

# MEDIA RELEASE



**Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC**  
**Attorney General**  
**Minister for Citizenship**  
**Minister for Regulatory Reform**

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## **Drug court for the Hunter**

Attorney General John Hatzistergos today announced that the New South Wales Government had approved \$3.7 million in annual funding to introduce the highly successful Drug Court program to the Hunter region.

Mr Hatzistergos said the Hunter Drug Court would be run from Toronto Courthouse and would service the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Maitland and Port Stephens Local Government Areas.

“Reducing a person’s drug dependence reduces their need to commit crime”, he said.

“Since 1999, the Western Sydney Drug Court has diverted thousands of drug-dependent offenders into supervised treatment to eliminate their drug dependence.

“Offenders are subject to strict supervision, including regular urinalysis, and those who fail to comply risk being sent to prison.”

A recent evaluation of the program by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has shown that it has worked exceptionally well in reducing rates of recidivism, with Drug Court participants being:

- 17 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for any offence;
- 30 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for a violent offence; and
- 38 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for a drug offence.

“It would be great if we could get these results, or better, in the Hunter Region”.

Mr Hatzistergos said the Minister for the Hunter, Jodi McKay, should be congratulated for her hard work in helping to secure the new funding.

“I know the Minister has been very passionate in delivering a Drug Court to the Hunter and has worked hard to ensure it becomes a reality,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

Minister for the Hunter, Jodi McKay, welcomed the funding and said the Hunter Drug Court builds on the Keneally Government’s \$94 million investment in Newcastle’s court complex.

“The Western Sydney Drug Court model has delivered very good results and I am confident those results will be replicated in the Hunter, which is great news for the region,” Ms McKay said.

“The Hunter Drug Court will help drive down crime and assist drug addicts on to treatment.

“It has worked well in Western Sydney and we need the same approach here in the Hunter.” Ms McKay said she is very pleased that both the new court complex in Newcastle and the Hunter Drug Court are being delivered.

“Investing in these new modern facilities and services will ensure the Hunter is well equipped to deal with law breakers for years to come,” Ms McKay said.

Member for Maitland, the Hon Frank Terenzini MP said the Drug Court would give local judges and magistrates a new option for rehabilitating repeat offenders.

“In my time working with defence practitioners in the Lower Hunter, I know first hand that there is a real need for a Drug Court”, he said.

"I am confident that the establishment of a Drug Court will go a long way to help drive down rates of repeat offending".

Mr Hatzistergos said that while the Government had considered basing the Hunter Drug Court in Newcastle, it found that Toronto was currently the best location for the program.

"Under current arrangements, it simply wouldn't be possible to run the Hunter Drug Court out of Newcastle without adversely affecting existing court sittings there", he said.

"Once the Newcastle Justice Precinct is completed, we can reconsider our options.

"In the meantime, Toronto Courthouse is an excellent location for the Hunter Drug Court.

"The Court is linked to the Newcastle CBD via a train and bus connection from Fassifern train station.

"It has an available second courtroom with chambers, with provision for an interview room, testing room and holding cells.

"Furthermore, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid Commission, and Probation and Parole Service each has offices in the Toronto area".

Mr Hatzistergos said that only drug addicted offenders charged with crimes not involving violent or sexual conduct would be eligible for the program.