

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Attorney-General
Minister for Resources



Friday, 19 February 2021

HISTORIC LAWS PASSED TO DECRIMINALISE PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

People who are drunk in public will get the health support and help they need with laws to decriminalise public drunkenness passing Parliament today.

The *Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020* will save lives by ensuring no one can be locked in a police cell just for being drunk in public. It paves the way for public drunkenness to be treated as a health issue, not a crime.

These laws have been informed by Aboriginal communities and health experts – who have advocated for this reform for decades – and enable the Government to move to 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.

This will include more outreach services, training for first responders and new sobering up services – making sure people are transported to a safe place where they can receive support if they need it.

The Bill builds on three decades of work and activism, including key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the Coronial Inquest into the tragic death of Tanya Day.

Over the next two years, the Government will continue to work closely with Aboriginal communities, health experts and key stakeholders – including Victoria Police – to design, trial and refine the public health model and develop local solutions that are safe and effective.

These reforms were developed following extensive consultation to ensure they strike the right balance between protection of people who are intoxicated and community safety.

The government is currently considering trial site locations in line with advice provided by an Expert Reference Group report.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

“Today we have delivered a reform that is long overdue – public drunkenness laws have caused too much pain for too many and we acknowledge everyone who has fought tirelessly for this change.”

“We’ll continue to work closely with Aboriginal communities, health experts and other stakeholders, including police to establish a health model that focuses on support and safety, not punishment.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

“We have worked with and listened to the Aboriginal community to deliver real change. These reforms will save lives and provide fair and culturally appropriate care – that’s the right thing to do.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

“This important change wraps a culturally appropriate health response around vulnerable people who are drunk in public, giving them the immediate help they need.”

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