

## What is MERIT?

MERIT is a voluntary program for adults in the Local Court who have problematic alcohol and/or other drug use.

MERIT provides access to a wide range of alcohol and other drug treatment services for 12 weeks.

## Benefits of participating

MERIT has been shown to have positive outcomes for participants. Some of the benefits may be:

- decreased drug use
- decreased offending behaviour
- improved health and wellbeing
- the possibility of a better sentence result.

## How does MERIT work?

Your court matters will be adjourned. The MERIT team (based in NSW Health or non-government organisations) will conduct an assessment with you. If accepted into MERIT, an alcohol and other drug treatment plan will be developed to match your needs. The Court may make involvement in MERIT a condition of your bail.

The MERIT team will work closely with you and provide the Magistrate with regular progress reports. Your final hearing will generally coincide with completion of the MERIT program.

## Is MERIT available at my Local Court?

The MERIT website has a list of all the courts where MERIT is available.

Visit [www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au) or call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on: **1800 250 015** to be referred to a MERIT team in your area.

*We acknowledge the Traditional Peoples of the land on which we stand. We pay our respects to them for their care of the land.*

July 2020 © NSW Ministry of Health. SHPN (CPH) 200337.

# Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT)

Local Court alcohol  
and drug treatment  
program for adults

[www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au)



## Can I participate in MERIT?

The Magistrate approves your participation and decides your eligibility. You are eligible if:

- you are released on bail or do not require bail
- you do not have any sexual assault matters, or any offence that will be heard in the District Court.

You must also:

- have a treatable alcohol and/or other drug problem
- live in or have a connection to an area (e.g. full time work) that provides MERIT
- consent to participate.

## How can I access MERIT?

A Magistrate, solicitor or police officer can refer you to MERIT. You can also refer yourself.

## What sort of treatment could I receive?

The MERIT team will work with you to provide the best treatment and support. This may include:

- individual and group counselling
- case management
- welfare support and assistance
- in-patient or home-based detoxification
- opioid substitution therapy
- residential rehabilitation.

## What are my responsibilities in the MERIT program?

- Participate in treatment for about **12 weeks**
- comply with all your other bail conditions
- appear before the Magistrate to provide an update on your progress (usually at the 6 and 12 week points in your treatment).

You can voluntarily withdraw from the program at any time. If you do not complete the program, your court case will continue in the usual way. You will not be penalised for leaving MERIT.

## What are the MERIT program conditions?

- Attend appointments regularly and on time
- work towards treatment goals agreed between you and the MERIT team
- behave safely at appointments.

The court may be informed if you do not follow the MERIT program conditions. The Magistrate may remove you from the program.

## What happens when I finish the MERIT program?

When you complete the MERIT program, the Magistrate will hear your original hearing or sentencing matter(s).

The Magistrate will be provided with a report from the MERIT team which includes information about your treatment and any recommendations for future treatment.

Where possible, the MERIT team will also develop an aftercare plan to assist you with further rehabilitation.

The Magistrate may take into account the report from the MERIT team when completing sentencing.

## Who can help me with my decision?

You should discuss available options with your lawyer before making a decision. A Legal Aid lawyer may be available for people wanting to participate in MERIT.

If you choose not to enter the program, your court case will continue in the usual way.

## What happens with the information collected?

Your personal and health information will be kept secure.

If you provide information to the MERIT team which leads them to have serious concerns about your or someone else's safety, they may have to notify appropriate authorities.

[www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.merit.justice.nsw.gov.au)

