MEDIA RELEASE

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Urgent call to NT Government: Do not abandon alcohol harm reduction measures

Community, health and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are urgently calling on the Northern Territory Government to retain the Minimum Unit Price (floor price) on alcohol, and to engage with communities to develop a comprehensive strategy to address alcohol harm in the NT.

This week, the NT Parliament will debate a bill proposing to remove the floor price, a move that has sparked widespread community concern. The floor price means that alcohol sold at takeaway outlets in the Northern Territory (NT) cannot be sold below a minimum of $1.30 per standard drink, a measure that targets alcohol products associated with the most harmful patterns of drinking.

Representatives from key organisations are again calling on the NT Government to properly engage with communities and to develop a comprehensive strategy to address alcohol harm, rather than removing policies that are shown to work.

“We’re asking the NT Government to work collaboratively with us, so that we can continue to make meaningful progress towards reducing the harm from alcohol in our communities,” said Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) Chief Executive Dr John Paterson.

“What we want to maintain and further develop is a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy that protects the health and wellbeing of all Territorians and promotes community cohesion and safety.

Rob McPhee, CEO of Danila Dilba Health Service, said, “We are facing a problem that requires us to continue to build on policies and programs that work – not take them away. Removing the floor price will spell disaster and is likely to lead to more harm, more crime and more disadvantage.”

Donna Ah Chee, CEO of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, said, “When controls on alcohol availability are relaxed, we see more of our women in emergency departments, more kids hungry, more drunken assaults. Policies to keep women and families safe need to be implemented and sustained.”

Dr Cassandra Wright, Program Lead of Alcohol and other Drugs and Senior Research Fellow at Menzies School of Health Research said, “There is strong evidence that the floor price has worked to reduce alcohol harms.

“Three years after the floor price was introduced, we saw a 14 per cent drop in assaults caused by alcohol, and a 21 per cent reduction in domestic and family violence assaults where alcohol was a factor.

“But it's not the only pricing policy that is effective, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the NT Government to explore all the available options.”

People’s Alcohol Action Coalition Spokesperson, Dr John Boffa said, “Since its introduction in 2018, the floor price has seen positive results in the NT. Removing it now with nothing to replace it would be a major step backwards for community health and safety.”

Association of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies Northern Territory (AADANT) Executive Officer Stephanie Holmes said, “We’re calling on the Government to consult with organisations that deal with the pointy end of alcohol harm every single day, before making changes that could worsen our situation.”

Michael Rotumah, CEO of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC), “It is crucial that the NT Government develops an alcohol strategy that is guided by evidence and community voices. We are all wanting to work with the Government to improve the lives of Territorians by preventing and reducing alcohol harms.”

Caterina Giorgi, CEO, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) said, “The harms caused by alcoholic products have devastated generations of Territorians, and measures like a floor price are fundamental policy in reducing harms.

“What we’re calling for is meaningful engagement to develop a comprehensive alcohol policy framework that will help keep families and communities safe now and into the future.”

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Interviews are available with: Dr John Paterson, Chief Executive, AMSANT; Dr Cassandra Wright, Senior Research Fellow at the Menzies School of Health Research; Dr John Boffa, People's Alcohol Action Coalition Alice Springs NT (PAAC); Stephanie Holmes, Executive Officer, Association of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies Northern Territory (AADANT); Michael Rotumah, CEO of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC) and Caterina Giorgi, CEO, FARE.

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