

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP
Attorney-General



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VICTORIA POISED TO ABOLISH THE CRIME OF PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

The Andrews Labor Government has welcomed an independent report that will help implement new laws to decriminalise public drunkenness and save lives.

The Expert Reference Group (ERG) – made up of Jack Blayney, Helen Kennedy, Tony Nicholson and Nerita Waight – reinforced in their report that no one should be placed into a police cell simply because they are drunk in public.

Their findings support the creation of a culturally appropriate health model – ensuring those who are intoxicated in public can access the healthcare and support they need.

Aboriginal communities have advocated for this reform for decades. Abolishing the offence of public drunkenness was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, almost 30 years ago.

It is clear current public drunkenness laws have caused an unacceptable and disproportionate impact on Aboriginal Victorians and reform is long overdue. We cannot wait any longer to do something about it.

The *Victorian Budget 2020/21* provides \$16 million to kickstart the new model and promote therapeutic and safer pathways to help people who are intoxicated on our streets.

The Government will review all recommendations from the ERG – including more culturally appropriate social services and prevention strategies, improving first response and transporting people to a safe place.

The report, *‘Seeing the Clear Light of Day’*, will serve as a lasting tribute to the tragic and unnecessary death of Tanya Day – a proud Yorta Yorta woman and much-loved mother and grandmother.

The Labor Government established the ERG to provide advice in consultation with the Aboriginal community, health services, alcohol and other drugs experts, local government and operators of licensed premises. That consultation will continue as we move to implement the health model.

The ERG has recommended a 24-month implementation period to safely and effectively develop the new public health model, including the establishment of trial sites to inform how the model is rolled out across the state.

Legislation to decriminalise public drunkenness will be introduced before the end of the year.

Quote attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

“Those who are intoxicated in public need our help to be safe and be well. The Aboriginal community has long advocated for these unfair and outdated laws to be overhauled. This legislation is an important first step as we move towards a health-focused model which has the best interests of Aboriginal Victorians at heart.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

“This funding boost will allow us to deliver a health-based response to public drunkenness – better protecting vulnerable people by ensuring they have access to the culturally appropriate care they need.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

“Current public drunkenness laws have had a profound and disproportionate impact on Aboriginal communities. These new laws will provide a common-sense change – focusing on support, not punishment.”

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