



Mark Speakman

Attorney General

Tanya Davies

Minister for Mental Health, Member for Mulgoa

Stuart Ayres

Minister for Western Sydney, Member for Penrith

MEDIA RELEASE

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COURT PROJECT TO HELP PEOPLE WITH A COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

The NSW Government has launched a pilot diversion program to help defendants with a cognitive impairment charged with low-level offences access services that address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour.

Attorney General Mark Speakman, Minister for Mental Health Tanya Davies and Member for Mulgoa, and Minister for Western Sydney and Member for Penrith Stuart Ayres today announced the Cognitive Impairment Diversion Program will be rolled out at Penrith and Gosford Local Courts.

“The pilot program will identify defendants with a cognitive impairment early to help prevent their further contact with the criminal justice system,” Mr Speakman said.

A psychologist or psychiatrist will screen defendants appearing before Penrith and Gosford Local Courts on lower level charges (known as summary offences) to identify people with a cognitive impairment. Support workers will then identify defendants’ needs and goals and help them access the services of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The program will provide a report to help magistrates decide whether to direct defendants into treatment or support as an alternative to criminal sanctions.

“Supporting people with cognitive issues when they enter the criminal justice system can increase their quality of life, reduce their risk of committing further crime and create safer communities,” Mrs Davies said.

Minister Ayres welcomed the establishment of the pilot at Penrith Local Court.

“The pilot will be crucial to determining what help people with cognitive impairments need to navigate the criminal justice system, to help ensure they don’t end up in trouble with the law again,” Mr Ayres said.

The Cognitive Impairment Diversion program is a joint initiative between the Department of Justice and NSW Health. The pilot will be evaluated after a year to determine whether the program should be expanded to other locations.