

Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT)

Alcohol and drug treatment program
for adults

Easy Read guide



How to use this guide



The NSW Government wrote this guide.

When you see the word 'we', it means the NSW Government.



We wrote this guide in an easy to read way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Bold

Not bold

We wrote some important words in **bold**.

This means the letters are thicker and darker.



We explain what these bold words mean.

There is a list of these words on page 27.



This Easy Read guide is a summary of a fact sheet.

This means it only includes the most important ideas.



You can find the fact sheet on our website.

www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au



You can ask for help to read this guide.

A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

What's in this guide?

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What is this guide about?

The Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) program supports adults who:



- are charged with a crime – the police think they broke the law



- need support for problems with alcohol or drugs.



The MERIT program provides different support for adults with alcohol and drug problems.

In this guide we just call it the program.

How can the program help you?



Lots of good things happen to adults who take part in the program.



This includes using less drugs.



It also includes:

- having better behaviour
- committing less crimes.



And the program can help adults have better health and wellbeing.



It might help adults have a better experience with their **sentence**.



When someone is guilty of a crime, a **magistrate** will decide what happens to them.

We call the decision a sentence.



A magistrate is an officer of the Court who makes a decision about a case.

How does the program work?



You can take part in a 12-week program.

It is your choice.



The MERIT team will work out what support you might need to use less alcohol or drugs.



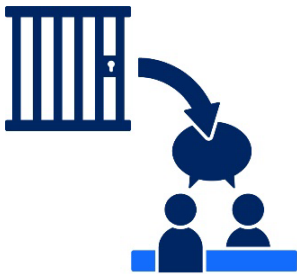
If you take part in the program, the MERIT team will make a plan with you.



This plan will explain what support you need when you are in the program.



The plan will help the MERIT team work with you to meet your needs.



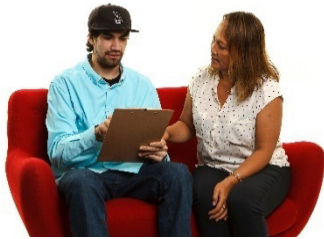
The Local Court might tell you to take part in the program because of your **bail**.



If you commit a crime, you might go to prison while a magistrate makes a decision about your case.

Or you might be able to live in the community while this happens.

We call this bail.



The MERIT team will work with you.
And they will update the Local Court about
how you're going in the MERIT program.



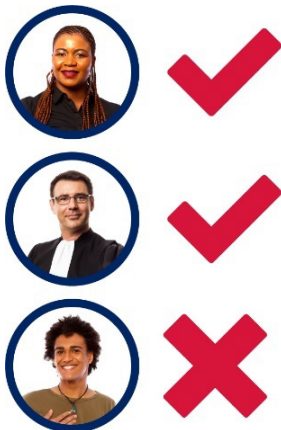
When you finish the program, you will go back
to the Local Court for your case.

How can you take part in the program?



People who work in the Local Court might ask you if you want to take part in MERIT.

No one can force you to do it.



Only certain people can suggest that you should take part in the program.



This includes a magistrate.



A solicitor can also suggest you should take part in the program.

They are a type of **lawyer**.

A lawyer is an expert who knows and understands the law.



And a police officer can suggest you should take part in the program.



You can also suggest for yourself to take part in the program.



After this, you also need to be **eligible** to take part in the program.

This means you meet the rules to take part.



The magistrate of the Court will make the final decision about who can take part.
And they will decide who is eligible.



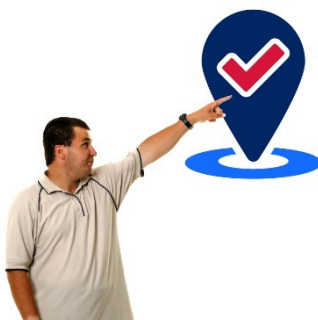
You are eligible if you:

- are an adult
- get released from prison on bail
- do not need bail.



You are also eligible if treatment can help you use less alcohol and drugs.

When you have treatment, you get support to meet your health needs.



You are eligible if you live in an area that has a MERIT program.

Or if you are connected to an area, like if you have a job there.



You must also agree to take part in the program.
You are only eligible if you agree – no one can force you to take part.



You will not be eligible if you need to go to the District Court for:

- a **sexual assault** charge
- another crime.



Sexual assault is when you:

- make someone do sexual things they don't want to do
- do something sexual to them that they don't want you to do.



Sexual assault is a crime.

What support does the program provide?

A group of people will support you when you take part in the program.



They are from:

- NSW Health
- other health services.

We call them the MERIT team.



The MERIT team will make sure they give good support.

You might get **drug and alcohol counselling**:



- on your own



- in a group.



Drug and alcohol counselling is when you talk to someone about:

- how you use drugs and alcohol
- ways to change how you use them.



You might get a staff member to help you:

- with your health
- use less alcohol or drugs
- connect with social services.

We call this **health case management**.



You might get support for different areas of your life.

This includes support for:



- how you think and feel



- staying safe and well



- seeing a doctor

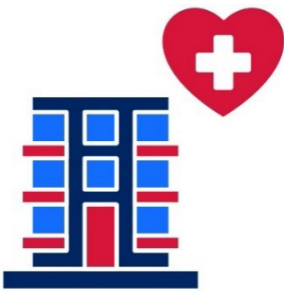


- improving your money skills.



You might get support to:

- use less alcohol and drugs
- stop using alcohol and drugs.



You might also take part in **residential rehabilitation**.



Residential rehabilitation is a place where you:

- live in a different place with other people who need support to use less alcohol or drugs
- get support 24 hours a day.

Where can you take part in the program?



Many Local Courts in NSW run the MERIT program.



There is a list of Local Courts that have the program.



You can find the list on our website.

www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au



You can also call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS).

1800 250 015



ADIS will connect you with a MERIT program near you.

Who can help you decide to take part?



You should talk to a legal expert before you decide if you want to take part.

You might be able to get help from:



- Legal Aid



- Aboriginal Legal Service.

They can help people who want to take part in the program.



If you don't want to take part in the program, your case will keep going with the Local Court.

What do you need to do?



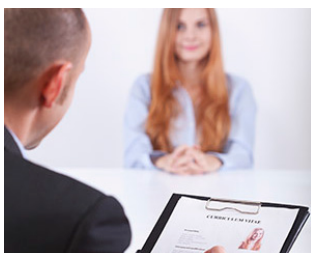
There are things you must do when you're in the program.



You must take part in treatment for 12 weeks.



You must do other things that are part of your bail.
For example, you must not leave the area.



You must update the Local Court about how you're going in the program.
You might have to do this in person.

And you must update the Local Court:



- after 6 weeks of the program



- when you finish the program after 12 weeks.



You can choose to leave the program at any time.

You won't get in trouble for leaving the program.



If you don't finish the program, your case will keep going.

What are the program's rules?



There are rules you must follow when you're in the program.



You must go to your appointments.

This includes getting to your appointments on time.



You must also work towards your goals that you made with the MERIT team.



If you don't follow these rules, the MERIT team might tell the Local Court.

And the Local Court might remove you from the program.

How the program protects your information



The MERIT team will keep your information safe.



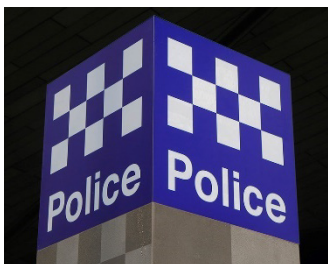
This includes information about:

- you, like your name
- where you live
- your health.



You might give information to the MERIT team that makes them worried about:

- your safety
- someone else's safety.



If this happens, they might have to tell someone who can help, like the police.

What happens after you finish the program?



When you finish the program, the Local Court will listen to your case.



The MERIT team will give the magistrate a report.

This report will include information about:



- how you did in the program



- your supports



- ideas for other support you can have in the future.



And the MERIT team might plan to help you after you finish the program.



The magistrate might use the report when they finish your sentence.

Word list

This list explains what the **bold** words in this guide mean.



Bail

If you commit a crime, you might go to prison while a magistrate makes a decision about your case.

Or you might be able to live in the community while this happens.

We call this bail.

Drug and alcohol counselling



Drug and alcohol counselling is when you talk to someone about:

- how you use drugs and alcohol
- ways to change how you use them.



Eligible

If you are eligible, you meet the rules to take part.



Health case management

Health case management is when a staff member helps you:

- with your health
- use less alcohol or drugs
- connect with social services.



Lawyer

A lawyer is an expert who knows and understands the law.



Magistrate

A magistrate is an officer of the Court who makes a decision about a case.

Residential rehabilitation



Residential rehabilitation is a place where you:

- live in a different place with other people who need support to use less alcohol or drugs
- get support 24 hours a day.



Sentence

When someone is guilty of a crime, a magistrate will decide what happens to them.

We call the decision a sentence.



Sexual assault

Sexual assault is when you:

- make someone do sexual things they don't want to do
- do something sexual to them that they don't want you to do.

More information



You can call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service for support to use less alcohol or drugs.

1800 250 015

You can call:

- any day
- at any time.



You can visit our website for more information about the program.

www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au



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