

04th November 2023

Ngwala Willumbong CEO Statement

RE: Public Intoxication Response (St Kilda Sobering Up Centre)

In response to the announcement of the second Sobering Up Centre that will commence service delivery this coming week based in St Kilda lead by our service, we are excited that we again, get this opportunity to intersect with our community in providing a health response to the changes of the public intoxication laws.

The decriminalisation of public intoxication is another step forward to reducing the over representation of our community in prison, with the burden of unpaid infringement notices, reduced life expectancy, poor health outcomes (just to name a few) but particularly related to Aboriginal deaths in custody and the advocacy from the Day family after the tragic death of their mother, Auntie Tanya Day (2017) whilst in police custody. Following this tragedy, we saw another four of our community members die whilst in custody in 2020, Veronica Nelson, in 2021 both Heather Calgaret and Michael Suckling and in 2022 Josh Kerr, may they rest in peace in their dreamtime.

Ngwala is honoured to be able to provide a culturally safe and responsive service to community that we believe will not only reduce the risk of community being incarcerated, but our hope is that we can reduce the number of lives lost and support community affected by chronic alcohol misuse in engaging in longer term treatment options by engaging in the breadth of complimentary services Ngwala offers.

The St Kilda site our service will operate from has been owned by Ngwala since the mid to late 1980's, where we have operated residential and non-residential services out of this site to support some of our most vulnerable community members.

The Sobering Up centre will be a fully staffed 24/7 model with nurses and assertive outreach support workers with on the property at all times. This site will have a 6 beds capacity, however we don't anticipate being at capacity all that often. Our service will increase in operation to support peak times of the week when community maybe more active on the streets drinking.

During peak periods through the week, we expect could be from Thursday to Saturday nights we will have assertive outreach teams out on the streets for community where a Ngwala coffee and soup van will be servicing hot spots we know community may gather, offering our services.

Our service model will see us responding to call outs by our outreach team, providing assertive outreach in the community and operating our Sobering up center for those who require additional support. In providing this response to community, our first priority will be to transport our community home, to aa family members home or a friend's home if there are no further safety concerns. If this is not possible, and a community member needs to access this service to sober up and rest, we will transport them to the sobering up centre where they will be able to freshen up, be provided with food and rest, and where they will be carefully looked after by our multidisciplinary team. Once our community members are sobered up and feeling well, we will transport them back home and/or to their own place of safety.



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Further to this brief interaction, we will support our community in accessing any further support services and referrals that they may want to engage with, either Ngwala's services or programs external to Ngwala. Our hope is that we will link our community into wrap around supports that will start a healing journey.

Ngwala Willumbong has been delivering Alcohol and Drug services both residential and non-residential for almost 50 years to our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community and we are confident in our ability to stand up and operate this service knowing that any opportunity in keeping our community safe is our focus and our priority.

At Ngwala our purpose is *"to enhance the lives of our community by offering culturally responsive, holistic AOD services, including homelessness and other healing services. We promote physical, mental and spiritual wellness, to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities throughout Victoria"*. Caring for and promoting healing and wellbeing throughout our community is the journey that our staff walk with and along and that we will always be an open door for our community.

I, my Board and my Executive team will actively monitor this service and how we operate. Making sure all community feel safe and have the confidence in us delivering a safe service. Might I add, we have had experience in delivering a service of this kind in the past, so in support and partnership with Department of Health we are well equipped and have the knowledge and expertise in what we are doing and how to keep our communities safe.

De-Joel Upkett
Chief Executive Office

