



women's
legal
service
tasmania



The Honourable Mr Peter Gutwein, MP
Premier and Minister for the
Prevention of Family Violence

Via email: peter.gutwein@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Premier,

Helping to close the gap for vulnerable Tasmanians facing violence

We are writing to you early in 2021 as we have been collaborating on a Health Justice Housing initiative that we believe will be essential for the health, wellbeing and economic stability of thousands of Tasmanian women, children and young people as the impact of the Covid19 pandemic continues to unfold this year.

Hobart Women's Shelter, Women's Legal Service Tasmania, Tasmania Legal Aid and Women's Health Tasmania would like to propose a collaboration on a Health Justice Housing initiative that would:

- multiply the crisis, transitional and permanent housing options available for women affected by family violence so they can leave life threatening relationships without the fear of homelessness, and
- pilot Tasmania's first Health-Justice-Housing Partnership with specialist family violence lawyers accessible at the health and welfare services that women and young people visit.

We are writing to you in your joint capacities as Premier and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence as the initiatives proposed require support from a range of Departments.

Recent data from the Hobart Women's Shelter (Annex 1) shows a disturbingly large number of women and children who were turned away from the Hobart Women's Shelter during July-December 2020. The high numbers of women seeking crisis accommodation in 2020 has not been seen since the Shelter opened in December 1974 as the second Women's Shelter to be established in Australia.

In the last half of 2020, 88% or 9 out of every 10 women seeking accommodation at the Hobart Women's Shelter were turned away due to a lack of space. 85% of all accompanying children were also turned away during the same period, again due to a lack of space. If this data analysis was undertaken in a consistent manner by all women's shelters across Tasmania the numbers would present a grim reality that vulnerable women and children who are facing violence and seeking a safe place to live and thrive have nowhere to go.

These figures [are more than double the national number of women](#) who are turned away from crisis accommodation across Australia. Tasmania makes up 2% of the national Specialist Housing Services population. However in 2019/2020 the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare data shows that the increase in unassisted requests for specialist housing services was primarily [due to increases in Tasmania and Victoria. Women in Tasmania form 71% of all people who are not assisted](#) by specialist homelessness services in Tasmania, this represents the highest proportion of women unassisted in any State in Australia.

We can see that women and their children are being disproportionately affected by the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and that the growth of social housing for women has not kept pace with the need.

Many of the women currently being turned away from the Hobart Women's Shelter and other crisis housing in Tasmania also need legal assistance and protection and a range of social services to rebuild their lives.

Tasmania is the only State or Territory in Australia that does not have a Health Justice Partnership that links women and young people to the legal services they need at the health and social services locations they visit or phone most often.

From a decade of experience and evaluation of Health Justice Partnerships in other Australian States, we know that they work as vulnerable women, men, children and young people seek help from medical professionals and social services, including crisis housing services, to help resolve a range of problems. We know that family violence is one of the main reasons women and children seek crisis accommodation, and that legal and protection dimensions also need to be addressed at the same time as providing a safe home. A Health Justice Partnership closes the gap between social services and legal services by partnering with a range of medical and social services to:

- identify legal issues related to violence, housing and homelessness, employment or family law as early as possible
- access legal protections, and
- provide justice support.

During 2020, Women's Legal Services Tasmania and Tasmania Legal Aid have built on their existing relationships and developed new connections with the following potential partners for a Health Justice Partnership:

- Child Health Nurses at Health clinics and selected Child and Family Centres
- General Practitioners
- Community Paediatricians working with Out-of-Home Care Young People
- Homeless services
- Emergency accommodation services especially for women leaving violence
- Tasmanian branch of the Australian Medical Association
- Tasmanian Council of Social Services
- Health Justice Australia

The experience of the Covid19 lockdown months in Tasmania has shown how telehealth services can deliver assistance on the medical front. The proposed HJP project would explore how Telehealth-Justice services could work in Tasmania to reduce 'missed opportunities' for appropriate support and assistance to women, boys and girls facing family violence while addressing health and justice dimensions.

On International Women's Day 2021, the Governor of Tasmania will launch a film made by a final year UTAS law student documenting the experience of a Tasmanian family whose daughter was murdered by her partner in August 2012 leaving four children behind. The mother of the young woman who was murdered when interviewed said: "My hope is that there would be places that are being built fully stocked so that when they decide to leave they have somewhere to go. Just leave and go to this safe place that's what I'm hoping for that there would be something like that being built in the near future"

As we approach a decade since this murder, we will be continuing our discussions with:

- the Minister for Housing to discuss potential opportunities to multiply the crisis, transitional and permanent housing options available for women affected by family violence so that we can reduce the number of women and their children who are turned away from the Hobart Women's Shelter from the current 88% of women. We note that there is a current \$100M EOI for Social Housing in Tasmania.
- the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General on the importance of supporting Health Justice Partnerships in Tasmania to link the medical, housing and other social services that women turn to when facing violence.

In the [Tasmania Report 2020 the economist Saul Eslake](#) reflected that: *Given the probable lasting impact of the Covid-19 on the growth rate of wages and other incomes, and hence on revenues from donations and other philanthropic activity, it seems likely that community organisations will need a greater commitment from governments to longer-term funding – if not necessarily to higher levels of funding – in order to meet on-going demands for their services in the post-Covid world.*

We would value your support for these cross portfolio discussions to provide more housing options for women facing violence and bridge the gap between housing, health and legal services by trialling Tasmania's first Health Justice Partnership.

Yours sincerely,



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Director
Tasmania Legal Aid



Yvette Cehtel
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Legal Service Tasmania



Janet Saunders
Chief Executive Officer
Hobart Women's Shelter



Jo Flanagan
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Health Tasmania

CC:

The Hon Elise Archer, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
The Hon Sarah Courtney, Minister for Health
The Hon Roger Jaensch, Minister for Housing
Sarah Bolt, Anti- Discrimination Commissioner Tasmania
Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania
Adrienne Picone, CEO TasCOSS
Natasha Stott Despoja AO, Chair Our Watch
Members of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council:
Don Challen, AM (Chair)
Professor Rufus Black
Dale Elphinstone AO
Tim Gardner
Kym Goodes
Samantha Hogg
Leanne McLean
Paul Ranson
Brett Torossi

Attachments:

Annex 1: Hobart Women's Shelter Data 2020/2021

Annex 2: Health Justice Housing Partnership – Just Healthy Families Proposal

Annex 3: Women's Health Tasmania 2021 Report