

Media release

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New training program launched to strengthen primary care response to family and sexual violence

Primary care providers across Tasmania are now being offered fully funded training to help them better identify, respond to and refer cases of family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) has partnered with the Safer Families Centre at the University of Melbourne to deliver the education program, with funding under an Australian Government pilot.

The education program, *Strengthening response to family and sexual violence in Tasmania: A primary care learning initiative including 'Pathways to Safety' workshops and collaborative learning opportunities*, will provide a mix of online modules and face-to-face workshops with Tasmanian general practices in mind. The online modules are free and available to all primary care providers. Face-to-face workshops are specifically for general practice staff and Aboriginal health services.

Primary Health Tasmania Acting CEO Susan Powell said primary care providers are a crucial entry point to support for many victim-survivors.

"Research shows that GPs are the highest professional group disclosed to by current survivors," Ms Powell said.

"Of those who disclose, approximately one in three survivors experiencing current partner violence (and one in four survivors who have experienced past partner violence) seek help from GPs.

"At least one in 10 women attending general practice will have experienced family violence, which for a full-time GP translates to around five women per week.

"This is why GPs are uniquely placed to identify when family violence is occurring.

"This training will further empower all general practice staff to respond confidently and connect patients with the specialist services they need.

"The training will also assist all general practice staff, including receptionists, practice managers, practice nurses and GPs, and Aboriginal health services, to identify violence."

This launch is part of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence (25 November – 10 December).

"We invite all primary care providers, practice nurses and reception staff, including those working in Aboriginal health services, to take action and undertake this training to help them better support victim-survivors," Ms Powell said.

“We recognise the significant pressures primary care providers are facing, and this training is designed to support them by providing practical tools to identify and respond appropriately and connect survivors with specialist services.”

The first online course, *Identifying and responding to domestic and family violence*, is now available and attracts continuing professional development hours from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Face-to-face workshops will commence in early 2026, followed by masterclasses on addressing child sexual abuse later in the year.

The training package will be run as a whole-of-practice approach, encouraging all staff to complete a series of online and face-to-face education to build confidence in identifying and supporting victim/survivors of violence and abuse.

“Your local general practice is a safe place to talk about family and sexual violence. Practice staff and clinicians have a range of ways to support you,” Ms Powell said.

Some Tasmanian GPs have previously accessed similar training from the Safer Families Centre.

A female GP from Norwood said: “The training gave me greater awareness of domestic violence overall. It has made me think about it more in my consultations with patients and to be alert to it, particularly with certain physical health presentations.”

Building on the existing training, Primary Health Tasmania is now offering the tailored online training free of charge to all primary care providers in Tasmania under the Australian Government initiative.

Dr Sarah Shepherd, a GP at headspace Launceston and The Bubble, said: “I’m so glad this training will now be available for free to practice staff, and I urge my GP colleagues to undertake this vital training.”

Safer Families Centre Director Professor Kelsey Hegarty said the training is grounded in evidence and lived experience.

“Together, we’re working to build safer pathways for those experiencing family violence by equipping primary care with the tools and confidence to respond effectively,” Professor Hegarty said.

“By embedding trauma-informed approaches, we can help ensure victim-survivors receive timely, compassionate and effective care.”

Bree Klerk, Chief Executive Officer of the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance, said the Alliance welcomes the announcement and strongly supports the education program.

“Primary care is often the first – and sometimes the only – service that people experiencing violence will come into contact with,” Ms Klerk said.

“By building the skills of primary care workers to recognise and act on concerns early, we can reduce harm and improve health and wellbeing over the course of people’s lives.”

Engender Equality CEO Alina Thomas said the education program complements the new primary care support service launched earlier this year by Engender Equality as another component of the Australian Government pilot.

“Training and on-the-ground support go hand in hand,” Ms Thomas said.

“While our service helps practices navigate disclosures and referral pathways, this education builds the foundational knowledge and confidence needed for sustainable change.”

Family, domestic and sexual violence can affect people of any age and gender. Statistics show at least 28% of Tasmanian women have experienced sexual and/or intimate partner violence (ABS, Personal Safety

Survey, 2021–22). About the same proportion of all Tasmanians have experienced child sexual abuse (Australian Child Maltreatment Study, 2023).

The following services can be contacted for support:

- Family Violence Counselling and Support Service – [1800 608 122](tel:1800608122)
- 1800RESPECT – [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732)
- Lifeline – [13 11 14](tel:131114)
- Kids Helpline – [1800 55 1800](tel:1800551800)

For more information or to enrol in the training, visit www.primaryhealthtas.com.au or contact events@primaryhealthtas.com.au.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation working to connect care and keep Tasmanians well and out of hospital. It was established under the Australian Government's Primary Health Networks Program to support and enable a coordinated, primary care-focused health system.

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