

Tasmania's child sex abuse commission of inquiry wraps up with final hearing in Hobart

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The inquiry ran for 29 months and wrapped up in Hobart today. (ABC News: Paul Strk)

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- **In short:** The Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings has held its final hearing in Hobart
- **What's next?** The commission's report will be handed to Governor Barbara Baker tomorrow, and the report will be made public in September

The Tasmanian child sexual abuse commission of inquiry has referred more than 100 people to Tasmania Police and child protection since it began.

The commission's president revealed the numbers at the final hearing in Hobart of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to

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Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings.

The commission focused on the Launceston General Hospital, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, out of home care and public schools.

"Although we believe that children are now safer in Tasmanian institutions than was the case in the past, more work needs to be done," commission president Marcia Neave said.

"We have continued to hear examples of poor systems, practices and cultures within government institutions even as our inquiry has drawn to a close."

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The commission of inquiry's president, Marcia Neave, said while children are now safer in Tasmanian institutions, more work needs to be done. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

Ms Neave said the commission had referred more than 100 people to police and child protection during the 29 months of the inquiry.

She said it was also the commission's view that the Ashley Youth Detention Centre should be closed as a "matter of urgency", and improving the safety of children in youth detention and out of home care should be a priority.

Ms Neave said the Tasmanian government's response to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse since 2000 had too often been inadequate.

"While we saw pockets of good practice, this was often a result of the initiative and

As a 12yo student, Sam was told to 'stop' relationship with sexually abusive teacher



Some 36 years after he was sexually abused by one of his high school teachers, Sam Leishman

good judgement of individuals rather than something encouraged or enforced by a broader system.

"More commonly, institutions did not recognise sexual abuse for what it was and failed to act decisively to manage risks and investigate complaints.

"Sometimes this was due to a lack of guidance and direction on how to manage incidents well. It was also due to ignorance, inertia and a desire to protect reputational interests."

was able to stand up in a courtroom and have his voice heard.

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Survivors hugging at the final hearing of the child sexual abuse commission of inquiry in Hobart. August 30, 2023 (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

The commissioners will hand their report to Governor Barbara Baker on Thursday. That will mark the end of the commission's work.

The report, which contains 75 findings and 191 recommendations, is expected to be tabled in parliament on September 26, which will mean it will be publicly available.

"Preventing and effectively responding to child sexual abuse will require changes to laws and policies and also to social and institutional cultures and individual beliefs, attitudes and practices," Ms Neave said.

"If the necessary changes are not made children will continue to be subjected to child sexual abuse in these institutions," Ms Neave said.

Woman who reported abuse by hospital paedophile 'fobbed off'



A woman abused by notorious paedophile nurse James Griffin later had to work with him and says her warnings about his risk to children were ignored by the Launceston General Hospital.

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The commission's report will be tabled in parliament in September. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

During Wednesday's hearing, the commissioners gave an outline of what their recommendations will include:

- Ensuring institutions know how to recognise warning signs of child sexual abuse, and how to respond to it
- Embedding safe, accessible and transparent complaints processes;
- Age-appropriate sexual education delivered consistently each year in public schools
- More therapeutic services to ensure victim-survivors have timely access to supports
- More culturally appropriate Aboriginal healing services, as well as support services that know diversity and disability
- Breaking down silos between different government agencies and departments to ensure investigations into allegations of child sexual abuse are properly coordinated
- Giving those working with children the knowledge to recognise harmful sexual behaviours in children, and clarity about how they should respond to them
- Urgent short-term reforms to youth justice to "address the serious deficits in the care of children detained at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre"
- The development of a world-class, trauma-informed, rehabilitative approach to youth detention
- Dedicated leadership for out-of-home care, youth justice and child safety services within the Education Department, which has responsibility for all three
- Investments in out-of-home care, and transitioning from government to non-government out-of-home care providers
- A new commission of children and young people that would act as a "strong and fearless advocate for children's rights" and would have more powers than the current Children's Commissioner, including additional advocacy for children in out-of-home care and youth detention, and advocate for the needs of Aboriginal children and young people

'Responsibility' now with Tasmanian

government, commissioner says

Commissioner Leah Bromfield said widescale reforms to youth justice and out-of-home care were "urgent".

"We note with concern the continuing delays in the closure of the Ashley Youth Detention Centre and the out-of-home care was the only institution we looked into for which there was no significant investments that were announced in response to our inquiry," Dr Bromfield said.

"Widescale reform is hard. Strong leadership and a dedicated workforce will be required to drive the urgent reforms needed to ensure Tasmania's out-of-home care and youth justice systems are meeting the safety and care needs of children."

Commissioner Robert Benjamin said he and his fellow commissioners had "been on a profound journey with victim-survivors, their families and their loved ones, their trusted friends and supporters".

"We have sought to produce a report that while it looks backwards in shame and horror to learn the necessary lessons, it also looks forward with hope and determination," Mr Benjamin said.

"Our report is not the end of the journey, it is the beginning.

"It is now the responsibility of the Tasmanian government and parliament as policy-makers and legislators to ensure that the state continues this journey to better protect children and young people."

The commissioners will omit some information from its report to avoid prejudicing cases before the courts.

The Governor, acting on advice from the government, also has the power to make redactions.

"Except for omitting the parts of the report which affect a person's right to a fair trial, the commissioners hope and expect that the rest of the report will be published in full as soon as possible so that the Tasmanian community can consider all of the information in it," Ms Neave said.

Ms Neave also paid tribute to victim-survivors, their families and supporters who shared information with the commission.

"They told us that one of the main reasons they wanted to assist our inquiry was to prevent other children from suffering sexual abuse in the future, and to make sure there were more supportive and effective responses to people who said they had been abused," she said.

Inside Tasmania's 'prison for kids'



A "gladiator pit", a "war zone", a "kindergarten for the adult prison" — these are just some of the ways Tasmania's only youth detention centre has been described. This is what it's like inside.

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"We also acknowledge the victim-survivors, their families and supporters who did not engage directly with our inquiry, but who may be listening today."

Premier Jeremy Rockliff, speaking after the hearing, said he acknowledged and recognised victim-survivors' enduring pain.

"Today marks a very new beginning where we can not only shine a light, admit to, recognise that we have failed so many children in our state care," Mr Rockliff said.

"We will absolutely do all we can diligently, thoroughly, to work through every single one of those eight volumes [of the report], 191 recommendations, of which we will fully and thoroughly implement, to ensure that the wrongs of the past can never, ever be repeated."

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