

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP

Attorney-General

Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety – COVID-19



Thursday, 22 October 2020

ABORIGINAL JUSTICE FORUM FOCUSES ON COVID-19 RECOVERY

The impact of COVID-19 on Aboriginal communities is the focus of the 57th Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) to help develop a strong, culturally safe response to the pandemic recovery.

Attorney-General Jill Hennessy, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams and Minister for Corrections and Youth Justice Natalie Hutchins virtually attended the forum, hearing from frontline Aboriginal services and community members on how to best support to Aboriginal Victorians as we move towards a COVID normal.

Minister Hutchins also announced more than \$150,000 for the Stay Deadly in Challenging Times cultural strengthening care package for Aboriginal young people in youth justice. The package will reinforce coronavirus prevention messages and behaviours, increase social and emotional wellbeing, and strengthen connection to culture.

The Government recently invested \$17.5 million to support legal assistance services, including Aboriginal legal services, to ensure legal support remains available during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 Aboriginal Community Taskforce has also been established to deliver tailored responses to support Aboriginal people, families and communities during this difficult time.

The Taskforce oversees the rollout of the \$10 million Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund. Grants will give local organisations the support they need to develop responses at a local level over the coming year.

Important reforms continue to be developed with Aboriginal community stakeholders, including a Spent Convictions scheme to promote rehabilitation and safely reintegrate those who spent time in the criminal justice system back into the community. This is on top of the Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, which will strengthen support initiatives to reduce offending and create stronger bonds to young people's culture and community.

The AJF brings together leaders within the Aboriginal community and government to oversee the implementation and development of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The 57th AJF is also in partnership with the Dhek Dja Partnership Forum, providing a strong focus on supporting victim-survivors.

Quote attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

"We know that better outcomes will only be achieved with Aboriginal people, families and communities leading the way – that's why the Aboriginal Justice Forum is critical to meaningful change."

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

"The pandemic has had a profound impact on the Aboriginal community – thank you to community elders and Aboriginal representatives for sharing their knowledge and expertise at the Forum, together we will get through this."

Quote attributable to Minister for Corrections and Youth Justice Natalie Hutchins

"The pandemic has caused significant challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody – we are focused on having the necessary programs, resources and supports available that will help reduce the number of people in prison and on remand."

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