

Budget Priorities Statement

2025-26 State Budget Community Consultation

22 December 2024



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

Acknowledgement of Country

Laurel House acknowledges and pay 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.

Disclaimer:

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About Laurel House

Laurel House is a not-for-profit, community-based sexual assault support service based in North and North-West Tasmania. Laurel House provides a range of trauma-informed, evidence based, therapeutic services to victim-survivors of sexual assault, their families and supporters. We also develop and deliver a broad range of programs to adults, young people and children including the provision of therapeutic face-to-face counselling at our centres located at Launceston, Devonport and Burnie and through outreach locations across the North and North-West Tasmania, and 24/7 telephone support and assistance with accessing police and forensic medical processes.

Laurel House partners with the Tasmanian Government in the delivery of the Arch Centres (multidisciplinary centres for victim-survivors of sexual harm) with the Northern Arch Centre opened in 2023 and the North-West Arch Centre currently under development.

Laurel House delivers the PAST (Prevention, Assessment, Support and Treatment) Program for children and young people (aged 17 years and under) who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours in North and North-West Tasmania.

Our team also provides community education and other capacity building programs focused on the prevention of sexual harm and on supporting parents, carers and service providers to better respond to disclosures of sexual violence.

Laurel House plays a key role in policy and advocacy work to improve the lives and safety of victim-survivors and the Tasmanian community. This includes our Laurel House Expert Advisory Panel for Youth (LEAPY) which is a program that provides victim-survivors aged 12 to 18 years with an opportunity to advocate and drive change, and our Policy and Advocacy Committee comprised of a diverse group of experts from practice, research, policy and lived experience.

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Executive Summary

Laurel House welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the 2025-26 (FY26) State Budget Community Consultation.

Laurel House is committed to playing a leading role in supporting the Tasmanian Government's response to:

- the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Tasmanian Government Responses to Institutional Child Sexual Abuse ("the Commission of Inquiry")
- the development and implementation of Change for Children - Tasmania's 10-year Strategy for upholding the rights of children by preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse ("Change for Children") and its associated action plans,
- the implementation of Survivors at the Centre - Tasmania's Third Action Plan for Family and Sexual Violence 2022-2027 ("Survivors at the Centre"),
- the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030 ("the CSA National Strategy"), and
- the National Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 ("the National Plan").

To assist in Tasmania's responses to the above, we seek commitments in five areas - Therapeutic and Support Services, Arch Multidisciplinary Centres, Harmful Sexual Behaviour Services, Primary Prevention Education, and Forensic Medical Examinations.

We have recommended longer-term investment in Laurel House services through five-year funding to provide greater financial stability, enable long-term planning, and ensure sustainability. This extended funding would allow us to focus on building meaningful relationships, improving services, without the constant pressure of annual funding uplifts and short-term funding agreements.

Longer funding cycles also reduce administrative burdens, allowing more resources to be directed towards our core work—supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence. Additionally, it helps address specific challenges in relation to our workforce shortage by making jobs more attractive, enabling us to invest in recruiting the right people, training and retaining skilled staff, and building a committed workforce, ultimately leading to better service and community impact.

1 Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings Final Report

2 Change for Children Draft Strategy and Action Plan

3 Survivors at the Centre Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027

4 National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

5 National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (dss.gov.au)

ONE: Therapeutic and Support Services

- \$24.43 million for FY26 to FY30 for the delivery of therapeutic supports to victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence North and North West Tasmania. This includes \$150,000 for FY26 to undertake a scoping project that models various scenarios and predicts future demand and funding needs.

TWO: Arch Multidisciplinary Centres

- \$6.08 million for FY26 to FY30 to provide therapeutic and support services in the Arch North and North West to fund staff requirements of the current service agreement, and match the higher staffing we provide to meet the increasing demands for services since the opening of the Northern Arch and that which we anticipate in the Western Arch when it opens in FY26.

THREE: Harmful Sexual Behaviour Program

- \$7.83 million for FY26 to FY30 to continue and strengthen the delivery of programs to prevent and respond to problematic and harmful sexual behaviours in North and North West Tasmania. Additional investment will strengthen the delivery of primary prevention, early intervention and therapeutic supports for children and young people who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviours across North and North West Tasmania, and to provide support and education for the parents/caregivers, schools, teachers and others.

FOUR: Primary Prevention Education

- \$6.08 million for FY2026 to FY30 to increase the reach of education programs including Laurel House's consent and respectful relationships programs, and All Come out to Play. These programs play a key role in primary prevention efforts, educating schools, communities, and organisations in North and NW Tasmania.

FIVE: Forensic Medical Examinations

- \$200,000 for a pilot project in FY26 to systematically explore and make recommendations for how forensic medical examination access can be equitable, accessible, and consistent across the state in all metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote areas to address the current dire shortfall.

ONE: Therapeutic and Support Services

We seek a commitment to convert the additional funding provided in FY25 by the Tasmanian Government and other funding provided by the Federal Government in FY23-FY26 to core funding for Laurel House for the delivery of therapeutic supports to victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence North and North West Tasmania. We also request \$150,000 for FY26 to undertake a scoping project that models various scenarios and predicts future demand and funding needs. **Requested – \$24.43 million for FY26 to FY30.**

Over recent years, victim-survivors, their families, supporters and others affected by sexual harm have benefited from the additional uplift in service capacity due to the Tasmanian Government investment in Laurel House. In FY24, Laurel House received \$600,000 and \$1.77 million in FY25 in addition to our core funding and National Partnership Agreement funding to assist in meeting Commission of Inquiry recommendations (21.1, 21.2, 21.4, 21.6), including to reduce waitlists for therapeutic services by 30 June 2026.

This investment has allowed Laurel House to increase delivery of therapeutic services including the addition of a brief intervention model from our offices in Launceston, Burnie and Devonport and from outreach locations across regional and remote North and North West Tasmania. In 2025, this investment will see an increased range of peer support and group programs being offered across Northern Tasmania, including online offerings. Additionally, this investment has allowed us to expand our delivery of community education including primary prevention and early intervention initiatives. We have seen an increase in community understanding of the work Laurel House does to support all genders, sexualities, ages, abilities and cultures whether their experience of sexual harm was recent or historical. In turn, these efforts combined with the increase in community awareness of child sexual abuse and sexual violence due to the Commission of Inquiry, the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, campaigns focused on violence against women, and other media and reviews, was seen an increase in demand for our services.

While we value and are grateful for the investment in our services, the one-off nature of funding agreements provided in FY23, FY24, and especially in FY25 creates significant barriers to effective workforce and organisational planning that will ensure that victim-survivors, their families and supporters receive the services they need in a timely manner, and that waiting times for therapeutic services are reduced.

Continued increased funding provided over the forward years (where increased investment is included in our core funding agreement) will provide:

- a stabilised workforce,
- a continuation of the sustained uplift in the capacity of Laurel House to meet current and increased demand for services with highly skilled staff and contemporary practice, and
- more timely access to specialist services for victim-survivors, family and caregivers, and bystanders who have been impacted by sexual violence or child sexual abuse.

This includes:

- Individual therapeutic counselling, psychoeducation and other supports,
- Group therapeutic programs including counselling, psychoeducation and other supports,
- Social integration models of support for people on the waitlist or exiting the service,
- Peer support groups and other peer programs,
- Child and family specific supports,
- Specialist programs and considerations relevant to priority groups including Aboriginal people, people with disability, people with mental illness, LGBTIQ+ people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, men and older persons,
- Increased capacity to support University of Tasmania and other student work experience placements for relevant allied health students contributing to the development of the future Tasmanian workforce.

Sustained funding at the requested increased level will support Laurel House to reduce waiting times to the target set by the Commission (21.4) of no longer than four weeks with improved accessibility of services across regional and remote areas in North and North West Tasmania.

We are also seeking an additional one-off investment to fund collaboration with the State Government to better understand and plan for future service demand. It is currently uncertain whether existing funding will be sufficient to meet the goal of reducing the waitlist to four weeks by 2026, as potential growth in demand has been difficult to predict. Laurel House proposes a partnership with the government to conduct detailed scoping and forward-looking planning to assess future demand for our services. This includes funding of \$150,000 to model various scenarios and predict future needs, enabling both parties to make informed decisions about resource allocation and long-term strategy. This collaboration would ensure that appropriate investments are made to meet the growing demand for services while maintaining high-quality care.

Funding Source	2024-25 (FY25) Current Year	2025-26 (FY26) Year 1	2026-27 (FY27) Year 2	2027-28 (FY28) Year 3	2028-29 (FY29) Year 4	2029-30 (FY30) Year 5	Total FY26 to FY30 (Year 1 to Year 5)
	Confirmed indexation: 3.5%	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	
Core Funding (including indexation)	\$2,148,441	\$4,035,994	\$4,597,494	\$4,827,369	\$5,068,737	\$5,322,174	\$23,851,768
Funding Uplift	\$1,770,000	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core
National Partnership Agreement	\$415,138	\$427,592 (confirmed)	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core	Included in core	\$427,592 for FY26 then included in core
Service Demand Project and findings	N/A	\$150,000	TBC based on project findings	TBC based on project findings	TBC based on project findings	TBC based on project findings	\$150,000 for FY26 only at this stage
Total	\$4,333,579	\$4,463,586	\$4,597,494 plus increase based on service demand project findings	\$4,827,369 plus increase based on service demand project findings	\$5,068,737 plus increase based on service demand project findings	\$5,322,174 plus increase based on service demand project findings	\$24,429,360 plus increase based on service demand project findings

TWO: Arch Multidisciplinary Centres

We seek a commitment to increase funding to provide therapeutic and support services in the Arch North and Arch North West to fund staff requirements of the current service agreement, and match the higher staffing we provide to meet the increasing demands for services since the opening of the Northern Arch and that which we anticipate in the Western Arch when it opens in FY26. **Requested - \$6.08 million for FY26 to FY30.**

Arch provides a safe space where people can get information and support when affected by sexual violence. At Arch, multi-disciplinary services and organisations that support people affected by sexual harm work together to provide coordinated and collaborative, trauma-informed and victim-centred support. Laurel House provides a core part of these specialist therapeutic and support services in the North (and will do the same when the North West Centre opens). However, the current funding agreement (utilising National Partnership Agreement funds) for the Arch North of \$500,000 for FY24 and FY25, and the \$250,000 provided in FY25 for the Arch North for the Arch North West is grossly insufficient and does not provide the surety of funding that we had hoped following the Rockliff Government's announcement that the Arch Centres (including the NW Arch) would be permanently funded.⁶

Laurel House has advocated since before Arch North (and Arch South) opened in 2024 that the current investment is severely insufficient and does not cover the staffing requirements of the service agreement, backfill, oversight and management. Further since opening, demand for specialist sexual violence support in the Arch, both directly with clients and in the form of secondary consultations and operational support to other partners and the program team has necessitated considerable additional staffing of counsellors/senior counsellors.

The recent announcement of permanent funding for the Arch and the lines in the recent State budget do not include the funding for external specialist sexual assault services, indicating that this is dependent on our National Partnership Agreement Funding. With our current core services already stretched thin, the need to extend our services consistently into the Arch Centres puts significant pressure on our already strained workforce and reduces our capacity to meet increasing demands and address our therapeutic services waitlist. Victim-survivors, whether through Laurel House directly or through the Arch centres, deserve better.

⁶ Supporting Tasmanian Women Announcement | Premier of Tasmania

Since the opening of the Arch, demand for support from victim-survivors has steadily increased. Laurel House is seeking an investment of \$6.08 million over the next five years to enable us to continue to provide this essential higher level of specialist support in an ongoing and sustainable way. This investment would include:

- staffing requirements of the current service agreement
- backfill for when these staff are on leave or professional development
- a senior counsellor on-site at each Arch Centre
- senior management support and oversight
- and extra staffing as required in response to demand.

	2024-25 (FY25) Current Year	2025-26 (FY26) Year 1	2026-27 (FY27) Year 2	2027-28 (FY28) Year 3	2028-29 (FY29) Year 4	2029-30 (FY30) Year 5	Total FY26 to FY30 (Year 1 to Year 5)
	Confirmed indexation: Nil	Announced indexation: Nil	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	
Arch North	\$250,000	\$558,822	\$575,587	\$604,366	\$634,584	\$666,313	\$3,039,672
Arch NW	\$250,000	\$588,822	\$575,587	\$604,366	\$634,584	\$666,313	\$3,039,672
Total	\$500,000	\$1,117,644	\$1,151,174	\$1,208,732	\$1,269,168	\$1,332,626	\$6,079,344

THREE: Harmful Sexual Behaviours Program

We seek a commitment to extend the additional funding provided in 2024-25 for the delivery of the harmful sexual behaviour services inclusive of primary prevention, early intervention and therapeutic supports. **Requested - a five year \$7.83 million agreement for FY26 to FY30.**

Currently Laurel House provides the Prevention, Assessment, Support and Treatment of Harmful Sexual Behaviours (PAST) Program in the North and North West of Tasmania. The program delivers therapeutic intervention, assessment and case management, in partnership with Mission Australia, and the Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS).

This specialist harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) program currently provides therapeutic responses, early intervention and primary prevention programs to children, young people and the community to:

- Improve understanding of, and responses to, children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviours.
- Proactively engage and work with young Tasmanians at risk of causing harm to either themselves or other children, to promote prosocial, respectful relationships and healthy intimacy. This includes individuals and groups of children that are at greater risk of displaying or being affected by harmful sexual behaviours (e.g. children with disabilities, those exposed to family violence or other childhood trauma, children who have been in out-of-home care).
- Proactively engage and provide education to school staff, parents, caregivers, and families to ensure caregivers, staff in schools, community counselling and youth specific services are confident to identify HSB and refer to appropriate services.
- Support parents, caregivers and service providers to understand and have conversations about age-appropriate sexual development, how to identify when behaviours sit outside of what is typical, and how and when to seek specialist assistance.
- Reduce the likelihood of adult offending.

We are seeking ongoing and increased funding of \$7.83 million over 5 years to Laurel House to deliver the harmful sexual behaviour services in the North and North West Tasmania. We request a five-year agreement that allows for funding and operational certainty that allows for the development of the service and workforce to meet growing demand for services. This investment provides an increase in staffing, both educators and therapeutic specialists/counsellors and case management staff, that (as per the Commission of Inquiry recommendation 21.8) will allow Laurel House to:

- provide therapeutic services that can be accessed in a timely manner,

- ensure access to therapeutic services to all children who need them regardless of their age, identify or location in the state (including in youth detention),
- ensure specialist interventions for children with disability,
- reduce waitlists for therapeutic treatment for children who have displayed abusive or violent harmful sexual behaviours and their families, making it increasingly more likely to meet the recommendation in the Commission of Inquiry of wait times no more than two weeks.
- provide advisory support for child-facing organisations, such as schools, childcare, disability and at-risk youth services,
- contribute to the statewide plan for preventing harmful sexual behaviours.

Further, this funding will allow Laurel House to develop the harmful sexual behaviour specialist workforce in North and North West Tasmania, noting the significant workforce shortages across the nation.

In alignment with research, our work with communities and organisations tells us that there is an increasing need for our specialist harmful sexual behaviour services. This need has been repeatedly articulated by educators and staff in both primary and high schools, disability organisations and other service providers, specifically regarding management of the increase in peer-to-peer assaults. This investment will allow us to increase the therapeutic specialists/counsellors across the North and NW regions at a level that is proportionate to the rising demand. Further, this investment would allow us to continue and expand the education and early intervention response that is essential to address this multifaceted issue, including to support parents, caregivers, schools and other service providers to understand age-appropriate sexual development, identify and intervene when problematic sexual behaviour is exhibited, and to respond and make appropriate referrals to Laurel House where the behaviour is harmful and a specialist response is needed.

	2024-25 (FY25) Current Year	2025-26 (FY26) Year 1	2026-27 (FY27) Year 2	2027-28 (FY28) Year 3	2028-29 (FY29) Year 4	2029-30 (FY30) Year 5	Total FY26 to FY30 (Year 1 to Year 5)
	Confirmed indexation: Nil	Announced indexation: Nil	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	
Total	Circa \$770,000 (Proportion of \$1,823,000 provided to SASS and LH, and some carry forward from FY24)	\$1,439,579	\$1,482,766	\$1,556,905	\$1,634,750	\$1,716,487	\$7,830,487

FOUR: Primary Prevention Education

We seek a commitment for additional funding to increase the reach of our education programs including consent and respectful relationships and All Come out to Play. These programs play a key role in primary prevention efforts, educating schools, communities, and organisations in North and NW Tasmania. **Requested - \$6.08 million for FY26 to FY30.**

A necessary part of an effective therapeutic service are activities that raise awareness of the service, what we do, how to access our services (referral pathways), and who we serve. This happens through Laurel House's education and training programs across primary and high schools, communities, and organisations in North and NW Tasmania. These programs provide frank, fearless information and spark important and thoughtful discussions about issues like gender roles, consent, respectful relationships, sexual violence and the impact of sexual harm. In addition to being a referral pathway for victim-survivors or children and young people using harmful sexual behaviours, our schools program and All Come Out to Play are a key part of Laurel House's primary prevention efforts – getting to the root cause of the perceptions that drive behaviours related to sexual violence.

We are seeking investment to sustain and grow the reach of two of our key education programs, specifically:

Schools program: Delivered in partnership with Women's Legal Tasmania and in an age-appropriate manner, this program covers the topics of respectful relationships, gender stereotypes, drivers of violence towards women, changes in laws and social attitudes and use of technology, consent, sexual harassment, media and social media, critical thinking analysis skills, pornography, and active bystander intervention. This is a whole of school program that includes an education session with whole of school staff, a session for parents and caregivers, as well as the sessions for students. To deliver this respectful relationships and consent education in a trauma-informed and actively engaging way is resource intensive and feedback from teachers and students tells us that these messages are best facilitated by specialist sexual violence services, and reinforced by school staff in their incidental interactions and through the curriculum. Currently, schools pay a fee for us to deliver this program. At times, we deliver this pro bono for schools who cannot afford the fees or at reduced rates, which limits the other community education and awareness raising we can do. To ensure equitable access for all children to have contemporary consent and healthy relationships education, we are seeking funding for these fees to be subsidised by State Government. This will reduce the misinformation and quality variation we hear reported when such content is delivered by school staff.

We are seeking \$2.36 million over five years in funding to subsidise the delivery fees of this education program across schools in the North and NW. This includes funding for delivery costs and travel costs for regional and remote locations.

All Come Out to Play: In partnership with Laurel House, Women's Legal Services Tasmania, Playgroup Tasmania, and Happy Habits, this program aims to prevent gendered and sexual violence by engaging young children and their parents/caregivers. It encourages parents to be alert to the stereotypes and messages that children may experience through their modelling and interactions, disrupts intergenerational cycles of violence, and fosters respectful relationships and gender equality through movement, music, storytelling, and performance. Further, playgroups and early childhood settings offers a safe space for victim-survivors to learn about support options and service pathways without the perpetrator.

We are seeking \$625,000 (\$125,000 per year over five years) in funding to deliver the ACOTP program to 65+ playgroups and early learning centres across Tasmania regularly. This includes funding for delivery costs and travel costs for regional and remote locations.

We are also seeking a \$2.92 million over five years investment to sustain the delivery and grow the reach of our other education programs, including:

Parent and caregiver groups in the community: Covers topics including protective strategies to empower parents to maximise safety for children and provides tools and resources for parents and carers of children to be better equipped to have conversations with children about consent, discuss image-based abuse, child sexual exploitation material, and grooming. These groups also provide supportive environments for children to disclose and get assistance.

Community Conversations: Tailored consent and relationships education appropriate to a wide range of community groups such as carers, school health nurses, community service and health organisations including disability, mental health, aged care organisations, child-care workers, sporting clubs, and community groups. These trainings include discussion on what is sexual violence, what is consent, what is grooming, gender stereotypes and myths about sexual violence, prevalence of sexual violence, how to recognise and respond to a disclosure, and where to get help and report.

Higher education in universities and TasTAFE: Delivered to students and lecturers to challenge gendered stereotypes, educate about what is sexual violence and sexual harassment, what is consent, prevalence and impacts of sexual abuse, image-based abuse, recognise and respond to a disclosure, and how this knowledge might apply to the profession they are studying for.

Implementation of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework: Intended for all who are mandated to implement the framework and who need support to build within their group a general understanding of what it means and what their obligations might be, what actually constitutes sexual violence and/or grooming, how to recognise sexual harm and respond to disclosures, and where to seek help and support.

Tailored sessions focused on the impact of sexual violence on marginalised groups: General education content with a focus on the experience and data related to those in marginalised groups (e.g. LGBTIQ+ community, people with disability). Addresses intersections of sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, binary approaches and cisnormativity, looks at preventative strategies, responding to disclosures and managing self-care and vicarious trauma.

Laurel House offers education in outreach locations in rural, regional, and remote areas of northern Tasmania. Part of this investment would be allocated to extending both our time in the regions and locations of educational outreach to ensure no community is left behind in their access to these learning opportunities.

Funding Source	2024-25 (FY25) Current Year	2025-26 (FY26) Year 1	2026-27 (FY27) Year 2	2027-28 (FY28) Year 3	2028-29 (FY29) Year 4	2029-30 (FY30) Year 5	Total FY26 to FY30 (Year 1 to Year 5)
	Confirmed indexation: 3.5%	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Announced indexation: 3.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	Assumed indexation: 5.0%	
Schools Program	N/A	\$434,178	\$447,203	\$469,564	\$493,042	\$517,694	\$2,361,681
All Come Out to Play	N/A	\$146,204	\$150,590	\$158,120	\$166,026	\$174,327	\$795,267
Education Programs	N/A	\$537,525	\$553,650	\$581,333	\$610,400	\$640,920	\$2,923,828
Total	N/A	\$1,117,907	\$1,151,443	\$1,209,017	\$1,269,468	\$1,332,941	\$6,080,776

FIVE: Forensic Medical Examinations

We seek a commitment for a pilot project to systematically explore and make recommendations for how forensic medical examinations access can be equitable, accessible, and consistent across the state in all metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote areas to address the current dire shortfall and allow pathways to justice for victim-survivors. **Requested - \$200,000 for FY26.**

A forensic medical examination (FME) is a physical examination carried out by a specially trained doctor or nurse (a 'forensic examiner') to gather evidence of a sexual assault or rape for the purpose of facilitating access to justice.

According to the Tasmanian Health Service, every victim survivor of sexual assault "...has the right to immediate, compassionate and comprehensive medical-forensic evaluation and treatment by specifically trained professionals who have the skills and experience to anticipate and respond to their needs during the recent assault response."

FMEs in Tasmania are a free service only provided at the Royal Hobart Hospital, Launceston General Hospital and the NW Regional Hospital. Rosters for hospitals are coordinated such that, ideally, there are forensic examiners on call to conduct FMEs 24/7. In practice, this is not the reality and, particularly in the NW, there are regularly gaps in staff availability – including gaps longer than 24 hours which is the recommended time within which an FME should be conducted after a sexual assault. FME requests have grown exponentially over the last three years in this region, yet the resourcing has not. Calls for improvements to the state of the current FME process have been made both in Tasmania and elsewhere, including in the recent Commission of Inquiry, the National Plan, and Tasmania's Survivors at the Centre strategy.

Despite these calls for improvement, no clear strategic directives exist on best practice approaches to ensuring all victim-survivors have 24/7 access to FMEs, especially for those in regional, rural and remote areas.

This investment would allow Laurel House to conduct a pilot to systematically explore and draw on the expertise of providers, researchers and victim-survivors to make recommendations for how FME access can be equitable, accessible, and consistent across the state in all metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote areas to address the current dire shortfall. Given the similar issues articulated across Australia, this pilot will be a project of national significance, supporting Tasmania to be a national leader in enshrining the rights of victim-survivors of sexual assault to seek justice.

Submission ends



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