Response to Keeping Children Safe and Rebuilding Trust—Ecosystem mapping

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Policy audit/stocktake of Tasmanian strategies, policies and frameworks to keep children safe from sexual abuse

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Contents

Policy audit/stocktake: An overview

This document reports on a comprehensive scan of policies and work undertaken in Tasmanian government and non-government agencies and organisations to keep children and adolescents safe from sexual abuse. There are 100 actions in place in Government agencies, and a further 110 in prospect for implementation by July 2026. Non-government agencies reported 592 actions. Results are reported by themes (as identified in *Keeping Children Safe and Rebuilding Trust Government Response* (hereafter, KCSR), and by setting (government) or sector (non-government).

Approach: Thematic and setting/sector mapping

For both audits, actions were coded to the themes adopted for the *Keeping Children Safe and Rebuilding Trust Government Response* (hereafter, KCSR).

Key findings

Government settings and agencies[1]

For government agencies, the greatest proportion of activity is in the Youth Detention setting (34.8% of all current and proposed actions). Health (27.6%) and school settings (26.2%) make up the next largest groups. The smallest proportion of actions is being undertaken by Tasmania Police (10%).

However, it is not appropriate to treat each policy, strategy, or framework as of equal value or impact. It is also not possible to know how the listed actions are being implemented, or whether there is in situ leadership to drive and oversee culture change. Are Codes of Conduct adhered to and enforced? Are Charters of Rights changing school or workplace cultures? Do National Police Checks prevent crime or can they in fact be discriminatory and have little impact on future offending? How useful are the multiple training programs being offered? This blurring is compounded by the serious dearth of evaluation, shared KPIs, and monitoring, or of clearly evidence-based actions.

Two themes are receiving the most attention in the government sector: Theme 1 (Accountability and integrity: 53.8% of all actions coded to this theme) and Theme 4 (Prevention and protection; 56.7% of all actions).

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[1] Note. The local government sector was scanned, where possible and the researcher spoke with several officers in local government and with the Local Government Association of Tasmania.

Non-government sector organisations

For non-government organisations, schools have the greatest proportion of policies, strategies and frameworks in place (57.4% of all actions), while services for children and young people (e.g., organisations offering youth programs) have the smallest (10.8%).

The thematic coding for non-government actions mirrors that for government. Theme 4 (Prevention and protection) was applicable to 73.3 per cent of all actions, and Theme 1 (Accountability and integrity) applies to 53.4 per cent of actions.

Additional findings

The most striking additional finding is that, regardless of how the numbers and proportions are calculated, two of the theme areas are receiving little attention. These are Theme 2 (Collaboration and integration) and Theme 3 (Participation and empowerment). This is particularly striking in the case of non-government organisations/sectors, where only one action coded to Collaboration and integration (this was development and provision of training materials to other sectors). One possible explanation for this is the competitive nature of resourcing. NGOs in several of the sectors spoke of the paradox of collaboration with other providers. While some have good collaborative relationships, they are also aware of the 'competitive advantage' they may rely on to win grants and other funding. This was one of the reasons that a sector, rather than individual organisation, approach was taken in mapping child and youth safe mechanisms in the non-government organisations.

Participation and empowerment fared only slightly better (1.0% of actions).

Collaboration and integration (Theme 2) was more prevalent in government actions (where it will be applicable to 21.4% of current and 'in prospect' actions), and 14.8 per cent of actions coded to Theme 3 (Participant and empowerment). These proportion are still very low.

Of all the 210 government actions, only 14 (6.7%) included mention of evaluation, monitoring or auditing of outcomes. Only one mention of monitoring was made in NGO actions, though several mentioned compliance with or reviewing in response to national or professional standards (e.g., Australian Association of Social Work Code of Ethics). Eight organisations (13.1%) had charters with child safeguarding elements.

There are very few actions in either sector that clearly aim to address the factors that place people at risk of child sexual exploitation (that is, perpetration[2]). While Prevention and protection (Theme 4) applies to almost three-quarters of NGO actions, and more

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[2] The term "perpetrators" is not universally accepted by those working in or researching child sexual abuse. We have used this term, as it is consistent with the Commission of Inquiry report terminology.

than half of those implemented or promised in the government sector, the vast majority of these involve either regulatory actions (e.g., Mandatory reporting procedures, Code of Conduct and penalties, and Working with Vulnerable People checks) or addressing situational risks (e.g., CCTV coverage in AYDC, and Prohibition of unclothed searches). These map to the **community**, **organisations & institutions**, and in some instances **law & policy** spheres of the socioecological model. They also, of course, apply to **individuals** with roles in the lives of children and young people and to the need for individual children to keep themselves safe. Structural changes to address the risk factors (trauma, being in or leaving care, economic vulnerability, insecure housing or homelessness, experiences of sexual abuse, social isolation, and so on) for perpetration are missing from actions, strategies and frameworks.

Practitioners in both government agencies and non-government organisations often have tertiary training. This makes explicit the role of the University of Tasmania (and other tertiary institutions) in raising awareness and creating child-safe cultures. An audit of university courses and unit-level offerings in social work, criminology, psychology, health sciences and medicine, education, business and other disciplines may reveal gaps in awareness or relevant training that need to be addressed. This also applies to Certificate and Diploma courses.

The greatest change to reduce child sexual abuse is most likely to derive from actions that "go deep". By that, we mean actions that shift culture (the **society** level). Exemplars of this are those local governments (e.g., Glenorchy City Council, Waratah-Wynyard and Devonport City Council) who are taking a "collective impact" approach, working with multiple individuals, community organisations and institutions to find shared goals, identify shared key performance indicators and evaluation plans, and then find their own, place-based ways to implement—and monitor—change.

Limitations

It was not possible to gather all policies, strategies or frameworks for relevant agencies or organisations, meaning that the scan is incomplete. Further, the dates given for some actions listed in the sources used may be inaccurate, may have been affected by the State election that coincided with some proposed sign-off or completion dates, and information on some organisation or agency websites is likely to be out of date.

Information was not available (or not provided in time to be included in this audit) from 17 NGOs with roles involving children and young people. Of these, ten are out of home care special care package providers.

The scan was conducted in a short timeframe, preventing the following up of some agencies and organisations.

Some non-government organisations expressed concern about what media or other entities or individuals might do with the information provided. For this reason, a list of all included organisations is provided, but not a list of actions taken by specific organisations.

We were also unable to engage with agencies via DPAC's Commission of Inquiry Taskforce to undertake the stocktake. This means there are likely to be measures in place that are not listed here, and that some of those that are listed may not in fact have been implemented.

...ork by: Kiara Lavin. In her artwork, Kiara illustrates the following: 'I was abused in my first relationship. It was not good' and 'Abuse is NEVER okay'. Depicted also in her ...ork is a print of her fist.