

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Workplace Safety



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DRUG COURT EXPANDED TO REGIONAL VICTORIA

The Andrews Labor Government is expanding Victoria's Drug Court program to improve community safety and reduce the rate of offending.

To be introduced today, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Drug Court and Other Matters) Bill 2020 will amend the *County Court Act 1958* and *Sentencing Act 1991* to establish a Drug Court Division within the County Court of Victoria.

The *Victorian Budget 2019/20* invested \$35 million to facilitate the expansion of the Drug Court to Ballarat and Shepparton to provide services to regional areas, as well as the establishment of a County Court Drug Court pilot.

The expansion is expected to provide capacity for up to 120 offenders to address their drug and alcohol issues and offending.

The Drug Court supervises offenders trapped in the cycle of drug and alcohol dependency and substance-related offending.

The Court attempts to address the underlying factors that contribute to offending, providing participants with an opportunity to receive treatment and stay drug and crime free — or risk ending up in prison.

The existing Drug Courts have proven to be successful, with results showing a reduction in reoffending, improving community safety and decreasing the burden on the courts and corrections system.

The move into regional Victoria will focus on providing services to help with local challenges of drug-related crime in some areas.

The expansion follows the successful roll out of the first Drug Court in Dandenong in 2002, followed by the establishment of a Melbourne location in 2017.

The County Court Drug and Alcohol Court is expected to commence in later 2020 and the two regional Drug Court locations are anticipated to commence in 2021.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

"We know that the Drug Court has a tangible impact on keeping people out of prison, keeping the community safe and delivering social and economic benefits."

"Investing in programs that reduce the underlying causes of crime will reduce costs involved with the criminal justice system in the long term."

Quote attributable to Minister for Corrections Ben Carroll

"The Drug Court is helping to break cycles of offending within families and communities – providing benefits by reducing offending both in the short-term for participants, and in the long-term for their families and community."