

Media Release

Circle Sentencing expanded to Sydney's Downing Centre

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The NSW Government is expanding the successful Circle Sentencing program to Sydney's Downing Centre.

Circle Sentencing is a program to help reduce reoffending, improve justice outcomes and improve community safety.

It is available to eligible defendants who plead guilty to or are found guilty of criminal offences in a local court.

Rather than being sentenced by a magistrate alone, defendants are sentenced by a magistrate alongside representatives from the local Aboriginal community, such as elders.

In addition, the police prosecutor is always involved while the victim can choose to participate if they wish.

The court has the full sentencing power of a traditional court for offenders who meet the criteria and are assessed as suitable.

A 2020 study by NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found Aboriginal people who participated in Circle Sentencing were 9.6 per cent less likely to reoffend, compared to those sentenced to a non-custodial sentence in a traditional way.

In developing the sentence, the group discusses factors including the impact on the victim and what can be done to prevent further offending.

Sydney Downing Centre will hold its first Circle Court today presided over by NSW Chief Magistrate, Judge Michael Allen.

Including the Downing Centre, Circle Sentencing now operates at 23 high-priority locations after beginning in Nowra in 2002.

The Downing Centre will become the third metropolitan location following Mt Druitt in 2007 and Blacktown in 2010.

Attorney General Michael Daley said:

"The NSW Government is investing in prevention and diversion measures to improve long-term outcomes for Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

"People who participate in Circle Sentencing are less likely to reoffend.

"Expanding Circle Sentencing to Sydney's Downing Centre Local Court will empower more Aboriginal communities to be involved in the sentencing process."

Chief Magistrate Judge Michael Allen said:

“Circle Sentencing elsewhere in the state has been effective for a number of years in reducing recidivism, and I look forward to seeing similar success in Sydney.”

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