

NSW Gov Media Release

NSW Government to support early childhood services to trial longer hours and expanded care

Working families across NSW are set to benefit from more access to early childhood education and care, including new programs, longer hours, weekend operating hours and additional places, as part of a new \$20 million program.

Examples of the family-friendly benefits can include:

- extending hours of operation beyond traditional working hours
- providing flexible pick-up and drop-off times
- giving families the ability to make occasional or ad hoc care arrangements
- establishing new family day care services in rural and remote areas
- partnerships between two different service types to provide extended or wraparound care.

This is just part of the NSW Labor Government's long-term commitment to support children and young families in the early years, which includes an historic \$769 million investment to build 100 new public preschools in NSW, which is the largest investment in public preschools in the state's history.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Early Learning Prue Car said:

“Every child in NSW deserves to start school with strong educational foundations, and we know early childhood education is vital in setting young children up for success.

“This trial is supporting existing services to expand their offerings and respond to the needs of their local communities.

“This will look different in different areas across the state, with more flexibility and expanded offerings, which is a great outcome for parents and our youngest learners.”

NSW Gov Media Release

Recovery support for flood-affected communities

Disaster assistance is now available in the Blue Mountains, Camden, Hawkesbury, Kiama, Liverpool, Penrith, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Sutherland, Upper Lachlan, Wingecarribee, Wollondilly and Wollongong Local Government Areas (LGAs) following the impact of flooding from 5 April 2024.

Support includes:

- Funding for affected local councils to help with the costs of cleaning up and restoring damaged essential public assets.
- Assistance for eligible residents to help meet immediate needs like emergency accommodation or small cash payments to purchase essential items generally provided from evacuation or recovery centres.
- Grants for eligible residents to replace lost essential household items to maintain basic standard of living.
- Grants for eligible residents to undertake essential structural repairs to restore their homes to a safe and habitable condition.
- Concessional interest rate loans for small businesses, primary producers, sporting and recreation clubs, and non-profit organisations to repair or replace damaged or destroyed property.
- Freight subsidies for primary producers to help transport livestock and fodder.
- Acting Federal Minister for Emergency Management Catherine King said floods had caused widespread damage across NSW in a very short amount of time.

“It’s important that we act quickly to activate disaster support so affected communities can begin their clean-up and recovery,” Minister King said.

“I want to thank those who have worked hard to start the clean-up efforts so quickly and I want to assure those whose lives have been disrupted that we will support them through their recovery.”

“The NSW Government is continuing to assess the damage and fully understand the impact of this disaster, and the Australian Government stands ready to respond to any requests for assistance.”

AFP Apr 6, 2024

North American-produced meth on the rise

The AFP can reveal that methamphetamine manufactured in North America has surpassed Southeast Asian countries as Australia's largest supplier of the illicit drug, with Mexican cartels increasingly targeting Australia.

In the 2022-2023 financial year, the AFP and its foreign law enforcement partners seized more than 23.6 tonnes of North American-produced methamphetamine bound for the Australian market, including 4.36 tonnes of methamphetamine seized in Australia and 19.33 tonnes seized offshore.

North American-produced meth, from countries such as Mexico, United States and Canada, made up 16.7 tonnes of the meth seized.

The AFP estimates at least 70 per cent of Australia's methamphetamine market is now supplied by North American production sources.

Wholesale methamphetamine is sold for as low as \$1000 AUD per kilogram in Mexico City, Mexico compared to an average \$3-5000 AUD per kilogram in Yangon, Myanmar, making it a cheaper alternative for organised crime groups.

AFP Commander Jared Taggart said methamphetamine was the second most consumed drug in Australia, with Australians consuming an estimated 10.5 tonnes per year.*

"Factors which may have contributed to Australia being a target country for North American-produced methamphetamine include cheaper wholesale prices, a preference by transnational serious and organised crime (TSOC) for Mexican cartels' complex concealment capabilities, and [Operation Ironside's](#) degradation of key TSOC syndicates' domestic and global operations.

"We will continue to disrupt the criminal environment both onshore and offshore to ensure life-threatening drugs are not entering the Australian community."

AAP Apr 4, 2024
By Duncan Murray
Jack Gramenz

Cocaine and sex worker allegations levelled at Bruce Lehrmann by ex-TV producer

A former Seven Network producer appointed to "babysit" Bruce Lehrmann has alleged in court he witnessed him purchase cocaine and attempt to order sex workers to a Sydney hotel.

Former *Spotlight* producer Taylor Auerbach told the Federal Court on Thursday he was tasked with building trust and rapport with the 28-year-old ex-Liberal staffer, who was a prospective interview subject.

Justice Michael Lee had been poised to deliver his final judgment on Lehrmann's defamation action against Network Ten and journalist Lisa Wilkinson over a 2021 interview with fellow ex-staffer Brittany Higgins, who alleged he raped her in a Parliament House office in 2019.

Instead, the court began hearing fresh evidence from Auerbach about the lead-up to the 2023 *Spotlight* interview, during which Lehrmann denied raping Higgins - as he always has.

Auerbach claimed he took a taxi with Lehrmann, who was not in court on Thursday, from Franca Brasserie in Potts Point in Sydney's inner-east to a Meriton Hotel in the city centre.

"Mr Lehrmann had over dinner purchased a bag of cocaine while we were dining at Franca," he told the court.

"When we got upstairs to the room he pulled that out and started to put it on a plate and then started talking to me about a prospective *Spotlight* story and his desire to order prostitutes to the Meriton that night."

In a text to his then-boss, Steve Jackson, Auerbach said he raised concerns about Lehrmann's behaviour.

"I told him that Bruce was on the warpath again and that it was no anomaly," Mr Auerbach said.

"I think I used the words, 'this is f---ed'."

Lawyer for Lehrmann, Matthew Richardson SC, put to Auerbach that he was being untruthful in his account, which the former Seven producer denied.

"I want to suggest to you ... that you are here today to do as much damage to your former employer and former colleagues as you possibly can," Richardson said.

Search for missing Ballarat mum Samantha Murphy resumes

AAP

The search for Ballarat mother Samantha Murphy has resumed in bushland, sparked by fresh intelligence.

A “significant search” at Enfield State Park will begin on Thursday to try to find her body, Victoria Police said.

Officers will focus on “an area highlighted by intelligence derived from a number of sources”.

Members of the public have been asked not to join the search, which is based about 20 kilometres south from the Murphy family home.

Officers out scouring the area include those who specialise in missing persons, search and rescue, road policing, local members, the public order response team, mounted branch and dog squad.

The Murphy family was made aware the search was being undertaken.

The new probe follows unsuccessful efforts in the Canadian State Forest over the past months.

Detective Acting Superintendent Mark Hatt described Thursday’s effort as an “extensive” large scale search that built on targeted searches in other areas.

“I want to assure those in the Ballarat community that police remain focused on doing everything we can to return Samantha to her family,” he said.

The regional western Victorian city has been rocked by a series of tragedies this year including Ms Murphy’s disappearance, a mine collapse that claimed the life of miner Kurt Hourigan, the death of mother-of-five Rebecca Young and bushfires in surrounding areas.

Channel 7 Media Release

Neil Shoebridge

Tuesday, 26 March 2024

Australian Idol sings for Seven Grand Finale hooks 1.84 million, 2024 season up 5% year on year.

The Seven Network's blockbuster 2024 season of Australian Idol ended on a high note last night, with part two of the Grand Finale reaching 1.84 million Australians on Channel 7 and 7plus.

The crowning of Dylan Wright as this year's winner pulled in an average national total TV audience of 955,000, up 2% on the 2023 Grand Finale and the biggest audience ever for an episode of Australian Idol on Seven. Part one of the Grand Finale on Sunday night drew an average audience of 891,000 and reached 1.98 million, as Dylan, Amy Reeves and Denvah Baker-Moller sung it out for a recording contract with music industry giant Sony Music Entertainment Australia and \$100,000 in prize money.

Across its full 2024 season, Australian Idol reached 10.8 million people. Its average total TV audience was 922,000, up 5.3% on 2023. This year's season broke voting records and was a smash hit across social media, reaching 20 million people and generating 60 million impressions and 3.5 million engagements across all @AustralianIdol accounts. Seven's Chief Content Officer, Entertainment Programming, Angus Ross, said: "Two decades after Guy Sebastian won the very first season, Australia's love affair with Australian Idol is still strong and it remains great family entertainment.

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"This year's season was one of the best yet, thanks to our amazing judges Marcia Hines, Kylie Sandilands and Amy Shark, our great hosts Ricki-Lee and Scott Tweedie, and our incredibly talented contestants from all around the country. "Congratulations to Dylan and a massive thank you to everyone who worked so hard on camera and behind the scenes to make Australian Idol such a success," he said.

Star studded lineup announced for AIS program supporting female athletes

26 March 2024

Australian government- sports commission.

Some of the nation's most successful female Olympians, Paralympians, and World Champions have been announced as part of 2024 AIS Accelerate, a program designed to retain the experience and knowledge of retired female athletes in sport.

The 15-strong group features the likes of three-time world netball champion Natalie Medhurst, Olympic and Commonwealth Games gold medallist Emma Snowsill, and Paralympic swimmer Monique Murphy, with the group boasting an incredible 12 Olympic Games, 16 Commonwealth Games, and 24 World Championships between them.

AIS Accelerate, which is run with the support of the Office for Women, is an educational and professional development program aiming to support retired female athletes looking to transition to a career within the sports industry.

With alumni including Rowing Australia CEO Sarah Cook, former Port Adelaide Head of AFLW Juliet Haslam, and Paris 2024 Australian Olympic Chef de Mission Anna Meares, AIS Accelerate also provides a crucial networking and support community for female athletes.

"The sustainable success of Australian sport depends on our ability as a system to attract, develop, and retain diverse and outstanding talent," Australian Sports Commission EGM of AIS Performance Matti Clements said.

"Our female athletes finish their sporting careers with an incredible amount of knowledge, experience, and leadership skills, so it's crucial we create the environment and opportunities for them to forge a career in sport once their athletic careers come to an end."

Natalie Medhurst, who retired from international netball in 2020 with three world championships and a gold and silver medal from the Commonwealth Games, said sharing the experience of AIS Accelerate with female athletes representing 12 different sports will be invaluable.

Tasmanian jailed for possessing AI-generated child abuse material

30 March 2024 AFP

A Tasmanian man has been jailed for two years, for uploading and downloading child abuse material (CAM), which included content generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI), identified as part of a Tasmania Joint Anti Child Exploitation Team (TAS-JACET) investigation.

The conviction is believed to be the first in Tasmania's history relating to child exploitation material generated by AI.

The TAS-JACET, comprising of AFP and Tasmania Police members, began an investigation in November, 2022, after receiving multiple reports from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) relating to an Australian-based user saving and downloading CAM from a website and social media platform.

Police identified the offender and executed a search warrant on 1 May, 2023, at his Gravelly Beach residence, where they seized a number of electronic devices, including the man's computer.

An examination of the computer revealed hundreds of files containing CAM which included a significant amount generated by AI.

The man was subsequently arrested and charged.

AFP Detective Sergeant Aaron Hardcastle said the investigation had been significant as it marked the first time police had located and seized AI-generated child abuse material in Tasmania.

"Child abuse material, is still child abuse material, no matter what form it takes," Det. Sgt Hardcastle said.

"People may not be aware that online simulations, fantasy, text-based stories, animations and cartoons, including artificial intelligence-generated content depicting child sexual abuse are all still considered child abuse material under Commonwealth legislation," he said.

Note to media:

*Use of term 'CHILD ABUSE' MATERIAL **not** 'CHILD PORNOGRAPHY'*

The correct legal term is Child Abuse Material – the move to this wording was among amendments to Commonwealth legislation in 2019 to more accurately reflect the gravity of the crimes and the harm inflicted on victims

Researchers say women with ADHD under-diagnosed, often not believed about their symptoms

ABC Health 12 April 2024

University of Queensland researcher Kate Witteveen said women were often not believed when they described their symptoms of ADHD.

Dr Witteveen is currently [seeking women](#) with ADHD to share their experiences of how their diagnosis affected their lives for a follow-up study.

Dr Witteveen said women were highly under-diagnosed with ADHD, with the bulk of the existing research focussing on symptoms in boys.

She said ADHD in boys typically manifested as hyperactivity and classroom disruptiveness, but in girls it often manifested as inattention, difficulty focussing, and disorganisation.

Additionally, Dr Witteveen said different gender roles and expectations may explain why practitioners were more likely to misdiagnose women.

"I have found in this study, and certainly with previous clients, that almost all of my clients received a first diagnosis of anxiety," Dr Witteveen said.

"These kinds of behaviours that they have sought assistance with have been understood through a lens of anxiety as opposed to ADHD."

Dr Witteveen said undiagnosed ADHD could lead to low self-esteem, burnout, and exhaustion.

Ms Pike said she sometimes wondered what her life could have looked like if she had been diagnosed with ADHD early in life.

She said she had many "false starts" in life, taking 10 years to finish her undergraduate degree and dropping out of her PhD entirely.

Ms Pike said her ADHD diagnosis forced her to re-evaluate her entire life and self-identity, but she was grateful that she eventually received the diagnosis.

"When I was in the initial stages of diagnosis, there was a massive grieving process, but ultimately that's not a healthy approach," Ms Pike said.

"What I've gone through to get to this point in my life has helped make me who I am today and it's increased my compassion for others and for myself.

"It's made me look at the world in a certain way and, for the most part, that's not too bad."

BOM's first winter forecast for 2024 declares it could be one of Australia's warmest on record

ABC

Meteorologist [Tom Saunders](#) April 12 2024

The Bureau of Meteorology's (BOM) first winter forecast of 2024 has confidently declared one of the warmest on record throughout Australia.

It has also slightly favoured above average rain across a wide swathe of the interior and the east.

The BOM's modelling showed most of Australia will have both minimum and maximum temperatures of about 1-2 degrees Celsius above average.

And for most of Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and the eastern seaboard, there is more than 70 per cent chance this winter would be amongst the hottest 20 per cent of winters.

If the forecast proves correct, this year could challenge last year's record warm winter, which brought the national temperature 1.53C above the 1961-1990 baseline average.

While the balmy winter forecast does not indicate the complete absence of cold spells, frost and snow, it does virtually ensure temperatures will be higher than normal when averaged across the entire season.

Because day-to-day weather can't be predicted with accuracy more than a week ahead, sometimes people assume seasonal forecasts must be unreliable.

Weather models work by ingesting millions of observations to simulate the atmosphere, then use the laws of physics to calculate how conditions will change into the future.

However, there are key differences that allow a seasonal forecast to have accuracy months in advance, and well beyond a standard weather forecast.

1. Seasonal forecasts cover a longer time period of up to three months and therefore smooth out the day-to-day noise of fluctuating weather. In other words, a seasonal forecast is just averaging the weather over an extended period compared to normal.
 2. Seasonal forecasts are produced from model ensembles, which involve running a weather model dozens of times and averaging the output to offer guidance on the likelihood of any given scenario. For example, a model could be run 100 times, and if 70 of those runs or "members" show above average rain over a particular location, that would equate to a 70 per cent chance of above average rain.
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Injured Olympic equestrian Shane Rose confident in recovery ahead of Paris 2024

ABC Illawarra

By Kelly Fuller April 12th 2024

Shane Rose is in a makeshift hospital bed in his family's lounge room, but he is confident he will be riding for Australia through the grounds of the Palace of Versailles at this year's Paris Olympics.

The triple Olympic medallist still has no memory of the training accident on March 14 that has left him bedridden.

"Nothing's come back to me at all, but I know what I was planning on doing. I'd set up some exercises, cross-country jumps," Rose said.

"I assume a horse has just got a little confused or made a little mistake and he's fallen, and most probably fallen on me, and I very kindly cushioned his fall.

The accident caused 18 breaks.

"I have three breaks in my elbow, and then I had a big break in [my] femur, which they've put a rod in and then I have four breaks in my pelvis and the worst ones at the back where near the sacrum," he said.

"Apparently it is split right through, but it's not displaced ... so they have just left it be.

"And there are three breaks in my transverse processes, which are the bones on the sides of your spine, and then seven ribs on this side and apparently one on the other side but I think it is probably an old one."

Just days before the accident, Rose had confirmed his qualifications for the Paris 2024 Olympics as part of the Australian eventing squad.

Rose breaks horses and over the years has been injured many times, including breaking both wrists, arms, legs, a thumb and five ribs.

He was once kicked in the head and placed in induced coma for a week, requiring facial reconstruction.

But speaking to the ABC from his property at Werombi, south-west of Sydney, Rose said this was the first time he had broken his pelvis.

It is this recovery he is most focused on.

"They're not letting me do any weight-bearing for four weeks," he said.

"The surgeon was saying that in a normal person with the injuries that I have, it would be 10 to 12 weeks non-weight-bearing, so they're certainly allowing me to push the envelope."

It's four months post-injury to the Games, so I'm pushing it tight.

"Ideally I'd like to be at least eight weeks in the saddle beforehand, so it's tight, but I am confident."

Australian police warn university students about money muling #DontBeAMule

AFP 19 February 2024

Australian law enforcement agencies have come together to deliver a campaign to raise awareness of the growing trend involving criminals recruiting financially vulnerable university students as money mules.

A money mule is a person who receives money from a third party into their bank account, transfers it into another account and obtains a commission for it.

Police are concerned about criminals targeting students, including through lucrative job adverts offering quick and easy money in exchange for moving funds through their bank accounts.

While this period is an exciting time for students, it is also an opportunistic time for organised criminals seeking to recruit money mules.

Criminal networks are targeting and attempting to recruit university students as money mules, which may be due to their financial situations and their active search for part-time employment. International students have added vulnerabilities due to language barriers and their limited knowledge of Australian criminal law.

The month-long campaign will be rolled out nationally across 39 universities by the AFP-led Joint Policing Cybercrime Coordination Centre (JPC3), and will include a digital information pack, marketing material on university campuses and advertising on social media.

The materials seek to educate students on what a money mule is, how to spot this cyber-enabled crime and what people should do if they think they've fallen victim to money muling.

"Often the only requirements for the job are access to a mobile phone or computer and an Australian bank account to receive and transfer funds at the direction of the criminal group – this is a major red flag," Det Supt Stainton said.

"If a job opportunity seems too good to be true, then it probably isn't legitimate. If you are being offered significant sums of money to just move money through your bank account, then it is likely you are committing a criminal offence.

"You can do your due diligence by researching the business to see if they have an online presence, check if they have legitimate contact details and find out if they're based in Australia."

"By being a money mule, unwittingly or not, you are complicit in a money laundering offence for which you can be arrested and charged by the police. Money laundering offences attract significant penalties including jail time.

"Having a criminal record can impact your ability to obtain employment, travel to certain countries and if you are an international student, it can adversely affect your ability to retain an Australian student visa."

Identifying and prosecuting money mules remains a focus for the AFP. Last year, the JPC3 undertook major money mule investigations, including Operation Wickham and the Europol-led European Money Mule Action 9 (EMMA9).