



Aboriginal Medical Services
Alliance Northern Territory
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MEDIA STATEMENT
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NT Government's OC spray trial a dangerous distraction from real solutions

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) has strongly condemned the NT Government's decision to allow public use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray for 'personal safety' under a 12-month trial, warning it will do nothing to improve community safety and instead place more lives at risk.

AMSANT CEO Dr John Paterson said the misguided policy is the latest example of the CLP getting the legislative settings completely wrong.

"It is incredibly misleading to suggest that equipping the community with a weapon is any kind of solution to community safety," Dr Paterson said.

"Weaponising people and allowing wider access to a harmful substance like OC spray won't fix violence – it will fuel it. This decision will cause harm, deepen community distrust, and exacerbate already dangerous racial divisions. It offers no positive outcomes and will instead trigger a range of unintended consequences."

Dr Paterson said the decision was especially dangerous for vulnerable people, including those sleeping rough, who are disproportionately targeted and criminalised—many of whom are Aboriginal. He said the context could not be more concerning, with the Territory facing record rates of homelessness, overcrowded prisons, and services stretched beyond capacity—all disproportionately affecting Aboriginal people.

"This is another example of the systemic criminalisation of Aboriginal people. It puts more vulnerable people in harm's way, instead of addressing the root causes of violence and disadvantage," he said.

"The Territory has nearly 6,000 people on the public housing waitlist. One in five Aboriginal people here are experiencing homelessness. We have 13 times the national rate of people sleeping rough."

"This crisis is driven by overcrowded housing, family and domestic violence, incarceration, and chronic underinvestment in social services. The same government that is pushing more people onto the street is now arming the public with a harmful weapon. It defies all logic."

"Expanding access to OC spray will only lead to more violence, more people being criminalised, and more pressure on a justice system that's already stretched beyond breaking point. This is a pressure fuse."

Dr Paterson urged the government to abandon ineffective and harmful programs and redirect public funds into solutions that actually improve safety.

"If we want to stop violence before it starts, we need to invest in what works – safe housing, early childhood services, culturally safe healthcare, and wraparound supports that strengthen families and communities," he said.

"If the government is serious about creating a safer Territory, it must flip the script. That means stop fuelling fear and division, and start funding the services that build hope, safety and resilience."

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