



Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT

8/52 Marina Blvd  
Larrakeyah NT 0820

1 December 2022

To whom it may concern

**Re: Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in the NT**

I write on behalf of the Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT in response to the inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in the NT.

The Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT (AADANT) is the peak body for non-government Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) treatment services in the Northern Territory (NT). We represent over 20 organisations providing drug and alcohol treatment and support to families and clients throughout the NT.

In respect to this submission, this will be in particular reference to points (a) and (b) of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

*(a) the preparation for the sunseting of the Stronger Futures legislation;*

Commentary

AADANT fully supports self-determination for Aboriginal populations in alcohol management practices, however we believe it is the responsibility of government to ensure that communities are properly supported and resourced to make informed choices with equitable recognition of the views of all community members.

Through the Stronger Futures legislation, the Federal Government accepted responsibility for undertaking and delivering on alcohol management plans for Aboriginal communities in the NT. Despite many communities engaging and investing considerable energy and resources in good faith, the large majority of these plans remain unaddressed. The removal of the Stronger Futures legislation, without the completion of these agreed processes, is disenfranchising for communities involved and an absolute abrogation of responsibility by the Federal Government who introduced and enforced this legislation upon communities. Many communities have been left in no better position in this regard from when the legislation was first introduced.

Issues identified by AADANT in this regard centre around several elements:

1. There was a lack of clarity and perceived confusion about the governance and responsibility for the changes from varying levels of government and across departments. Responses from both the Federal Government and NT Government indicated that each believed that the other held responsibility for the changes and required responses. The Australian Alcohol and Drug Council, along with all eight affiliate jurisdictional AOD peak bodies, has continuously called for reinstatement of a national and cross-jurisdictional AOD governance body following the dissolution of the Ministerial Drug and Alcohol Forum. **This lack of coordinating structure is a recognisable cause of all other shortfalls from this process.**
2. A lack of structured engagement with all key stakeholders to provide information and allow opportunities for input on the changes (e.g. AADANT was not once consulted regarding the likely impact on our membership or the broader community despite representing almost all NT drug and alcohol treatment agencies).
3. An insufficiency in the timeliness, content and accessibility of the information provided relative to the likely impacts on organisations, communities and individuals affected by the change. There did not appear to be any structured communications planning to ensure those affected were properly informed of processes, likely impacts of the change or opportunities to put in place harm minimisation plans.
4. Despite this change having been forecast for many years it does not appear there was any evaluation of the preparedness of affected communities for the changes to take effect.
5. For many years prior to the change, the alcohol and other drug sector in the Northern Territory (and nationally) has suffered from chronic underfunding to meet the demand for services. It is highly foreseeable that the reintroduction of alcohol into populations with high levels of vulnerability to alcohol harms, along with expansion of availability into additional geographic areas where access has been restricted for fifteen years, would increase the burden on the AOD treatment sector. No additional resourcing was planned or provided to allow services to support harm minimisation planning or to prepare for the foreseeable increase in work.
6. No additional resourcing was planned or provided as might be reasonably required to:
  - a. Facilitate community planning processes for adaptation to the changes;
  - b. prepare communities to enact harm minimisation strategies and measures for foreseeable impacts from the change.
7. There was no assessment of, or work to ensure sufficient monitoring and data management systems were in place to track changes resulting from the changes to the legislation.

### Summary

There was a clear lack of evaluation of the readiness for this change or consultation with those likely to be affected. There was seemingly a lack of clarity between the Federal and NT Governments regarding responsibility for planning and responding to the changes

resulting in a failure to properly engage and consult with affected parties or to provide appropriate levels of communication or resourcing in preparedness for the change.

*(b) community safety and alcohol management.*

#### Commentary

It is well evidenced that the Northern Territory experiences challenges that result in a greater vulnerability to alcohol harms than other jurisdictions. The underlying socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges for a significant proportion of NT residents are exacerbated by the limitations in capacity for response caused by the expense and difficulty of providing the required support across a region of significant remoteness.

The Northern Territory Government has recognised the impact that alcohol has on health, community safety and community harmony across the NT. The entrenched issues associated with alcohol-related harms have become intergenerational and endemic. The required response to these issues surpasses the alcohol management requirements of other jurisdictions and justifies a significant additional and sustained investment of funding and resources by the Federal and NT Governments.

The Northern Territory has, over the last decade, implemented stricter alcohol management measures than any other jurisdiction in Australia. In fact, the simultaneous implementation of a minimum unit price, police auxiliary officers at alcohol outlets, a banned drinker register and widely applied General Restricted Areas means the NT has one of the most structured alcohol supply management systems in the world. Despite this, there has been little advancement in reducing the harms caused by alcohol in the Northern Territory.

The National Alcohol Strategy recognises the three-tier approach to Harm Minimisation – Supply Reduction, Demand Reduction and Harm Reduction. While the NT Government has taken considerable efforts in implementing supply reduction measures on alcohol, an equivalent focus and investment in the harm and demand reduction elements has not kept pace with the need. A significant further investment into the AOD treatment sector is required to support sector development and expansion of services to appropriately meet the needs of the population. New and innovative programs in both demand and harm reduction are required with a key focus on co-designing appropriate solutions with those most affected – the treatment sector and those with lived and living experience of alcohol-related harms.

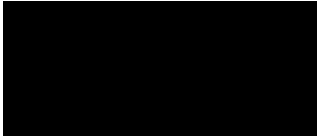
#### Summary

In the Northern Territory, community safety is inextricably linked to the impacts of alcohol in the community. There is an acute and urgent need for a specific, focused investment in demand and harm reduction measures to provide a 'circuit breaker' to the immediate alcohol-fuelled crisis with a simultaneous increase in focus and investment in delivering long-term, transformative change in how the population lives with alcohol.

Conclusion

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to put forward the position of AADANT in these matters and look forward to working constructively with all levels of government to address the needs of the Territory. I do not believe our current issues are insurmountable, however, we do recognise that without considerable change and investment, we are unlikely to progress in reducing the harms caused by alcohol in the NT.

Sincerely,



**Peter Burnheim**  
Executive Officer

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E: [Redacted]