



**Mark Speakman**

Attorney General

Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence

**Alister Henskens**

Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Thursday, 3 June 2021

### **SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT**

People with a cognitive impairment will receive greater support across the criminal justice system following the NSW Government's \$28 million investment in the statewide Justice Advocacy Service (JAS) and a nation-leading court-based diversion program.

This commitment follows a positive [independent evaluation](#) of JAS, which has provided critical support in over 4,500 cases for victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants since July 2019.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the new court-based diversion services will build on the supports offered by JAS by providing more targeted assistance to people accused of low-level offences to get the treatment they need to help break the cycle of re-offending and boost community safety.

"People with cognitive impairment face significant challenges navigating the criminal justice system. JAS is improving access to justice for thousands of people and ensuring more compliance with police and court orders to help drive down re-offending," Mr Speakman said.

"We've heeded the evaluation's findings and are delighted to be investing four years of additional funding to support some of the most vulnerable people in our justice system."

JAS's network of volunteers and advocates helps people with a cognitive impairment understand and participate in their criminal matter by providing a support person to accompany them to the police station, court and legal appointments. Other services include:

- supporting victims and witnesses with a cognitive impairment to report a crime to police
- providing a 24-hour service for people with cognitive impairment who are in police custody
- training to help identify people in the justice system with cognitive impairment
- offering informal supports to help refer people with cognitive impairment into relevant care.

The new court-based diversion services will be delivered at six of NSW's busiest Local Courts, providing a referral path from JAS for defendants with cognitive impairment accused of low-level offences who need diversion into treatment and support.

It will help these defendants access a cognitive assessment, develop tailored support plans, connect them with relevant services like the NDIS and provide accurate and relevant information to assist magistrates with their decision making.

"Together, these services will provide holistic, end-to-end support for people with a cognitive impairment – from their first point of contact with police to the resolution of their court matter. We are enhancing the capacity and capability of the criminal justice system to respond to

people with a cognitive impairment,” Mr Speakman said.  
Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Alister Henskens said this additional funding will make a significant difference for people with a cognitive impairment.

“This program will help people with disability access the supports they require in the community by connecting them with the mainstream service system and the NDIS,” Mr Henskens said.

“These early interventions will help defendants to get the treatment that is right for them, which the evidence shows will reduce the risk of re-offending.”