of a range of specialist recovery-based services that support Tasmanians affected by sexual assault to overcome the effects and the impact of sexual assault and to regain their sense of control, dignity and self-esteem.

Address the impacts of sexual assault and deliver significant benefits to Tasmanian communities by increasing health and wellbeing, family functioning and economic participation.

Reduce incidences of sexual violence, including sexual assault in Tasmania through broader professional and community awareness of gender equity, the nature of sexual violence and the role of associated trauma in the social determinants of health for Tasmanians who have experienced sexual violence.

Target resources to ensure immediate clients needs are met, enabling people impacted by sexual assault to achieve their individual goals and opportunities are leveraged to build the capacity of mainstream and community organisations to understand and respond to the impacts of sexual assault.

Provide accessible and appropriate support and specialist responses that utilise contemporary, evidence-based practice.

Principles of the TSAS Program

The following set of six guiding principles form the basis of how TSAS Program funded services will work with people, professionals and the community to achieve high quality care and outcomes for Tasmanian children, young people and adults affected by sexual assault:

- **Building Capacity** – Preventing violence and ensuring safe environments for all children, young people and adults is a community responsibility.
- **Creating Pathways** – Pathways to quality responses and specialist care will be created and

maintained through collaboration, partnerships and referral between services.

- **A Responsive Service System** – A service system that will address the multiple and complex barriers people affected by sexual assault face in accessing contemporary, evidence based specialist services and responses.
- **Culturally Competent Responses** – Culturally competent services will be available that understand the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in today’s society and in Australia’s history. Culturally competent responses will also be available for people from CALD communities that take into account the diversity and particular needs of CALD children, young people and adults.

Quality Services – Services will demonstrate continuous improvement in the delivery of quality care and services for children, young people and adults impacted by sexual assault and community awareness and education to the wider community.



Priority Outcomes for the TSAS Program

The Department through DCS aims to ensure models of service delivery are put in place that achieve consistent positive outcomes utilising evidence-based contemporary based practice. To make certain that individuals reach their potential, families are strong and supportive, communities are safe, inclusive and resilient and Tasmanians have good health and well-being.

The TSAS Program has five priority outcomes:

1. **Education and Awareness** - People impacted by sexual violence, professionals and the wider Tasmanian community have a better awareness and improved knowledge about the nature and impact of sexual violence and appropriate responses and referral pathways.

2. **Individual Outcomes** – Service models that provide a person centred approach to support people who have experienced sexual assault to achieve individual goals, to address the impacts of sexual assault on their lives and to assist them in the recovery process to overcome the trauma of sexual assault.
3. **Access** – People affected by sexual assault have better access to contemporary, evidence-based services that are responsive to their immediate and long term needs.
4. **A Responsive Service System** – A service system that enables people impacted by sexual assault better access to specialist and other supports relevant to their needs and circumstances.
5. **Provision of Culturally Competent Services** – Services that understand and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD people and recognise spiritual, cultural and social needs and adapt the service accordingly.



The Framework provides a transparent foundation for the commissioning of TSAS Program services and the ongoing monitoring of the services performance. The Framework is a working document and will be reviewed in response to an ever-changing and evolving research and service response environment. This will ensure the critical success factors are captured along with any barriers to the achievement of the desired outcomes. This will also make certain that the Department, through DCS and the TSAS Program, continues to provide contemporary evidence-based responses for those impacted by sexual violence including sexual assault and to realise the ultimate goal of preventing incidences of sexual violence in the Tasmania community.

Notes

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