

LAUREL HOUSE STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES

Leading together:
*Ending sexual
violence starts here*

July 2025



Laurel House
SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT
COUNSELLING • EDUCATION • ADVOCACY • CHANGE



Acknowledgement of Country

Laurel House acknowledges and pays respect to the Palawa, who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Lutruwita. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We particularly acknowledge the resistance and resilience of those Aboriginal people who have experienced sexual violence.

Acknowledgement to Victim-Survivors

Laurel House also honour and acknowledge the victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. We recognise the immense strength it takes to confront and heal from these traumatic experiences. We commit to amplifying your voices, advocating for change, and standing side by side on the path to healing and recovery.

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Summary of priorities

Laurel House calls on all candidates to commit to real action to prevent sexual harm and support victim-survivors of sexual violence and child sexual abuse. As the July 2025 snap election approaches, we are seeking clear commitments from candidates to:

- 1. Commit to a Future Free from Sexual Violence and Child Sexual Abuse:** We ask all candidates to commit to building a Tasmania free from sexual violence and child sexual abuse and to keeping these issues front and centre in public and political conversations. This requires a renewed commitment to fully implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings — ensuring this critical work is prioritised, adequately funded, and seen through over time.
- 2. Partner with Laurel House & Lived Experience to Build a System That Works:** We ask all candidates to commit to working in genuine partnership with Laurel House, our sector, and victim-survivors to create a system that is trauma-informed, inclusive, and truly fit for purpose. This includes supporting a whole-of-government framework for engagement and consultation that sets clear, best-practice standards across all departments.
- 3. Act on the Evidence to Drive Prevention, Reform and Culture Change:** We ask all candidates to commit to actioning evidence — including major national studies and law reform reports — to drive systemic reform, prevention strategies, and cultural change across government and community to prevent, respond to, and heal from sexual violence and child sexual abuse.

Each priority is outlined in detail in the sections below. We invite all candidates to sign on to these commitments — and demonstrate genuine leadership in making Tasmania safe from sexual harm.

Please contact Laurel House to discuss these issues in more depth. We welcome your interest and questions.

- To discuss our positions during your campaign or after election, please contact Kathryn Fordyce on 0427 739 397 or kathryn.fordyce@laurelhouse.org.au
- For advice about your public commitment/statement, please contact Lucy Mercer-Mapstone on 0458 173 629 or lucy@laurelhouse.org.au

ONE – Commit to a Future Free from Sexual Violence and Child Sexual Abuse

We ask all candidates to commit to building a Tasmania free from sexual violence and child sexual abuse and to keeping these issues front and centre in public and political conversations. This requires a renewed commitment to fully implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings – ensuring this critical work is prioritised, adequately funded, and seen through over time.

A shocking **1 in 4 Australians have experienced sexual abuse as children.**ⁱ When sexual violence and child sexual abuse are absent from public commitments and campaign platforms, it reinforces silence – and silence reinforces shame and perpetuates harm. Victim-survivors, their families and communities deserve to see these issues named, prioritised and addressed with care, integrity and action.

Ending sexual violence and child sexual abuse is a shared responsibility – and a long-term project beyond a one-off reform effort. It requires sustained leadership, cultural and structural change, and a whole-of-community response that centres the voices and needs of victim-survivors.

We acknowledge the progress made so far, but with only 27% of recommendations implemented, most of the work remains ahead – and it's vital that momentum is maintained. Key areas still lack action, including increased funding to reduce sexual assault counselling wait times, provision of specialist support for children in Ashley Youth Detention Centre, for priority groups, and responses to harmful sexual behaviours (Recommendations 21.4, 21.6, 21.8; see attached Laurel House Budget Priority Statement). Despite a 2026 implementation deadline for the former two recommendations, sustained funding commitments remain absent.

Together, we can build a safer Tasmania – one where sexual violence is no longer hidden or tolerated, and where the systems, culture and supports around victim-survivors truly reflect our shared values of safety, dignity and justice.

TWO – Partner with Laurel House & Lived Experience to Build a System That Works

We ask all candidates to commit to working in genuine partnership with Laurel House, our sector, and victim-survivors to create a system that is trauma-informed, inclusive, and truly fit for purpose. This includes supporting a whole-of-government framework for engagement and consultation that sets clear, best-practice standards across all departments.

Laurel House is a trusted, specialist service grounded in trauma-informed practice and a wealth of experience walking alongside victim-survivors. We have built deep, trusting community networks in Tasmania's north and north west where our team members work to both respond to and prevent harm through education, early intervention, and advocacy. Such local knowledge driving local solutions is the only way forward in building a tailored system that works.

But to continue to do this work, the system around us must be built to support it. And, with an **158% increase in reported sexual assault from 2014 to 2023ⁱⁱ**, that system is currently in urgent need of improvement.

A system that truly meets the needs of communities is one that is co-designed – not just consulted on – with those most affected. This means engaging with victim-survivors in authentic, inclusive, and appropriately resourced ways. It means recognising the diversity of lived and living experience – including experiences shaped by race, Indigeneity, disability, gender, sexuality, class, culture, belief system, and geography – and ensuring that engagement mechanisms are intersectional, accessible, and safe. It also means moving toward a coordinated, trauma-informed, whole-of-government approach that creates opportunities for shared learning and lasting change.

To harness the collective power of government, organisations, and lived experience, we need a coordinated, well-resourced, and trauma-informed approach to engagement that is intersectional, inclusive, and embedded in how government works. Designed in partnership with relevant services and communities, this whole-of-government engagement framework must be co-designed with those it is intended to engage.

True partnership means designing systems together, listening deeply, and recognising the value of the lived expertise of victim-survivors and the professional expertise that sits with Laurel House. This is how we build a system that works for everyone.

THREE – Act on the Evidence: Drive Prevention, Reform and Culture Change

We ask all candidates to commit to actioning evidence – including major national studies and law reform reports – to drive systemic reform, prevention strategies, and cultural change across government and community to prevent, respond to, and heal from sexual violence and child sexual abuse.

We know what needs to change and in what direction – the evidence base is clear. Multiple reports^{1 2 3} all highlight what's not working – and what will drive meaningful progress. These reports reinforce what we hear every day from victim-survivors: systems are still falling short of meeting the needs of those impacted by sexual harm.

Many justice processes remain inaccessible, retraumatising or ineffective and misunderstandings and myths about sexual violence remain widespread in our communities. For example, only 20% of Australian adults had high confidence that they could recognise the signs or behaviours of when a child has been sexually abused and **52% of adults said that they didn't know how to keep a child safe from sexual abuse.**² Services that are central to the solution, like Laurel House, are currently doing this work in ways that are stretched thin by ever-growing demand and chronic under resourcing.

Tasmanians need real action. The evidence tells us clearly what needs to be done. It is up to governments to act on this evidence by ensuring it informs policy development, funding choices and reform agendas across portfolios.

We call for a whole-of-government commitment to aligning policy and funding decisions with what we already know works. Laurel House is ready to work with government to translate this evidence into tangible, meaningful change – to shift systems, improve outcomes, and create safer futures for all Tasmanians.

¹ The Australian Law Reform Commission [Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence](#)

² The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse [Australian Child Sexual Abuse Attitudes, Knowledge and Response Study](#)

³ ANROWS [National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey](#)

COMMIT NOW

We urge you to make a public commitment to these priorities to demonstrate your support for making choices that ensure a future for Tasmanians that is free from sexual harm.

You can show your commitment by:

- Talking with your colleagues and voters about your commitment to taking action to prevent and respond to sexual harm.
- Making a public statement of commitment at campaign events
- Making a public statement of commitment on social media and traditional media. We have provided some draft text below.
- Contact Laurel House to discuss these issues in more depth. We welcome your interest and questions.

Use the below text to publicly commit to these priorities – ensuring a safer future for Tasmanians free from sexual harm.

Leading together: Ending sexual violence starts here

I proudly commit to:

- ♥ A future free from sexual violence and child sexual abuse.
- 🛡️ A sexual violence prevention and response system that is trauma-informed, inclusive, and truly fit for purpose.
- 🤝 A response to sexual violence and child sexual abuse that is evidence-based and action focused.

I'm standing for safer communities and committing to lead in partnership with victim-survivors and frontline services who know it best. Together we will end sexual violence.

For guidance on how to talk publicly about sexual violence and child sexual abuse, see these resources:

- Our Watch – [Guidelines for reporting on violence against women](#)
- National Office for Child Safety – [Reporting on child sexual abuse](#)

When sharing information about child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Tasmania, we encourage the inclusion of the following services:

- For 24-hour sexual assault support call 1800 697 877 (1800 MY SUPPORT)
- If you are concerned about a child's wellbeing and safety, call the Advice and Referral Line on 1800 000 123
- If you are worried about your thoughts or behaviour towards children, please call STOP It Now! on 1800 01 1800
- If you are worried about your behaviour towards your partner, please call the MENS program on 1300 364 27

About Laurel House



Laurel House is a not-for-profit, community-based service supporting victim-survivors of sexual assault across North and North-West Tasmania. We provide trauma-informed, evidence-based therapeutic services to victim-survivors, their families and supporters – including counselling at our Launceston, Devonport and Burnie centres, outreach locations, 24/7 phone support, and assistance with police and forensic processes.

We partner with the Tasmanian Government to deliver the Arch Centres (multidisciplinary centres for victim-survivors), with the Northern Arch open and the North-West Arch in development. We also deliver the PAST Program for children and young people (aged 17 and under) who display harmful sexual behaviours.

Our work extends to community education and capacity building to prevent sexual harm and strengthen responses to disclosures. We play a key role in advocacy and policy reform, including through LEAPY, our advisory panel empowering victim-survivors aged 12 to 18 to drive change.

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Disclaimer:

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This document was written by Dr. Lucy Mercer-Mapstone (Policy, Advocacy, and Lived Experience Lead) with input from Laurel House staff.

ⁱ <https://www.acms.au/resources/the-prevalence-and-impact-of-child-maltreatment-in-australia-findings-from-the-australian-child-maltreatment-study-2023-brief-report/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/budget-and-financial-management/2025-26-tasmanian-budget>



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