



## Strengthening Sexual Violence Policy Architecture in Tasmania

**Prepared by** Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS)

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**Purpose** This paper has been developed to inform consideration of the future direction of sexual violence policy in Tasmania. It examines how sexual violence is currently addressed within Tasmania’s gender-based violence policy architecture, including the relationship between family violence and child sexual abuse reform agendas, and identifies opportunities to strengthen coordination, accountability and strategic alignment. Drawing on evidence and contemporary reform developments, the paper explores the importance of dedicated, evidence-informed sexual violence policy architecture that builds on existing reform commitments and supports long-term system improvement.

The paper is intended to contribute to ongoing policy development and reform efforts and should be read as complementary to, rather than in place of, existing family violence and child sexual abuse reform agendas.

**Content warning** This document contains information about sexual violence and family violence. It includes specific references to different forms of violence, abuse and harm, as well as their impacts on individuals, families and communities. Given the nature of this information, we encourage readers to take care and consider their wellbeing when engaging with this material. If the information in this document raises concern or distress, please consider contacting the following services for support:

*1800RESPECT* – 24/7 domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support  
Ph: 1800 737 732 | SMS: 0458 737 732 | webchat: <https://1800respect.org.au/>

*13 YARN* – 24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People  
Ph: 13 92 76

*Kids Helpline* – 24/7 support for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years  
Ph: 1800 55 1800 | webchat: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

**About SASS** SASS is a specialist, non-government, sexual assault support service dedicated to promoting the safety, wellbeing and agency of victim survivors, and those at risk of, or otherwise impacted by sexual violence in Tasmania. We work across the prevention continuum – primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery, and healing – to deliver evidence-based, best practice and trauma-informed services.

In collaboration with government, non-government and community stakeholders, we work to amplify the voices and experiences of victim survivors and their support networks to inform legislative, policy, and sector reform that is attuned to the unique needs, complexities and impacts of sexual violence. We take a holistic approach, supporting individuals and families to heal from harm, while actively working to challenge the underlying drivers, structures, norms and attitudes that enable sexual violence. This approach underscores our unwavering commitment to creating lasting change for individuals and communities affected by sexual violence and our vision for a Tasmania free from sexual violence.

## Executive summary

Tasmania records some of the highest rates of sexual violence in the country. Despite the scale of sexual violence, it is not clearly or consistently addressed within Tasmania's gender-based violence policy settings.

Family violence and sexual violence are deeply interconnected and frequently co-occur, however they are not synonymous. While often framed this way in public policy, evidence indicates that a substantial proportion of sexual violence is experienced outside of family violence relationships. When sexual violence is framed as a subset of family violence, the distinct drivers and risks, patterns, prevention levers, system response requirements and recovery needs are obscured, creating a structural gap in how sexual violence is framed, prioritised, prevented and responded to in policy and practice. As a result, significant and pervasive forms of sexual violence including threats of harm; workplace sexual harassment and assault; technology facilitated sexual violence; sexual violence experienced by people subject to structural marginalisation; sexual assault of adults in institutional settings; and alcohol and other drug facilitated assault, remain fragmented across policy settings, limiting the effectiveness of reform efforts.

In Tasmania, policy responses to sexual violence have developed largely through broader gender-based violence reform agendas, particularly those relating to child sexual abuse and family violence, consequently establishing intimate partner sexual assault, child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours as policy priorities. While progress in these areas remains critical, current policy settings are insufficient to address the full scope of sexual violence across the life course and in all contexts.

This paper therefore emphasises the importance of developing clear, evidence-based, delineated sexual violence policy architecture. Consistent with contemporary approaches in other Australian jurisdictions, this would establish sexual violence as a clear policy priority, enhance responses to rising prevalence and emerging forms of harm, and complement existing and forthcoming reform initiatives. Such measures are designed to strengthen policy foundations, improve coordination and support sustained, measurable reductions in sexual violence over time.

## Defining family violence and sexual violence

Family violence and sexual violence are gendered forms of harm shaped by structural inequalities and the abuse of power, control, dignity, autonomy and agency, which are reinforced by social and cultural norms that condone or minimise both the act and impact of violence.

Family violence is characterised by patterns of violent, abusive or controlling behaviour inflicted by a person within the context of a legally defined relationship. At the time of writing, this is limited in Tasmania, to "significant" intimate partner relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual violence refers to sexual behaviour, conduct or acts that occur in the absence of enthusiastic, conscious and ongoing consent,<sup>2</sup> including where consent is withdrawn or a person is unable to consent. It encompasses both contact and non-contact conduct of a sexual nature and is inflicted most

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, the [Family Violence Act 2004](#) (Tas) limits family violence to prescribed conduct (as set out in the *Family violence Act 2004*) inflicted in the context of an intimate partner relationship, namely a marriage or a relationship that constitutes a 'significant relationship' under the [Relationships Act 2003](#) (Tas), between two adults, or where one or both parties are aged between 16 and 18 years.

<sup>2</sup> S. 2A, [Criminal Code Act 1924](#).

commonly by people known to the victim survivor, including, intimate partners, family members, carers, peers, colleagues, acquaintances, authority figures and professionals – across a broad range of private and public settings, such as homes, workplaces, communities, online platforms, institutions and via technology.

## Key data

### *Prevalence of sexual violence in Australia*

- An estimated 2.8 million people aged 18 years and over (14 per cent) experienced sexual violence (assault and/or threat) since the age of 15<sup>3</sup>
  - 1 in 5 women (22 per cent)
  - 1 in 16 men (6.1 per cent)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are around 3.5 times more likely to have been sexual assaulted compared to non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>4</sup>
- Three in four of LGBTQIA+SB people (75.8 per cent) have reported experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>
- Adults with ‘severe or profound disability’ were three times more likely (24 per cent) than adults without disability (9.6 per cent) to report experiencing sexual violence since the age of 15.<sup>6</sup>
- More than one in four Australians (28.5 per cent) experience child sexual abuse.<sup>7</sup>
  - More than 1 in 3 girls (37.3 per cent)
  - Almost 1 in 5 boys (18.8 per cent)
- Between 2018 and 2022, one in three people (33 per cent) experienced workplace sexual harassment, with higher prevalence among:<sup>8</sup>
  - Women (41 per cent)
  - People with diverse sexualities and genders (46 per cent)<sup>9</sup>
  - Young people up to 17 years (47 per cent)
  - People with disability (48 per cent)
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (56 per cent)
  - People with intersex variation (70 per cent)

### *Prevalence of sexual violence in Tasmania*

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<sup>3</sup> ABS (2023), [Personal Safety, Australia 2021-22](#), Sexual violence.

<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Social Services (2023), [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025: Under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](#), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Salter, M., Breckenridge, J., Lee- Ah Mat, V., Whitten, T., Kaladelfos, A., Suchting, M., Breckenridge, V., Dubler, N., & Griffin, A., (2024), [National Survey of LGBTQIA+SB Experiences of Sexual Violence – Report 1](#), Gendered Violence Research Network, UNSW Sydney, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (updated 2025), [Sexual violence](#), data is from 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Haslam, D., Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Scott, J.G., Finkelhor, D., Higgins, D.J., Meinck, F., Erskine, H.E., Thomas, H.J., Lawrence, D., & Malacova, E., (2023), Australian Child Maltreatment Study, [The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report](#), Queensland University of Technology, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2022), [Time for respect: fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#). Additionally 26 per cent of respondents were men; and 46 per cent of respondents were 18 and 29 years of age.

<sup>9</sup> People who identified as ‘gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, aromantic, undecided, not sure, questioning or other.’ Australian Human Rights Commission (2022), [Time for respect: fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#).

Sexual violence rates in Tasmania are among the highest in the country.

- Tasmania records the second highest rate of sexual assault and the third highest rate of sexual harassment of any Australian jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>
- Between 2019 and 2024, reports of sexual assault increased by 169 per cent,<sup>11</sup> reflecting rising prevalence, emerging forms of sexual violence, and increased community awareness.
- More than one in four women (26 per cent) experienced sexual assault or sexual threats since the age of 15.<sup>12</sup>
- More than one in two women (56.8 per cent) experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.<sup>13</sup>

In 2024, Tasmania Police recorded 567 sexual assaults.<sup>14</sup>

- The majority of victim survivors (85 per cent) were female:
  - Around 1 in 2 (52 per cent) were under 18 years of age
  - Almost 1 in 2 (47 per cent) were aged 18 years and over
- Around one in seven victim survivors (14 per cent) were male:
  - More than 3 in 4 (77 per cent) were under 18 years of age
  - Around 1 in 5 (22 per cent) were aged 18 and over
- More than a third of sexual assault victims (35 per cent) were aged between 10 and 17 years at the date of the assault.<sup>15</sup>
- The majority of victim survivors (91 per cent) knew the person who harmed them.
- More than three in four sexual assaults (77.8 per cent) were inflicted in residential location.<sup>16</sup>

## Key Distinctions and Policy Implications

### *Intersections with family violence*

Family violence and sexual violence frequently co-occur.<sup>17</sup> In 2024, approximately half (51.4 per cent) of reported sexual assaults were perpetrated in the context of family violence relationships.<sup>18</sup> Co-occurrence of sexual and family violence is associated with heightened risks of severe harm and

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<sup>10</sup> ABS, Personal Safety, Australia 2021-22 (2023), [Table 9.3](#) Women aged 18 years and over, Experiences since the age of 15, By state and territory: Proportion.

<sup>11</sup> ABS, Recorded Crimes – Victims 2024 (2025), [Table 9](#) Victims, Selected offences by states and territories, 1993 to 2024. Tasmania recorded 211 sexual assaults in 2019, and 567 in 2024.

<sup>12</sup> ABS, Personal Safety, Australia 2021-22 (2023), [Table 9.3](#). Women aged 18 years and over, Experiences since the age of 15, By state and territory: Proportion.

<sup>13</sup> ABS, Personal Safety, Australia 2021-22 (2023), [Table 9.3](#). Women aged 18 years and over, Experiences since the age of 15, By state and territory: Proportion.

<sup>14</sup> ABS, Recorded Crime – Victims 2024 (2025), [Tasmania](#), Sexual assault.

<sup>15</sup> ABS, Recorded Crime – Victims 2024 (2025), [Tasmania](#), Sexual assault.

<sup>16</sup> ABS, Recorded Crime – Victims 2024 (2025), [Table 12](#) – Victims, Location where offence occurred by selected offences, States and territories, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> For example, reproductive control, image-based abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, sexual exploitation, non-fatal strangulation, sexual coercion – including withholding or threatening to withhold medications or aids, threats to ‘out’ the person, cultural scripts surrounding marital obligation.; While the current Tasmanian legislative framework confines family violence to intimate partner violence, we understand that broader frameworks employed in other Australian jurisdictions recognise additional forms of sexual violence as family violence, such as sexual abuse of children within the family, including kinship structures, harmful sexual behaviours and adolescent violence within the home and sexual abuse of children in care. Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), [Summary and recommendations](#), p. 217 – 223.

<sup>18</sup> ABS, [Recorded Crime – Victims](#), Sexual assault, Tasmania, Sexual Assault, ‘There were 567 victims of sexual assault in Tasmania in 2024... Half (50%) of all recorded sexual assaults were FDV related (284 victims).’

lethality, including revictimisation; intergenerational harm and trauma; non-fatal strangulation; sexual exploitation; child sexual harm and other forms of child maltreatment; coercive control including sexual coercion; intimate partner homicide; filicide; and victim suicide. Women who experience intimate partner sexual assault are also reported as less likely to seek advice or support after an assault (44.3 per cent) than women who were sexually assaulted by a stranger (50.9 per cent).<sup>19</sup> Despite these elevated risks, sexual violence is often under-identified in family violence responses.<sup>20</sup>

While integrated approaches to sexual violence and family violence are essential, evidence demonstrates that sexual violence is inflicted beyond the scope of family violence relationships and cannot, therefore be effectively addressed through family violence-centred frameworks alone.

### *Distinct drivers and prevention requirements*

Primary prevention of gender-based violence in Australia has largely focussed on addressing the drivers of gender inequality.<sup>21</sup> However, evidence suggests that the gendered drivers of sexual violence manifest in distinct ways, shaped by specific risk factors, enabling conditions and challenges for prevention.<sup>22</sup> This includes beliefs, norms and rigid gendered stereotypes associated with intimacy; sexual entitlement and objectification; perceptions of men's sexual behaviour as uncontrollable; and social norms that condone, excuse or minimise sexual harm – often reinforced through cultures that reward sexual coercion and 'conquest'.<sup>23</sup> While these dynamics are grounded in gender inequality, they operate through distinct social, cultural and situational mechanisms that influence the contexts in which sexual violence occurs.

While adults who use family violence and/ or sexual violence may share underlying gendered belief systems, there are important distinctions in how these beliefs are rationalised and expressed, with direct implications for the design and delivery of prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, effective prevention requires comprehensive approaches that address both the shared drivers and the distinct mechanisms through which sexual violence is enabled. This includes initiatives to shift social norms and peer cultures, promote consent and ethical sexual conduct, and implement structural and institutional measures to reduce opportunities to cause harm and strengthen

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<sup>19</sup> ABS, Sexual violence, 2021-22 (2023), [Table 11.1](#) – Women aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual assault by a male in the last ten years, Support-seeking and perceptions of the most recent incident, By relationship to perpetrator of the most recent incident(a): Estimate and proportion

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton, G, & Tidmarsh, P., (2023) *The Intersections of Family Violence and Sexual Offending*.

<sup>21</sup> OurWatch, [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia](#), identifies the four key drivers of violence against women, being: condoning of violence against women; men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life; rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity; male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control. Hooker, L., Ison, J., Henry, N., Fisher, C., Forsdike, K., Young, F., Korsmeyer, H., O'Sullivan, G., & Taft, A. (2021), [Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence and Harassment Against Women and Girls: Combining Evidence and Practice Knowledge - Final Report and Theory of Change](#). La Trobe University, p. 30-32.

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton, G, & Tidmarsh, P., (2023) *The Intersections of Family Violence and Sexual Offending*, p. 38, 'Attention to primary prevention frameworks is encouraging, but... sometimes over-arching frameworks can lack specialist attention to specific forms of violence against women, namely, sexual violence, which requires targeted advocacy and prevention in terms of comprehensive sexual consent education.'; O'Conner, J., (2022), [The Longitudinal Effects of Rape Myth Beliefs and Rape Proclivity](#), *Psychol Men Masc* 2021, 22(2), p. 321-330; Adair, J., & Senn, CY., (2025), [The Role of Rape Myth Acceptance, Situational Context, and Gender in Individual's Perceptions of Image-Based Sexual Abuse Victims and Perpetrators](#), *J Interpers Violence* (2025) 41(3-4), p. 918-944.

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton, G, & Tidmarsh, P., (2023) *The Intersections of Family Violence and Sexual Offending*, p. 4 – 7.

accountabilities. Recognising these distinctions supports targeted prevention activity across drivers, risks and settings.<sup>25</sup>

### *Myths and misconceptions*

Entrenched myths and misconceptions about sexual violence continue to shape sexual scripts, community attitudes, disclosure patterns, system responses and legal outcomes. While some overlap with family violence,<sup>26</sup> sexual violence is also influenced by distinct social and cultural narratives that generate additional layers of shame, stigma and disbelief, and additional barriers to prevention and response.<sup>27</sup> These include persistent beliefs about false allegations, delayed disclosure and victim credibility and provocation. Each influences how sexual violence is understood and responded to in public, media and community discourse, as well as in legal proceedings, with implications for victim-survivor wellbeing, investigative processes, prosecutorial pathways and criminal justice outcomes.

Key features include:

- Normative ideas about what constitutes ‘real rape’, including assumptions that sexual assault involves physical force by a stranger,<sup>28</sup> that victims must present as visibly distressed and report immediately to be believed – shaping how victim survivors, people who use violence, bystanders and professionals interpret and respond to sexual harm.<sup>29</sup>
- For children and young people, these dynamics are compounded by harmful narratives about the fabrication of abuse, the reliability of children as witnesses, and expectations that they would immediately disclose to a trusted adult – despite the very nature of grooming and abuse.

Evidence further demonstrates the impacts of these narratives:

- Women who were sexually assaulted by a man, were much more likely to perceive the incident as a crime (33.5 per cent) if they were assaulted by a stranger than by an intimate partner (17.8 per cent) or another person known to them (18.1 per cent).<sup>30</sup>
- Women are more likely to perceive sexual assault by an intimate partner as ‘something that just happens’ (31.6 per cent) than by a stranger (19.1 per cent) or another person known to them (18.1 per cent).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> World Health Organisation, [Sexual Violence](#), Studies of sexual violence prevention strategies.

<sup>26</sup> Such as victim-blaming, minimisation of harm and assumptions that evidence of abuse requires visible injuries. Hamilton, G, & Tidmarsh, P., (2023) *The Intersections of Family Violence and Sexual Offending*, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Data demonstrates an evident downward trend in early reporting of sexual assault in Tasmania. A comparison of data from 2023 to 2024, shows the proportion of incidents reported within one year declined from 63.1 per cent to 51.1 per cent, while reports made more than one year after the sexual assault increased from 36.9 per cent to 47.6 per cent. ABS, *Recorded Crime – Victims 2024 (2025)*, [Table 15](#) Victims of sexual assault, Time to report by sex, States and territories, 2014–2024.

<sup>28</sup> 18 per cent of Australians surveyed reported this belief. ANROWS (2021), [Attitudes Matter: NCAS The 2021 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> ANROWS (2015), [Sexual assault and domestic violence in the context of co-occurrence and re-victimisation: State of knowledge paper](#), p. 5. These norms particularly affect interpretations of intimate partner sexual assault.

<sup>30</sup> Sexual violence, 2021-22, Table 11.1 Women aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual assault by a male in the last ten years, Support-seeking and perceptions of the most recent incident, By relationship to perpetrator of the most recent incident(a): Estimate and proportion

<sup>31</sup> ABS, Sexual violence, 2021-22 (2023), [Table 11.1](#) Women aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual assault by a male in the last ten years, Support-seeking and perceptions of the most recent incident, By relationship to perpetrator of the most recent incident(a): Estimate and proportion

- Around one in three Australians (34 per cent) believe women “lie about sexual assault as a way of getting back at men”, while one in four believe allegations of sexual assault are made because women later regret consensual sexual interactions (24 per cent).<sup>32</sup>
- One in four Australians (25 per cent) agree with problematic heterosexual sex scripts that privilege men’s entitlement to sex and position women as the “gatekeepers” who must resist men’s advances.<sup>33</sup>
- One in five Australians (21 per cent) believe consent can be disregarded in some circumstances, such as when a woman sends an intimate image to her partner and he shares it without her consent,<sup>34</sup> or because an aroused man “may not realise” the woman does not want to have sex.
- In Tasmania, almost one in four people (24 per) believe that older children have a responsibility to actively resist adults’ sexual advances.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside these narratives, is the misconception that family violence and sexual violence are either the same phenomenon or entirely separate, rather than distinct yet overlapping forms of harm. This false binary obscures the realities of sexual violence across different relationships and settings, contributing to uncertainty about risk, responsibility and appropriate response. Together, these factors impact prevention and help-seeking, contribute to inconsistent system responses, and reinforce the need for policy approaches that explicitly address the social and cultural dynamics of sexual violence.

### *Emerging forms of sexual violence*

Sexual violence is evolving in ways that extend beyond the traditional scope of family violence-centred policy frameworks and present new and complex policy challenges. Digital technologies, changing sexual cultures and emerging mechanisms of violence are expanding the settings, scale and experience of sexual harm. This includes the growth of image-based abuse, technology-facilitated sexual violence, online grooming, and AI-enabled sexual exploitation; the widespread availability and consumption of violent pornography; and the increasing normalisation of non-fatal strangulation and other harmful sexual practices.<sup>36</sup>

These forms of sexual violence are often inflicted outside of intimate partner and family relationships and span multiple policy portfolios, including education, emergency services, health, workplace safety, and child protection. As such, they are not adequately addressed through existing family violence mechanisms. They require targeted, dedicated policy, regulatory, and legislative responses capable of anticipating emerging risks, coordinating cross-portfolio action and supporting timely, evidence-informed responses to rapidly evolving forms of sexual harm.

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<sup>32</sup> ANROWS (2021), [Attitudes Matter: NCAS The 2021 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> ANROWS (2021), [Attitudes Matter: NCAS The 2021 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#), p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> ANROWS (2021), [Attitudes Matter: NCAS The 2021 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (2024), [The Australian child sexual abuse attitudes, knowledge and response study: Tasmania](#), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Respect Victoria, [Enabling policy and legislation](#).

## Legal systems

Family violence and sexual violence are addressed through intersecting, but materially different legal pathways. Responses to family violence operate through both civil and criminal legal pathways, with civil mechanisms designed to enable protective interventions based on assessed risk, alongside criminal legal responses where conduct constitutes a criminal offence.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, sexual violence is predominantly addressed through criminal legal pathways, often requiring progression through forensic, investigative and prosecutorial processes, with evidentiary requirements shaped by criminal legal thresholds and standards. These processes often rely on timely evidence collection, access to specialist professionals (including forensic medical examiners and specialist investigators), sustained victim survivor engagement and are often described as lengthy, resource-intensive, adversarial and retraumatising by both victims of sexual violence and family violence. Criminal legal responses are also influenced by entrenched myths, misconceptions and stigma associated with sexual harm, which can affect disclosure, reporting, investigative practice and justice outcomes.

These differences in legal and service system design also shape workforce models and operational pathways of response. While both family violence and sexual violence necessitate acute crisis response, family violence systems are often organised around immediate safety, risk management and intervention in the context of escalating violence and risk to life, with initial response to “incidents” of family violence commonly undertaken by general duties police.<sup>38</sup> Sexual violence responses also involve urgent and crisis-oriented intervention but are more commonly organised around specialist investigative pathways, evidentiary process and forensic response, including in the context of child sexual harm.

Further, where experiences of sexual violence have not been explicitly disclosed or identified and relevant pathways are inaccessible, sexual violence is often less likely to be recognised within family violence responses, despite the distinct dynamics, impacts and risks of harm associated with sexual violence.

## Structural Limitations of the Current Policy Approach to Sexual Violence

Existing gender-based violence reforms have delivered meaningful improvements in safety, accountability and system capability.<sup>39</sup> However, progress has been constrained by the current policy approach, which often locates sexual violence within family violence and child sexual abuse frameworks rather than as a distinct, whole-of-government policy domain.

This is reflected in *Tasmania’s Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027* (the ‘Action Plan’), which tends to address family violence and sexual violence together, without clearly identifying the different prevention levers, victim survivor experiences, service pathways, specialist capabilities,

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<sup>37</sup> We note that there are also considerable challenges associated with civil and criminal legal responses to family violence.

<sup>38</sup> Within the broader Safe at Home model that includes specialist Family Violence Units.

<sup>39</sup> Including through [Survivors at the Centre: Tasmania’s Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027](#), [Change for Children: Tasmania’s 10-year strategy for upholding the rights of children by preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse 2025-2035](#); [Implementation of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings \(2023\) recommendations](#); [Equal Means Equal: Tasmanian Women’s Strategy 2022-2027](#).

justice responses and outcomes measures required to address sexual violence.<sup>40</sup> While the Action Plan includes actions relevant to sexual violence, there is limited differentiation between family violence actions and sexual violence-specific initiatives. The Action Plan therefore provides limited guidance on how sexual violence related actions will be scaled, monitored or evaluated as distinct from family violence responses where necessary. As a result, sexual violence outcomes are not consistently disaggregated in reporting, reducing visibility of trends, impacts, system performance and improvement.

In practice, a combined policy approach tends to adopt a family violence lens, which can unintentionally position sexual violence as a subset of family violence, despite the distinct contexts, drivers, disclosure patterns, response and healing trajectories. While this combined approach has enabled important progress, the absence of dedicated, comprehensive sexual violence policy architecture creates a range of structural risks and gaps, limiting capacity to deliver coordinated and fit-for-purpose responses to sexual violence across all forms, settings and life stages.

### *Structural risks and gaps associated with Tasmania's current policy approach*

#### *Policy architecture and governance*

Tasmania's policy architecture does not consistently articulate or reflect the intersections and distinctions between family violence and sexual violence, nor does it provide guidance on when integrated approaches are appropriate versus when distinct responses are required. The absence of dedicated, evidence-based architecture – comprising a clear theory of change, defined governance arrangements and targeted reforms across the prevention continuum – can result in uneven momentum and limited capability to address the full spectrum of sexual violence.

#### *Accountability*

Responsibility for sexual violence prevention and response is distributed across multiple policy portfolios and reform streams, including family violence, child safety, health, justice and education. While this reflects the cross-portfolio nature of the issue, system-level stewardship and accountability for sexual violence outcomes are not clearly delineated or defined within existing governance arrangements and rely largely on existing family violence and child sexual harm mechanisms. Strengthening system-wide mechanisms to align strategic sexual violence priorities, coordinate reform efforts and sustain accountability would reduce fragmented responses and support a more coordinated and coherent approach to addressing sexual violence.

#### *System design and service delivery*

Where sexual violence is situated within family violence policy architecture, family violence policy, sector and practice priorities can operate as a default approach to sexual violence. Over time, this may dilute sexual violence specialisation and limit the capacity of systems to deliver prevention and response approaches that are tailored to the distinct dynamics and impacts of sexual violence,<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Such as workplace sexual harassment and assault, acquaintance sexual assault, digital/ online sexual harm, consent education outside of school settings.

<sup>41</sup> George, A.J., Lowik, V., Suzuki, M., Corbett-Jarvis, N., & Heather, L., (2023), Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, CQUniversity College of Law and Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research, [Specialist Approaches to Managing Sexual Assault Proceedings: an Integrative Review](#).

including across workforce capability, commissioning, service models, system maturity and innovation.<sup>42</sup> These impacts are likely to be most pronounced for victim survivors who experience heightened risks of victimisation and who encounter additional structural barriers and vulnerabilities within the context of broader systems response.

### *Population and life-course*

Tasmania has developed a strong focus on preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse but is yet to establish a framework designed to address the full spectrum of sexual violence, across the lifespan and across settings. This results in uneven visibility of where and how sexual violence occurs and who is impacted. Without a life-course and whole-of-population perspective, policy development, planning and commissioning overlooks key cohorts and contexts, from child sexual harm to sexual violence experienced by older people, including in the context of elder abuse. As a result, policy settings do not consistently account for the diverse ways that sexual violence is experienced across the lifespan, including the varying contexts, risks, impacts and support needs associated with different life stages and circumstances.

### *Prevention and early intervention*

While gender-based violence policy addresses structural drivers such as gender inequality, it does not consistently account for the specific drivers and enabling conditions related to sexual violence. As a result, prevention and early intervention efforts are not always targeted to the contexts in which sexual violence is inflicted or to the mechanisms through which harm is sustained. Without dedicated sexual violence policy architecture to guide prioritisation and coordination, prevention and early intervention efforts are less likely to systematically target the contexts, risks and mechanisms which enable and perpetuate sexual violence.

### *Evidence, measurement, monitoring, evaluation and learning*

Sexual violence indicators, targets, outcomes and reporting lines are not consistently articulated across government policy and performance frameworks. In many cases, sexual violence data is aggregated within broader family violence reporting,<sup>43</sup> reducing visibility of trends, system performance and survivor outcomes.<sup>44</sup> This lack of specificity limits transparency and accountability and reduces the ability to monitor progress, evaluate impact and inform decision-making.<sup>45</sup>

### *Justice and accountability*

To our knowledge and at the time of writing, Tasmania does not currently have a public-facing, integrated roadmap for sexual violence justice reform. While noting the expansive reform agenda arising from the COI, there is limited visibility of how other major inquiries, such as the Australian Law

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<sup>42</sup> Tidmarch, P., & Hamilton, G., (2021), [Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission Improving the Response of the Justice System to Sexual Offences: Questions](#).

<sup>43</sup> While the Tasmanian Government's six monthly progress reports are welcome, [Tasmania's Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan: Survivors at the Centre 2022-2027](#) does not appear to be accompanied by a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. We note that a number of sexual violence specific performance measures are included in the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#) – [National Outcomes Framework Performance Measurement Plan](#).

<sup>44</sup> At the time of writing, the Tasmanian Change for Children Outcome and Evaluation Framework had not been published.

<sup>45</sup> Data challenges associated with sexual violence – such as attrition, timeliness, survivor experience and outcomes – are not consistently addressed through a clear, publicly available data improvement agenda in Tasmania.

Reform Commission Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence<sup>46</sup> and other national policy developments, are being considered, prioritised and progressed within Tasmania's reform agenda.. This includes how persistent challenges within the criminal legal system will be addressed, as well as the extent to which victim survivors can or will have access to safe and appropriate justice and healing pathways outside of the criminal legal system.

### *Strategic implication*

Collectively, these issues point to the absence of dedicated, evidence-based, whole-of-government sexual violence policy architecture across all forms, settings and life stages and across the scope of the prevention continuum. Strengthening this foundation will support Tasmania's capacity to deliver coordinated, evidence-informed and measurable reform outcomes.

### *Contemporary approaches to sexual violence policy in other jurisdictions*

Queensland,<sup>47</sup> New South Wales<sup>48</sup> and Western Australia<sup>49</sup> have responded to similar challenges by developing standalone sexual violence policy frameworks, aligned with, but distinct from broader domestic and family violence reforms. This reflects a growing recognition, that targeted and sustained action is required to address the unique risks, experiences and impacts of sexual violence.<sup>50</sup> This includes the high prevalence, significant underreporting and historical overshadowing within both gender-based violence and family violence policy frameworks, which have contributed to fragmented systems, safety risks and unmet victim survivor needs.<sup>51</sup>

Common features of policy frameworks in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia include:

- Recognition that sexual violence is a complex issue with distinct dynamics and risk factors, requiring targeted and sustained action beyond measures designed to address family violence.
- Acknowledgement that while sexual violence is a form of gendered violence that disproportionately victimises women and girls, sexual violence impacts people of all genders who require inclusive, specialist and accessible supports.
- Separate but aligned sexual violence and family violence policy frameworks enable both pillars to draw on lived experience, best practice, evidence and specialist expertise, while maintaining shared principles, governance arrangements and coordinated or integrated action where appropriate.

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<sup>46</sup> Australian Government, Australian Law Reform Commission (2025), [Final Report – Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence](#).

<sup>47</sup> Queensland Government (2024), [Prevent. Support. Believe. Queensland's framework to address sexual violence](#).

<sup>48</sup> New South Wales Government (2022), [NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027](#).

<sup>49</sup> Government of Western Australia (2025), [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy 2025-2035: Addressing sexual violence together](#).

<sup>50</sup> Schnittker, J., (2022), [What makes sexual violence different? Comparing the effects of sexual and non-sexual violence on psychological distress](#), SSM – Mental Health, Vol. 2; ANROWS (2022), [A life course approach to determining the prevalence and impact of sexual violence in Australia: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health](#).

<sup>51</sup> Queensland Government, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, The Honourable Yvette D'Ath, Media Statement (19 April 2024), [Latest action plan key to efforts to end sexual violence in Queensland](#), 'The plan captures the extensive work underway as recommended by the second report of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce.'

- Clear articulation of sexual violence-specific outcomes, indicators and accountability arrangements to drive measurable progress.

In these jurisdictions, standalone sexual violence policy has been developed as an extension of integrated gender-based violence reforms, rather than a departure from them. This approach provides clearer guidance on where integration is appropriate and where distinct responses are required. This contemporary policy direction offers a credible and practical reference point for Tasmania in shaping the next phase of sexual violence reforms.<sup>52</sup>

### **Integrated but not absorbed – the need to establish dedicated sexual violence policy architecture**

While commendable action has been taken to address aspects of gender-based violence, this paper demonstrates that further reform is required to ensure Tasmania’s policy settings adequately account for the full scope, complexity and prevalence of sexual violence across the life course and in all settings.

The risks identified within the current gender-based violence policy framework are systemic rather than programmatic. As such, they are unlikely to be fully addressed through existing policy settings alone. Addressing these risks will require dedicated, evidence-based sexual violence policy architecture to strengthen the foundation for reform and enable more coordinated, evidence-based and accountable action. This would support an approach in which family violence and sexual violence are recognised as distinct but intersecting policy domains, enhancing reform efforts by clarifying where integrated responses are appropriate, where distinct approaches are required and how the two domains intersect in contexts of co-occurring harm. This approach aligns with contemporary policy practice in jurisdictions such as Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia, where standalone strategies support distinct yet integrated responses to family violence and sexual violence reform.

Tasmania’s reform agenda presents a timely and strategic opportunity to address existing limitations in the current policy approach by embedding dedicated sexual violence policy architecture across key settings. Advancing this work now will strengthen Tasmania’s capacity to respond to rising prevalence, emerging forms of sexual violence and changing community expectations and deliver more coherent and effective action to prevent sexual violence into the future.

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<sup>52</sup> We note that *Tasmania’s Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027* will reach term in 2027.