

Michael Daley
Attorney General



Kate Washington
Minister for Families and Communities
Minister for Disability Inclusion

Media Release

NSW Government strengthens legal support for people with a cognitive impairment

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The NSW Government is investing \$14 million to strengthen support for people with a cognitive impairment who come into contact with the justice system.

The Government is extending funding for the Justice Advocacy Service (JAS) which helps people understand their rights and responsibilities when interacting with police, legal representatives and the courts.

The service is run by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) and has been extended for another two years until 30 June 2027.

It is available across the state, including in regional and remote areas, and has supported more than 9,000 people since 2019.

JAS also provides a voluntary diversion service helping eligible defendants to provide evidence of their impairment, apply for a diversion order, and access the NDIS and other support services.

This diversion service is available across six local courts – Downing Centre, Parramatta, Blacktown, Penrith, Gosford and Lismore – and has helped more than 900 clients since 2022.

Attorney General Michael Daley said:

“This funding extension ensures the Justice Advocacy Service can continue providing support to people with a cognitive impairment when they interact with police, legal representatives and the courts.

“This is important to ensure equitable access to justice and fairness for vulnerable community members.”

Minister for Disability Inclusion Kate Washington said:

“Legal processes can be complex for anyone – but for people with a cognitive impairment, navigating the courts without adequate support can result in unjust outcomes with life shattering consequences.

“Thanks to the Justice Advocacy Service, people with cognitive impairment can access the support and advice they need as witnesses, victims or defendants.

“By extending this funding, we’re backing a service that makes sure people’s needs are understood which helps to ensure everyone in our courts gets a fair hearing.”

Intellectual Disability Rights Service Chief Executive Officer Joanne Yates said:

“The Justice Advocacy Service supports more than 2,500 people with a cognitive impairment in their criminal proceedings each year.

“JAS advocates contribute to the effective operations of the courts. Our work is critical in supporting vulnerable people with intellectual disability. This includes keeping them out of prison and diverting them into support services as appropriate.

“We welcome the extension of our vital funding for these next two years and thank the Attorney General and the Minister for their ongoing support”.

A former Justice Advocacy Service client said:

“JAS saved me when I was at my lowest point in life and through their work has given me so many opportunities. I’m working and I can’t thank them enough for what they’ve done for me.

“It changes lives in so many ways, support is unreal, they spend extra time with court matters.

“It will keep a lot of people out of prison, having the diversion in courts is really beneficial for people with intellectual disability as it is keeping them out of somewhere that will make them even more vulnerable than they already are.”

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