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MEDIA RELEASE

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REPORT SHOWS DRUG COURT REDUCES REOFFENDING

A new report issued today shows that the NSW Drug Court has led to a significantly lower reconviction rate among offenders diverted through the program.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the joint report from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) shows the Drug Court is making a real difference.

“The Drug Court helps offenders steer clear of drugs and other crime through intense interventions like detoxification, counselling and monitoring. The court can apply severe sanctions should an offender relapse, to ensure accountability too,” Mr Speakman said.

“This report reinforces international studies which show that drug court programs are effective in reducing reoffending. This means safer communities, while also providing offenders with a foundation from which to rebuild their lives.”

BOCSAR and NDARC found that offenders who participate in the Drug Court stay free from committing a violent offence for 22 per cent longer than similar offenders who did not participate. The reoffending rate amongst participants was 17 per cent lower.

Minister for Health and Medical Research Brad Hazzard said drug use can be a symptom of underlying health and mental health issues that could lead to more serious crime.

“The Drug Court model enables the justice and health systems to work together to help offenders address the underlying causes of their offending, while making them accountable for their crimes,” Mr Hazzard said.

“I’m pleased to see that this report confirms that the approach is having positive impacts for participants and the broader community.”

The report evaluated the outcomes of 604 Drug Court participants and a control group of 306 offenders over a period of up to 17 years.

The NSW Drug Court has been operating since 1999 sitting in Parramatta, the Sydney CBD and Toronto.

Senior Judge of the Drug Court Roger Dive said close collaboration with BOCSAR in previous research has been central to enhancements in the program.

“We know that great improvements in the Drug Court program since those early days would indicate even more exciting results in the future,” Judge Dive said.

The ‘Ice Inquiry’ recommendation to expand the Drug Court will be considered as part of the Government’s response to the Inquiry.

The NSW Government also funds the Magistrates’ Early Referral Into Treatment program (MERIT), which is available to defendants appearing in Local Courts who have a demonstrated drug or alcohol problem. It is not restricted to offenders at risk of receiving a prison sentence.