

Media Release

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Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

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MORE DRUG ADDICTION SUPPORT FOR SHEPPARTON

More regional Victorians recovering from drug and alcohol dependency now have specialised court services and support closer to home with the opening of a dedicated new Drug Court in Shepparton.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes today joined members of the judiciary to officially open the Magistrates' Court Drug Court in Shepparton – the second to be formally launched after Ballarat Drug Court officially opened in March.

The expansion of the Drug Court program to Shepparton and Ballarat is part of a \$35 million expansion of the program and builds on the success of the two courts in Melbourne and Dandenong.

The Shepparton Drug Court will provide up to 35 people a year on Drug and Alcohol Treatment Orders the opportunity to access vital support and reconnect with the community.

Participants must undertake alcohol and drug counselling, comply with drug testing and regularly attend court review hearings, case management and clinical advisor appointments to ensure they stay on track.

The Drug Court program addresses the underlying factors that contribute to offending and provides participants with an opportunity to stay drug and crime-free, break the cycle of offending and get on the path to recovery.

Research has shown that by addressing the underlying causes of crime the Drug Courts program has reduced reoffending, increased community safety, and decreased the burden on the courts and corrections system.

Evaluations of the existing Drug Courts have shown a 70 per cent reduction in prison time for participants on a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Order. They have also shown a 32 per cent reduction in unemployment and a 23 per cent reduction in reoffending rates over the first 12 months after program completion.

The new drug court is located near community services including Centrelink, Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre, and employment agencies, helping to keep participants connected to the support they need.

Victoria's Drug Court was established in Dandenong in 2002 and expanded to Melbourne Magistrates' Court in March 2017.

A further \$5 million in additional funding was announced in the *Victorian Budget 2022/23* to support the Ballarat and Shepparton Drug Courts. This investment will also continue the Court Integrated Services Program pilot at the County Court – helping more Victorians break the cycle of reoffending and get their lives back on track.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"We're investing in drug courts because we know they work. By supporting people to reduce alcohol and drug use instead of just punishing them, they're more likely to get their lives back on track and less likely to reoffend."

"Expanding the Drug Court program to regional Victoria is about making these important services available outside of Melbourne – helping people get help closer to home and stay connected to their community."