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MEDIA RELEASE

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\$20 MILLION BOOST FOR ABORIGINAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES

The NSW Government has today announced an additional \$20 million investment over four years in justice initiatives to help reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the package involves significant expansions of the Youth Koori Court, Circle Sentencing in the Local Court, and the Justice Reinvestment program.

“The NSW Government is committed to working closely and collaboratively with Aboriginal communities to address disproportionate rates of Aboriginal incarceration,” Mr Speakman said.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Franklin said investing in these programs will enhance the NSW Government’s commitment to the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#).

“Investing in these programs aims to meet targets within the Closing the Gap agreement, including reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and young people in the criminal justice system,” Mr Franklin said.

The NSW Government is today committing:

- \$5.8 million to expand the [Youth Koori Court](#) to the Children’s Court at Dubbo and to provide more funding for Aboriginal Legal Services, Legal Aid NSW and a specialist Children’s Magistrate to oversee the Youth Koori Courts including at Surry Hills and Parramatta.
- \$4.2 million to expand the Circle Sentencing program from 12 to 20 high-priority Local Court locations.
- \$9.8 million for new Justice Reinvestment pilots, which aim to divert people away from the criminal justice system by investing in evidence-based community-led initiatives that address the underlying causes of crime, with a focus on Aboriginal people. A [Justice Reinvestment pilot](#) is presently operating in Bourke.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Franklin said: “The National Agreement provides us with the framework to empower and support Aboriginal communities across the State to create fundamental change and achieve meaningful, permanent outcomes.”

Mr Speakman said as part of the funding package the Circle Sentencing program will be expanded to include Local Courts at Penrith, Campbelltown, Wollongong, Broken Hill, Wagga Wagga, Batemans Bay, Waverley and the Sydney Downing Centre.

Circle Sentencing is an alternative sentencing method in which a Local Court Magistrate works with Aboriginal Elders, victims, respected members of the community and the offender’s family to determine an appropriate sentence.

“In the 20 years since the program was first piloted in Nowra, more than 1,450 Circle Sentencing sittings have been held,” Mr Speakman said.

“This approach has been found to reduce rates of imprisonment and reoffending compared with traditional sentencing methods.”

Uncle John Bolt, a proud Bundjalung man who has been involved as an Elder in the Circle Sentencing Program for 20 years, said: “I’m honoured to be part of this program, and over the past 20 years it’s been really strong and positive, giving our community the opportunity to see our young people get a better start in life and stop being incarcerated.”

This funding package complements other new NSW Government initiatives already underway, such as the Walama List pilot that started in the District Court on 31 January, 2022.

The NSW Government is also investing \$27.9 million over four years to expand the NSW Drug Court to Dubbo.

Plans are also underway to expand the Aboriginal List in the Drug Court already operating at Parramatta to Dubbo and Sydney.

Specialist roles attached to the Drug Court will enhance the provision of culturally safe and responsive support for Aboriginal participants going through the Drug Court.

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