

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP
Attorney-General



Tuesday, 8 December 2020

GETTING ON WITH PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS REFORMS

The Andrews Labor Government will ensure those who are drunk in public get the health response and help they need, under new laws introduced to parliament today.

The *Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020* will decriminalise public drunkenness and allow for a health-based response, designed to save lives and better protect vulnerable people.

We have listened to Aboriginal communities and health experts – who have advocated for this reform for decades – and will build a culturally safe and appropriate model that prioritises the health and safety of individuals who are intoxicated in public, as well as the broader community.

The Government appointed an Expert Reference Group (ERG) to provide advice about decriminalising public drunkenness and ensure we get this right – consulting widely with Aboriginal communities, Victoria Police, health services and alcohol and other drugs experts.

The ERG's report, which was released on 28 November 2020, provided detailed recommendations about implementing a health-based response – delivering more social services and prevention strategies, improved first response and ensuring people are transported to a safe place.

To begin work on this important reform, the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* provided \$16 million to kickstart work on safer pathways to help people who are drunk on our streets.

Abolishing the offence of public drunkenness was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, and the recent inquest into the tragic death of Yorta Yorta woman Tanya Day.

The Government will consult further to make sure the new model is effective in maintaining community safety and supporting the health and safety of people who are intoxicated in public.

The Bill will come into effect after two years, while we do the work to develop, trial and implement a health-based response to public drunkenness.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

"Current public drunkenness laws have devastated too many families – that's why we're delivering reforms that focus on support and safety, not punishment."

"We will work closely with Aboriginal communities, health experts and other stakeholders, including police, to address any concerns and ensure the public health model is safe and supportive."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"We will build a health model that is culturally safe and appropriate – informed by the communities who this law has impacted the most."

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

"It's clear the current laws have had a profound and disproportionate impact on Aboriginal communities. These reforms will save lives and ensure those who need support have access to culturally appropriate care."

Media contact: Jamila Fontana 0409 741 279 | jamila.fontana@minstaff.vic.gov.au