

Media Release

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Minister for Mental Health
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HEALTH-LED RESPONSE TO CHANGE AND SAVE LIVES

Simply being intoxicated in public should not be a crime. And from tomorrow, it won't be.

The change in law is the direct result of tireless advocacy from First Nations communities and the family of Aunty Tanya Day – as well as key recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* and coroners' reports, including into Aunty Tanya's tragic and avoidable passing.

For the majority of Victorians, this change will have no effect on their daily lives – but those who do find themselves intoxicated in public needing additional support will get the most appropriate care and support for their circumstances.

We know a police cell is not the place for someone who is intoxicated to recover – and this new approach will include outreach services to support people with transport to a safe place if needed.

For most people, this will be their own home or that of a family member, friend or carer – for others, it may be a staffed place of safety or sobering centre.

The health-led model prioritises services for First Nations Victorians, in acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact public intoxication laws and police interactions has had for too long.

From tomorrow, Aboriginal outreach services will be operated by Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation (Ngwala) across Melbourne, Frankston and Wyndham, supporting Aboriginal Victorians who are intoxicated in public – and if needed, providing them with transport to a safe place or the dedicated sobering centre in St Kilda.

The dedicated First Nations sobering centre in St Kilda will operate from an existing service that is already open and run by Ngwala, and other dedicated services will provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across eight key areas of need in regional Victoria.

The locations and lead service providers are:

- **Geelong** – Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative
- **Ballarat** – Ballarat and Districts Aboriginal Cooperative
- **Bendigo** – Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative
- **Shepparton** – Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative
- **Mildura** – Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation, supported by Mildura Base Hospital
- **Swan Hill** – Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation
- **Latrobe** – Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation
- **East Gippsland** – Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation

There will also be 24/7 outreach services available for the general public across Melbourne and a sobering centre in Collingwood – both these services will be delivered by cohealth.

All regional and metropolitan services will be coordinated by a centralised service, run by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS).

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These extra services will work alongside local health and social support services to ensure people can also access help for concerns like alcohol and other drug addiction, family violence, homelessness, mental health and wellbeing, or financial difficulties at the same time.

Dedicated services will be present in local government areas that cover 98 per cent of all historic public intoxication offences by Aboriginal people in Victoria – that is why we have specifically selected these key eight regional service areas, alongside two inner city sobering centres and Melbourne outreach services.

First responders outside dedicated service areas will also have access to the statewide central intake and referral service – the service delivering advice and recommending AOD and health services.

Triple Zero will continue to be there for emergencies – and paramedics and Victoria Police will continue their vital work helping Victorians whenever there are critical health emergencies or community safety risks involved.

The new approach has been developed in consultation with the Aboriginal Advisory Group and other Aboriginal stakeholders.

An Implementation Monitoring and Oversight Group is also being established to look closely at these new services – to see what is or isn't working and make any necessary recommendations as the response scales up.

The Victorian Government is investing more than \$120 million to support these reforms to ensure that nobody is taken into a police cell for the sole reason of being intoxicated in public while providing safer pathways to help people who are intoxicated in public and in need of additional support.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt

“For too long we have seen First Nations Victorians disproportionately affected by current laws and too many tragic outcomes when they are in custody – simply being intoxicated in a public place should not be a crime.”

“These health-led reforms strike a balance between supporting people who are intoxicated and community safety, and while there is always more work to do to close the gap for vulnerable people in our community – this reform will undoubtedly change and save lives.”