

Three drug courts in NSW – Western Sydney, Hunter and now Sydney’s East

A re-elected Keneally Government will invest \$6.3 million in a new Drug Court for Sydney’s East – building upon the highly successful Western Sydney model. It will be the State’s third.

Premier Kristina Keneally and Attorney General John Hatzistergos made the announcement today with Minister for the Hunter and Member for Newcastle, Jodi McKay, while opening the new Hunter Drug Court in Toronto.

At that announcement, they revealed that there would be a third drug court – in Sydney’s east at the Downing Centre.

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

More than 50 per cent of participants have not returned to jail.

“If we can break an offender’s dependence on drugs, we can help them break the drug-crime cycle and reduce the overall rates of reoffending,” Ms Keneally said.

“Under the Drug Court program, offenders undergo intensive drug treatment and rehabilitation whilst being subject to strict supervision, including regular urinalysis. Those who fail to comply risk being sent to prison.

“The evidence shows that Drug Courts assist drug addicts through treatment and help drive down crime in the community.

“The NSW Government last year signed off on \$3.7 million in annual funding to make the Drug Court a reality for the Hunter.

“We are backing that up with a commitment, if re-elected, to provide \$6.3 million for a Drug Court to be established in Sydney East.”

A landmark study by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics found offenders who complete the Drug Court program are 37 per cent less likely to be convicted of any further offence.

It also found that offenders were 58 per cent less likely to be convicted of another drug offence.

Attorney General John Hatzistergos said studies have shown that the Drug Court has been highly successful at reducing reoffending for drug-related crime in Western Sydney.

“The Drug Court has proven more cost-effective than prison in reducing re-offending rates among people who have committed drug-related crime,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“The Western Sydney Drug Court has been highly successful but has not been able to cover the whole Sydney basin.

“Labor’s commitment to a Sydney East Drug Court will ensure coverage of the program extends work to break that cycle of crime and drug dependency.”

Ms McKay said the expansion of the Drug Court to the Hunter was a major step forward for crime prevention in the region.

“We know criminals addicted to drugs often commit crimes to fund their addiction,” Ms McKay said.

“By helping them break their addiction to drugs, we can help them break their addiction to crime.

“The Hunter Drug Court builds on the Keneally Government’s \$94 million investment in Newcastle’s court complex.

“The Hunter Drug Court is currently based at the Toronto Court-house and it is anticipated that it will relocate to the planned Newcastle Justice Precinct upon its completion.”

John Hatzistergos



Liberals want to cancel community group funding

Minister for Citizenship John Hatzistergos today attacked Barry O’Farrell’s community relations adviser and handpicked candidate for Cabramatta Dai Le for saying Community Relations Commission (CRC) funding leaves communities “isolated” and “marginalised”.

Speaking at the Cabramatta Candidates Debate, Dai Le said:

“In regards to providing funding to communities in an area as multicultural as Cabramatta - giving funds to these individual communities isolates and marginalises these groups.”

Mr Hatzistergos said that all CRC funding goes to community groups for worthwhile projects that directly benefit their communities.

Mr Hatzistergos said: “How can a so-called multicultural advisor advocate on behalf of NOT giving multicultural communities funding for community groups and projects?”

“Ms Le’s comments should be very concerning to culturally diverse communities.

“Ms Le needs to explain face-to-face to these groups why she believes they shouldn’t receive any funding,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“She needs to come clean on whether CRC funding for community groups will be cancelled under a Liberal Government.

Under Labor, government funding is made available to a wide, variety of multicultural groups for projects, for example:

- ↳ Vietnamese Women’s Association for a qualified early childhood worker to assist special needs children; and

- ↳ Croatian-Australian Welfare Centre Co-Op for a bilingual community worker who will assist senior citizens with language and cultural barriers to access mainstream services;

- ↳ Australian Sikh Association for an expanded library in the Glenwood Gurdwara;

- ↳ Italian Social Welfare Organisation of Wollongong for a project encouraging senior citizens to keep active, and the maintenance of mental and physical health; and

- ↳ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese for a community worker to build links between diverse cultural networks.

“The question needs to be asked: why does Barry O’Farrell continually refuse to stand up for multicultural communities?” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“NSW Labor believes multicultural community groups are a true backbone of our society.

“We cannot let a Liberal Government come in and undo all the great work Labor has done to support cultural diversity in NSW.”

SBS Radio’s special appeal for New Zealand

The Greek community showed their generosity last week during SBS Radio’s special appeal to raise money for New Zealand earthquake survivors, pledging a huge \$49,000!

The pictures were taken during the radiothon. The lady at the microphone is Greek program broadcaster Angela Pirdas, and the others are group shots with the Melbourne-based Greek broadcasters and their volunteer group.

