

# Office of Central Australian Regional Controller– Proposed Actions for Alcohol Related Harm in Central Australian Communities

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## 1. Executive Summary

On 24 January 2023, the Prime Minister of Australia and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory met with a number of stakeholders in Alice Springs regarding alcohol related harm and crime occurring in the town. As a result, immediate alcohol restrictions were implemented for three months and the office of the Central Australia Regional Controller (OCARC) was established.

This report from the OCARC sets out alarming statistics for domestic violence and alcohol related harm. It is clear that action must be taken to address the unacceptable levels of harm being faced by residents in town camps and nearby remote communities, including the harm being suffered by visitors from outlying remote communities and including other states.

Many of these issues are not new to Central Australia, nor the NT more broadly. All of them are closely related to the disproportionate disadvantage that Aboriginal people face at every level in our society and are visible on essentially every social index, including but not limited to:

- overrepresentation in the criminal justice system and in detention;
- poorer health outcomes, including life expectancy, child mortality rates, suicide rates, and child development;
- higher rates of alcohol and other drug (AOD) addiction and misuse; and
- poorer education and training outcomes, and fewer employment opportunities.

These are deeply-rooted disparities, persisting across generations. Decades of action to end them have made some meaningful progress, but the gap well and truly remains – and on some measures is worsening.<sup>1</sup> Sustainably reducing the harms being observed in Alice Springs in the long run will require improvements on each of these measures.

In the meantime, although the NT has some of the most rigorous and world leading supply measures in place, it is clear that additional work is required to act as a circuit breaker in Central Australia to allow service agencies, including Police, child protection and health providers, the necessary time to engage with those affected and support them.

For these reasons, it is recommended that the NT Government, with the help and partnership of the Commonwealth, acts to implement immediate restrictions for takeaway alcohol on town camps and nearby remote communities. The best way to do this is by amending the *Liquor Act 2019* on urgency.

These measures form part of the response to the current crisis which will then enable the development and implementation of community led alcohol management plans (AMPs). We know that alcohol measures are one part in a much bigger picture that requires significant investment to address the underlying social determinants including addressing social policy settings, remote service delivery and investment in the social and economic future of the Central Australian Region.

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<sup>1</sup> [Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report 2022](#)

## 2. Purpose

To provide a report to the Chief Minister and Prime Minister on the proposed actions to reduce alcohol related harms, anti-social behaviour and levels of crime for Central Australian communities. For the purposes of this report, 'communities' encompasses both town camps and remote communities.

## 3. Background

### 3.1. Commonwealth intervention

In 2007, the Commonwealth Government passed a package of laws (commonly referred to as 'the Intervention package'), comprising:

- *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (Cth) ('Emergency Response Act')
- *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Act 2007* (Cth)
- *Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Other Measures) Act 2007* (Cth)
- *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No 1) 2007-2008* (Cth)
- *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No 2) 2007-2008* (Cth)

The Intervention package applied to a wide range of 'prescribed areas', including all land held under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth), all Community Living Areas and all town camps. The Intervention package introduced a raft of measures to these prescribed areas including:

- bans on the consumption, possession and sale of alcohol;
- bans on pornographic material;
- compulsory acquisition by the Commonwealth of five-year leases over Aboriginal land;
- exclusion of customary law and cultural practice as a factor to be taken into account in sentencing and bail hearings;
- introduction of income management to residents (and removal of appeal rights regarding income management decisions); and
- modifications to the permit system to allow greater access to Aboriginal land.

The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011* was introduced to the Commonwealth Parliament on 23 November 2011, along with the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011*. Both bills were passed on 28 June 2012. The *Stronger Futures* legislation repealed and replaced the *Emergency Response Act*.

The object of the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* (Cth) (the *Stronger Futures Act*) was to 'support Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to live strong, independent lives, where communities, families and children are safe and healthy' (*Stronger Futures Act*). The Act contained a number of measures aimed at building stronger futures for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The three main substantive parts of the Act were:

- (i) Part 2 – Tackling alcohol abuse
- (ii) Part 3 – Land reform

(iii) Part 4 – Food security.

Part 5 featured a number of miscellaneous provisions. It required the Minister to cause an independent review to be conducted of the first 3 years of the operation of this Act (section 117). It provided that this Act sunsetted 10 years after commencement (section 118). It also included other miscellaneous provisions (such as the power to delegate, the power to make rules and the power to make regulations).

The Stronger Futures Act continued alcohol prohibitions in prescribed areas and gave the Commonwealth Government powers to amend Northern Territory legislation applying to Community Living Areas and Town Camp Living Areas. The Stronger Futures Act also imposed prohibitions on pornography and established a licensing regime for certain community stores aimed at promoting food security in Aboriginal communities.

At the time, the Stronger Futures Act inserted provisions into the *Liquor Act 1978* (since replaced by the *Liquor Act 2019*) making it an offence to possess, supply, consume or bring alcohol into an Alcohol Protected Area (APA). While some communities already had alcohol controls in place through the *Liquor Act 1978* General Restricted Areas (GRA) provisions, the introduction of the Stronger Futures Act APAs superseded all existing arrangements.

### 3.2. Northern Territory Legislative Amendments – ‘Opt-in’ to Interim Alcohol Protected Areas (APAs)

When the Stronger Futures Act automatically expired, communities that had a GRA in place prior to the Commonwealth Government’s statutory interference continued to have alcohol restrictions (noting that these were not all uniform). Communities that did not have a previous GRA ceased to have alcohol restrictions unless they opted in to maintain restrictions through an interim alcohol protected area under the *Liquor Act 2019* (section 170A).

In preparation for the sunset of the Stronger Futures Act, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly passed the *Associations and Liquor Amendment Act 2022* (the Amendment Act), on 17 May 2022, amending the:

- *Associations Act 2003* (Associations Act) to continue modifications made to it by the Stronger Futures Act around leasing and licensing in Community Living Areas (CLAs); and
- the *Liquor Act* to enable relevant communities to apply to continue current alcohol restrictions for two years while they are consulted about their long-term alcohol aspirations (the ‘Opt-in’ approach to Interim Alcohol Protected Areas).

After over 700 consultations with affected communities across the Territory, 13 former APAs have opted in to interim APAs, with a combined population of approximately 1,300. For reference, approximately 36,000 Territorians automatically reverted to dry status under a pre-existing GRA after the Stronger Futures Act expired, while approximately 7,000 experienced change to restrictions.

Under section 170A, applications may be made to the Director of Liquor Licensing to establish an Interim APA for an area. The request must be made before 31 January 2023 and must be supported by a written consent of the registered owner of any land in the area.

Under section 318 of the *Liquor Act 2019*, the Director of Liquor Licensing may, at their discretion, extend or abridge a time limit specified under the Act. This may assist some communities that are still in the process of obtaining land owner consent through Land Councils. Under the current legislation, interim APAs cease to have effect on 17 July 2024.

The interim APA mechanism allows communities to continue with alcohol management arrangements until July 2024 whilst working through what a longer term alcohol management plan might look like for that community.

It is important to note that, there are communities that submitted AMPs to the former Federal Government that were not signed off. This left a gap for appropriate management plans to be enacted.

### 3.3. Current alcohol supply, demand and harm measures in force

Alcohol misuse – and the resulting harm – is a product of greater social disadvantage and inequities. Therefore, the NT Government has an alcohol framework aimed at reducing the demand for alcohol, reducing the supply of alcohol, and reducing the harm caused to Territorians from the misuse of alcohol.

The supply measures in force in the Territory are world leading. The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in the southern hemisphere to introduce a minimum unit floor price or PALIs. We are the only Australian jurisdiction to introduce a jurisdiction-wide point of sale system to prevent problem drinkers from accessing takeaway alcohol.

Supply reduction measures in place in Alice Springs include:

- Risk based licensing: an incentive model enforced through licensing fees rewarding those who supply alcohol responsibly and financially penalising those who do not comply with liquor licensing regulation
- The Banned Drinker Register - for all takeaway alcohol sales
- Local Liquor Accords
- Place based restrictions: GRAs and interim APAs under the *Liquor Act 2019* provide prohibitions or restrictions of alcohol in certain areas
- Minimum Unit Price of \$1.30 (subject to CPI) on all standard drinks sold in the NT by retailers
- Moratorium on takeaway licences: in place since October 2017
- Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspectors (PALIs) at takeaway alcohol outlets
- Restricted Premises: residential or business premises, any land or other place prescribed by regulation may request to have restrictions applied to their premises.
- Grocery Store Authority 25% limit on alcohol sales on total revenue
- Permanently reduced takeaway hours – Monday to Friday 2pm – 9pm, Saturday (and public holidays) 10am – 9pm, Sunday (bottle shops only) 12pm to 9pm, closed Good Friday and Christmas Day.
- Restrictions on the sale of fortified wine which is limited to one bottle per day and can only be sold during the last three scheduled trading hours of each day.

On 24 January 2023, further supply measures were announced by the NT Government for Alice Springs:

- One sale per person per day for takeaway liquor
- A reduction in hours of trade for takeaway liquor outlets as follows:
  - Wednesday to Friday inclusive: 15:00 – 19:00
  - Saturdays and Public Holidays: 11:00 – 20:00
  - No trading Mondays or Tuesdays

- Sunday takeaway (drive through bottle shops only<sup>2</sup>): 12:00 – 21:00

Harm and demand reduction measures across the region include:

- Education campaigns
- Alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services including withdrawal, residential rehabilitation, counselling, case management, community engagement and outreach
- Sobering up shelter
- Alcohol Action Initiatives: including locally based and community led programs to reduce alcohol-related harm within communities.
- The establishment of the Social Order Response Team (SORT) for Alice Springs
- Police – Operation DRINA

The NT Government invests over \$12 million per annum for the full scope of AOD treatment and re-engagement services in Central Australia delivered by non-government organisations and NT Department of Health.

Alice Springs residential AOD treatment and transitional after care services are co-funded by NTG and NIAA with a total of 74 beds. These services are meeting current demand and have existing capacity to meet immediate needs. The Alice Springs Sobering Up Shelter has adequate bed capacity with the potential to upscale with a further 10 beds in the interim and operate with extended hours if needed with additional resources.

## 3.4. Alice Springs communities

### 3.4.1. Context

According to the 2021 ABS Census data, the population of Alice Springs is 25,909, with 5,434 Indigenous residents (20.6%)<sup>3</sup>. 1,097 of those are residing in town camps.

These statistics do not capture the visitor population from outlying communities, which can fluctuate significantly. Some frontline service delivery agents have expressed concern that the ability to consume takeaway alcohol in residences in town camps has attracted significant numbers of visitors from remote communities. Given the lag in reputable data such as ABS and school enrolments, this has been difficult to verify. However, it is a pattern that has been seen before in the Northern Territory and therefore it should be accepted that there is drift from communities by persons seeking to access alcohol. This, in part, can also be attributed to seasonal trends such as remote communities being affected by heavy rains and roads being cut for periods of time.

### 3.4.2. Current alcohol restrictions over communities

Only one of the 18 town camps in Alice Springs is subject to a GRA, which increases the potential that the other communities could be at greater risk of increased alcohol related harm from the lifting of Australian Government's APAs. Mpwetyerre, aka Abbots Camp, reverted to its previous restrictions as a GRA when the Stronger Futures legislation ceased.

The risk of increased alcohol related harm arises primarily due to the fact that takeaway alcohol can now legally be purchased by residents (and their visitors) for consumption in residences situated in town camps, and takeaway

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<sup>2</sup> There are only two drive through bottle shops in Alice Springs.

<sup>3</sup> [2021 Alice Springs, Census Community Profiles | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/2021-Alice-Springs-Census-Community-Profiles)

alcohol is acknowledged as a riskier category of alcohol consumption compared to supervised consumption on premises. The town camps without restrictions are as follows:

- Akngwertnarre (Morris Soak)
- Anthelk Ewlpaye (Charles Creek)
- Anthepe (Drive In)
- Aper Alwerrkngge (Palmer’s)
- Ewyenper Atwatye (Hidden Valley)
- Lhenpe Artnwe (Hoppys Camp)
- Ilperle-Tyathe (Warlpiri)
- Ilyiperenye (Old Timer’s)
- Inarlenge (Little Sisters)
- Itwiyethwenge (Basso’s)
- Karnte
- Yarrenyty Arltere (Larapinta Valley)
- Mount Nancy
- New Ilparpa
- Nyewente (Trucking Yards)
- Ilpeye Ilpeye Estate (Golder’s)
- Kunoth
- Irrkerlantye (White Gate)<sup>4</sup>

A number of communities, notably the town camps in Alice Springs as represented by Tangentyere Council, have made it clear to NT Government that they do not wish to opt-in to the interim APA.

The community of Amoonguna is only 15kms from Alice Springs and currently does not have alcohol restrictions in place. It should be subject to the same policy treatment as town camps – to do otherwise would risk it being subject to unintended consequences of displaced drinkers should alcohol supply measures be implemented for Alice Springs town camps.

## 4. Alcohol related harm and crime data in Alice Springs

From July 2022 to November 2022, the weekly intelligence briefings regarding alcohol in Alice Springs were not showing a substantial sustained increase in alcohol-related harm following the cessation of the Stronger Futures Act. The operational intelligence was showing fluctuations or spikes that were attributable to specific activities such as large sporting events leading to an increase in the number of visitors to Alice Springs.

However, additional data and operational intelligence obtained through Northern Territory Government operations and regular statistical reporting has indicated that there has been an increase in alcohol-related harm

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<sup>4</sup> There is contention as to whether this is actually a town camp.



from November 2022 to present that warrants consideration of urgent action, particularly as it relates to the consumption of takeaway alcohol.

#### 4.1. Alcohol consumption

From 2012, alcohol consumption rates in the Northern Territory were steadily declining. However, in 2019 the Northern Territory recorded its first increase in consumption, with this increase continuing throughout 2020. Most jurisdictions also recorded an increase during this period, which has been attributed to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Since March 2022, quarterly wholesale alcohol data in Alice Springs (i.e. pure alcohol in litres purchased by premises from wholesalers) has been trending upwards. This data would support the assumption that alcohol consumption, particularly of takeaway alcohol, has increased in Alice Springs (even allowing for the usual seasonal fluctuations).

#### 4.2. Alcohol related assaults

Since January 2019, there has been a significant increase in the number of alcohol-related assaults in Alice Springs, with these figures surpassing those of Darwin in September 2022.<sup>5</sup>

According to the 2021 ABS Census data, Darwin has a population of 139,902<sup>6</sup>, which is five times more than Alice Springs (25,909 residents). This means as of September 2022, 1 in 27 people in Alice Springs experienced alcohol-related assault, compared to 1 in 154 people in Darwin. Given the higher rates of alcohol-related assaults that Aboriginal Australians face, it is anticipated that this number is higher for Aboriginal people.

In 2020 and 2021, there was a rise in assaults across the NT with sharp increases notable in Darwin, Palmerston and NT Balance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that COVID was a significant contributor to the rise in assaults during this period, specifically the economic support payments, the ability to access superannuation, JobKeeper and regular COVID supplement payments.

It was also reported during this time that a large number of remote community members were travelling to urban centres to consume and purchase alcohol.

Since 2021, Alice Springs is the only region reporting an increase in alcohol-related assaults.

There has been a 79.4% increase in alcohol-related assaults in the year ending November 2022 compared with the year ending November 2019.<sup>7</sup> Note: 2019 is used as a more relevant comparison due to the influence of COVID measures during 2020 and 2021.

#### 4.3. Domestic violence

Domestic violence continues to be a significant problem across the NT, with Aboriginal women suffering unacceptably high levels of harm. The causes and contributing factors to domestic violence are complex, stemming from social and cultural attitudes and behaviours and are not simply attributable to alcohol abuse. However, alcohol and other drugs are significant reinforcing factors.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [NT crime statistics September 2022 Website.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701>

<sup>7</sup> [Alice Springs Crime Statistics | NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services](#)

<sup>8</sup> [NT Government, Domestic, Family & Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018-2028](#) p 14.

Alice Springs has been experiencing historically high levels of domestic violence and assaults for a long time, with an increasing number since 2021.

Since February 2022 the number of alcohol related domestic violence assaults in Alice Springs has been greater than those occurring in Darwin.

Anecdotally, it is suggested that the COVID-19 payments during 2020 created problems and contributed to increases in domestic violence.

NT Police confirms that domestic violence call-outs is one of, if not, their biggest single job. Given the importance of getting to the victims as soon as possible, these jobs take top priority. Higher numbers of domestic violence offences – as recorded in Alice Springs – therefore, mean that less Police are immediately available to respond to other jobs, including property offences.

There has been a 96.7% increase in alcohol-involved, domestic violence-related assaults in Alice Springs in the year ending November 2022 compared with the year ending November 2019.<sup>9</sup> Note: 2019 is used as a more relevant comparison due to the influence of COVID measures during 2020 and 2021.

#### 4.4. Emergency Department Presentations

Alcohol related emergency department presentations can fluctuate significantly from month to month, particularly in small populations like Alice Springs.

Clinical reports from Emergency Department Alice Springs Hospital have observed an increase in the severity of harm being inflicted on Aboriginal women as a result of domestic violence since the cessation of the Stronger Futures Act restrictions. Data is still under collection to verify these observations.

#### 4.5. Secondary supply

There is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest there is a significant black market for alcohol for those people either on the BDR or trying to access alcohol outside of trading hours.

The CARC has been advised by community members that bottles of rum are selling for upwards of \$150.

Detecting and prosecuting such offending is extremely time and labour intensive for Police who are already stretched responding to increased alcohol related offences.

The NT Government is focusing on addressing secondary supply, and we will continue to work on reducing illegal products circulating and trading in our communities. This is ongoing and includes conversations with counterparts in WA, SA and QLD to discuss greater cross-border secondary supply measures, and looking towards possible technology-based solutions.

#### 4.6. Property offences

In Alice Springs, the number of property offences in a 12-month period reached a new high of 8,222 offences in the 12 months ending November 2022. This represents an increase of 82% compared with the 12 months ending November 2019 and accounted for 30% of total NT property offences in the last 12 months.

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<sup>9</sup> [Alice Springs Crime Statistics | NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services](#)

The main component of the annual increase was property damage, though increases also occurred in break-ins and theft. Property damage accounted for 44% of all property offences in Alice Springs in the 12 months ending in November 2022.

Note: 2019 is used as a more relevant comparison due to the influence of COVID measures during 2020 and 2021.

## 4.7. Findings from available data and intelligence

Key statistics:

- A 79.4% increase in alcohol-related assaults in the year ending November 2022 compared with the year ending November 2019.
- Since February 2022 the number of alcohol related domestic violence assaults in Alice Springs has been greater than those occurring in Darwin.
- Property offences in Alice Springs are at their highest level ever recorded, and have been climbing steadily since mid-2020.
- An increase in alcohol related ED presentations from July 2022 in comparison to other years.
- In Alice Springs there has been an increase in the availability of takeaway alcohol for the approximate 1,097 town camp residents since the cessation of the Stronger Futures Act.

There is anecdotal information that remote community residents are travelling to Alice Springs in order to access takeaway alcohol, with some residing as visitors in town camps and others camping on Crown land.

- Due to PALIs and BDR there can be greater confidence that takeaway purchases are being made in accordance with law. However, the prevalence of secondary supply of that takeaway alcohol is difficult to quantify.

The following findings can be drawn from the available evidence.

1. Despite the existing supply measures in place in Alice Springs, the community is currently experiencing substantial alcohol related harm and crime more broadly. There is an immediate need to address alcohol related issues through a combination of supply restrictions, greater compliance and an educative approach.
2. History shows that that only addressing alcohol is a temporary solution to a complex, multifaceted, deep rooted issue. The immediate measures put in place will not alone see long term generational change.
3. It is evident that greater investment and service delivery is needed in Central Australian remote communities, to support longer term development, including but not limited to housing, health services, childcare, education and training. The Hub and Spoke model offers efficiencies in remote service delivery and expansion where services and resources are concentrated in the Hub communities and accessible to those in the outlying Spoke communities. Policing, Health, Education and Australian Government Services located in the Hub communities would be enhanced and increase their footprint.
4. There is also a requirement for significant development in infrastructure, roads and essential services alongside the creation of economic opportunities across Central Australia.
5. No one entity can resolve these issues quickly. It is going to require all levels of Governments, ACCOs, NGOs, Traditional Owners, Elders, community groups, and sectors leaders to address collectively

## 5. Proposed Actions

### 5.1. Urgent amendment of the Liquor Act to apply Interim APAs to Central Australian communities and establish an opt-out mechanism

It is proposed urgent legislative amendment be made by the NT Government to the *Liquor Act 2019* to:

- Implement alcohol restrictions (ie an Interim APA) in all Central Australian communities that are currently not subject to an Interim APA or GRA
- Establish a mechanism which provides that an application may be made to the Director of Liquor Licensing to revoke an Interim APA prior to 17 July 2024 on the satisfaction of specific criteria (eg a community alcohol plan or an application for a GRA, or support from Police or Health)

#### 5.1.1. Community Alcohol Plans

The legislation should include detail about the process to opt-out, including the development of a Community Alcohol Plan (the Plan). The Plan must address clearly, amongst other things, what responsible alcohol management in communities will look like (i.e. social club, take away, or other), and community consultation inclusive of women and children must be undertaken as part of its preparation. This will provide certainty to impacted residents.

It is proposed the Plans will be developed by the relevant community, assisted by culturally appropriate third-party consultants to ensure comprehensive consultation. Once developed, the Plans must be voted on and affirmed by a 60% majority of the 18 years plus residents in the community, and approved by the Director of Liquor Licensing.

Once the Community Alcohol Plan is approved, the Director of Liquor Licensing will implement the conditions of the Plan through the declaration of a General Restricted Area, and the interim APA will automatically be revoked when that GRA comes into force.

This action will also increase the effectiveness of PALIs as a supply measure as they will be able to refuse the sale of takeaway alcohol to visitors staying in town camps. This will likely have an immediate impact on alcohol related harm being suffered by residents in those town camps.

#### 5.1.2. Risks and Sensitivities

There is a possibility that these supply measures could lead to an increase in property offences as impacted persons may seek to acquire alcohol from businesses or private residences. However, when Tennant Creek was subject to strict takeaway restrictions in early 2018, total property offences declined 24.5% in the six months after restrictions were implemented compared with the six months before. Similarly, alcohol-related assaults declined 38.7% in the same period.<sup>10</sup>

When the alcohol bans were originally introduced under the Emergency Response Act, they were unilaterally declared to be 'special measures' for the purposes of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) ('the RDA'). To eliminate any doubt, the then-Commonwealth Government went further and entirely excluded the *Emergency Response Act* from the operation of both the RDA and from any Northern Territory Acts which may have conflicted with them (e.g. the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* (NT)).

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<sup>10</sup> [NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services Crime Statistical publications, December 2018](#)

Any reimposition of those blanket alcohol bans will require close care and consideration to the interaction between the bans and the operation of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* (NT).

## 6. Recommendation

The recently announced three-month supply measures for takeaway alcohol in Alice Springs will undoubtedly reduce alcohol related offending and harm, at least in the immediate term.

However, they alone will not be enough. The measure of one sale per day per person for takeaway, and the looming possibility of further controls are likely to encourage different purchasing behaviours such as stockpiling of alcohol and a greater reliance on illegal secondary supply. This alone can have unintended consequences such as binge drinking to avoid liquor being taken or consumed by others in a communal environment. Secondary supply, including unsophisticated sharing amongst family and black market illegal operations, is also rife and not sufficiently addressed through the current arrangements.

Moreover, a failure to seriously address the underlying drivers of alcohol misuse and youth crime will mean these harms will continue to return year after year, as people find new ways to access and consume alcohol, or turn to other harmful products such as hand sanitiser.

We cannot continue to accept the levels of domestic and family violence leading to assaults on women who are presenting with horrific facial injuries, broken bones, fractured skulls and in some tragic situations even death. The children who have been spoken to have unanimously voiced their hatred of alcohol and the harm it inflicts on their families. Their simple aspirations are to live in a 'normal place', have jobs when they are older and be able to support their families with basic needs. We need to listen to the most vulnerable in our community and act with urgency to address the current crisis but also tackle the extreme poverty and social disadvantage causal factors amongst this cohort. Health disadvantage for Aboriginal Australians is stark and in the Northern Territory the rates of acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are amongst the highest in the world. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). This is a shocking statistic in the context of a wealthy nation. The disadvantage is complex and challenging and will require targeted policies and programmatic responses particularly in early intervention and prevention, supporting the family unit.

This will require a substantial investment to achieve progress in the measures outlined in *Closing the Gap*.

Therefore, the initial respite that the measures will bring to frontline response agencies and our communities should be seen as an opportunity to engage constructively with residents on medium to long term aspirations for alcohol management, and as an opportunity to deliver the necessary services to cover service gaps and funding shortfalls so that these harms do not return year after year.

For this reason, I recommend two immediate actions:

1. The NT Government make urgent amendments to the *Liquor Act 2019* that will see town camps and nearby remote communities return to alcohol free areas, with a clear path forward if the community wishes to introduce responsible drinking options, upon the development of a Community Alcohol Management Plan.
2. The NT and Commonwealth Governments continue to work together to deliver needs based funding to the relevant service providers in the Northern Territory as a matter of priority, so that the cycle of intergenerational trauma and disadvantage can truly begin to be broken.