

# Public intoxication response

About the health-led response

**OFFICIAL**

## Frequently asked questions

### What is the new public intoxication response (PIR)?

Following changes from the Victorian Government, from 7 November 2023 being intoxicated in public is no longer illegal and the Government will be providing a health-led response.

People will no longer be taken into custody solely for public intoxication. Outreach services with qualified health and social support workers will assist instead, where available.

Outreach services may help people on the spot or if needed, provide them with transport to a safe place.

For many people, this will be their own home or that of a family member, friend or carer. For others, it will be a place of safety or a sobering centre, where they can recover and receive support.

Staff will work alongside local health and social support services to ensure people can also access services for concerns like, alcohol and other drugs, family violence, homelessness, mental health and wellbeing, or financial difficulties.

### Why has this changed?

In 2019, the Victorian Government acknowledged that reform was long overdue and committed to decriminalising public intoxication and replacing the current criminal justice response with a health-led approach.

This means putting the right programs in place to help people who are intoxicated in public access the support they need to stay safe.

Victoria's previous public intoxication laws had an unacceptable and disproportionate impact on certain communities, particularly Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These changes respond to extensive Aboriginal community advocacy and action, key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the tragic passing of Aunty Tanya Day who died in police custody following an arrest for public drunkenness.

### What services are now available?

The new PIR services will see Aboriginal outreach services running across Melbourne, Frankston and Wyndham to support people who are intoxicated in public, and if needed, providing them with transport to a safe place or the dedicated sobering centre in St Kilda.

There will also be outreach services available for the general public across Melbourne and a sobering centre established in Collingwood for the wider population to access as well.

Once the public intoxication response is fully operational, Aboriginal communities in eight regional locations will have access to Aboriginal specific outreach services and places of safety, with access to additional culturally safe social support services.

All of these services will be coordinated through a dedicated phone line, operated by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), which will manage intake, referrals and the dispatch of outreach services when appropriate.

It's important to remember, for most people who need and consent to transport by an outreach team, it will be to their own home or that of a family member, friend or carer.

Places of safety, including the dedicated sobering centres, will be available to people who have nowhere else to recover.

## **Who can call the centralised service, and how will it operate?**

From 7 November, the following groups will be able to contact the centralised service operated by VAHS:

- Emergency services (Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria)
- Local government authorities
- Liquor licensees
- Transport operators

Calls to the centralised service will be triaged to ensure that a person who is intoxicated in public can receive the most appropriate response.

Calls from emergency services will support the identification of any relevant information about the intoxicated person that outreach teams should be aware of.

Calls from non-emergency services will be triaged to determine if the person requires urgent medical assistance or if there are any immediate community safety concerns.

If no emergency response is required, the caller will be taken through a process to evaluate the intoxicated person's level of need and whether they have a safe place they could be transported to. The VAHS call taker will then arrange dispatch of any required outreach teams and notify any relevant service – such as places of safety or sobering services.

## **What happens if a person is outside the service coverage area?**

Where the person is outside of the service coverage area, the centralised service can provide general advice and recommend AOD services that may be able to support the person.

If the person appears to need urgent medical assistance or if there are immediate safety concerns, the call taker may direct the caller to contact Triple Zero (000).

## **Why are some regions receiving services for Aboriginal people only?**

The health-led model prioritises services for the Aboriginal community, in acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact public intoxication laws and police interactions have had on Aboriginal people.

The response ultimately aims to reduce Aboriginal deaths in custody and is in recognition of the strong and sustained advocacy from the Aboriginal community for reform to the way that government systems respond to people who are intoxicated in public.

## Will PIR services help people under the age of 18?

Yes, the new model includes provisions for children and young people under 18, with specific requirements to ensure that they are safely cared for and are provided with age-appropriate supports and referrals.

All efforts will be made to contact the child or young person's parent, guardian or relative and to transport them home or to the home of a family member. A child only be transported to a sobering centre or place of safety if all other options have been exhausted.

All staff at sobering centres and places of safety will be appropriately trained in order to safely work with children and young people.

## Does the new response mean Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria are no longer involved at all?

Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police will continue to provide a response in instances of public intoxication where there are emergency health risks or community safety risks.

Where Victoria Police are in attendance, their response will be informed by the behaviour of the person and any particular risks presented, rather than the person's intoxication.

In areas across Victoria where there may not be dedicated PIR services available, Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police may still respond, and provide support and appropriate referrals with the consent of the person.

## What should I do if I see someone intoxicated in public?

If you see someone intoxicated in public and you are worried about their immediate health or for the safety of others around them, you can call 000 and they will divert the call to the appropriate emergency responders.

If you are in a licensed venue, let staff members know what the problem is. They will be able to call 000 or the new centralised service phone number to access the PIR services available.

In some areas outreach workers will proactively be visiting known public intoxication hotspots and will respond on site if they believe someone needs assistance.

## Find out more

Visit our website for further information about the health-led response and services available throughout Victoria: <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/public-intoxication-reform-0>>

To receive this document in another format, email the [public intoxication response team](mailto:publicintoxication@health.vic.gov.au) at <[publicintoxication@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:publicintoxication@health.vic.gov.au)>.

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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