

# MEDIA RELEASE

## REAL ACTION ON ICE SCOURGE CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER

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NEW SOUTH WALES  
BAR ASSOCIATION

New South Wales Bar Association President Gabrielle Bashir SC has welcomed the Government's response to the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug Ice, but called on the Government to move decisively on its implementation.

'This was urgent two and a half years ago, and it's only more urgent now,' Ms Bashir SC said. 'We can't afford further delay, particularly for the pre-court diversion scheme, which will link users with health interventions and the increased accessibility of the Magistrate Early Referral into Treatment scheme (MERIT).'

The recommendation by the Special Commission of Inquiry was to implement a police diversion scheme for personal use offences. However, despite two and a half years of consideration, the Government has only announced a police diversion scheme in principle, pending advice from the Chief Health Officer and the Police Commissioner on the rollout of new health services said to be reportable by June 2023, a further nine months away and after the NSW election.

There has also been no commitment to making the highly effective MERIT open to young people. Strip searching, in particular of minors, is also an area of critical concern where regrettably reform has not been embraced.

The Bar Association welcomes the Government's support for the majority of the Inquiry's public health recommendations, including \$499 million to establish new state-wide health rehabilitation services and justice initiatives. However, it is concerned that some elements of today's response only commit to further consideration, meaning further delay to effective action to address the ice epidemic.

'The impact of ice use on Australian families and communities, is shocking. Australia has the highest rate of amphetamine dependence in the world and Australasia has the highest rate of all-cause deaths associated with amphetamine dependence, according to the Ice Inquiry's Report. Further delay in diverting low-level drug users towards much needed health interventions has enormously negative impacts for our community' said Ms Bashir.

'The Bar Association will be watching closely, examining the details of the diversionary scheme. We call on the Government to commit to its implementation well before the next election, and to rethink some of the refusals to implement reforms which will impact on young people. The need is urgent, and it demands an urgent response', Ms Bashir concluded.

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