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Drug court promised

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SHADOW attorney general Paul Lynch has promised to establish a drug court in the Illawarra if his government is successful at the next state election.

Mr Lynch, also shadow minister for justice, made the commitment at a public forum on drug courts which was held at the University of Wollongong on Saturday.

"The introduction of a drug court to the Illawarra will be one of our election commitments at the next state election," he said.

"The proof of the drug court's success elsewhere is really in the reports and surveys that have been done about it - it undoubtedly and very clearly reduces the amount of illegal drug use and the number of people that reoffend.

"To get that outcome in a criminal justice system is pretty rare and if you have a model that works

you'd be silly not to use it."

In NSW, drug courts have been successfully established in Toronto near Newcastle, Parramatta and Sydney, and they work by giving offenders convicted of drug-related crimes the option of rehabilitation, rather than prison.

Mr Lynch said the Illawarra would be the best location for the next drug court in NSW due to the volume of criminal offences which occur in the region.

"The largest number of criminal offences are in Sydney, the second highest number are in Newcastle and the third highest are in the Illawarra," he said.

"That's a reflection of the large populations of those regions rather than the criminality of communities, but it means that the Illawarra is the most obvious next place for a drug court to be established.

"The fact there's also been a call by people in the Illawarra - from



Meeting of minds: Native American Judge Joseph Flies-Away and NSW Drug Court Judge Roger Dive at a drug court public forum held at the University of Wollongong on Saturday. Picture: ORLANDO CHIODO

the law society and other interested parties - the fact that they want it, is another strong argument to support it."

Illawarra solicitor Renata

public forum on the weekend, which heard from a range of speakers including Drug Court of NSW Judge Roger Dive, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics director Dr Don Weatherburn and Hualapai Nation Court of Appeals Judge Joseph Flies-Away.

"There was a really good turnout, with more than 100 people from the health and legal professions attending, as well as interested community members," Ms Matyear said.

"We had a positive response from those that attended - including people coming up and asking what they can do to help and how they can be involved in this initiative.

"We were really pleased with the commitment made by shadow attorney general Paul Lynch who said the drug courts were 'morally desirable' and economically rational'. We now plan to build on the momentum."

MP defends his obesity comments

THE federal Liberal MP under fire for allegedly questioning whether a woman weighing 70 kilograms is overweight says he was not being judgmental, but simply wanted to spark de-

