



MEDIA STATEMENT

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AMSANT calls for certainty on the future of Alcohol Protected Areas

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) is calling on the Northern Territory Government to publicly confirm how it will ensure vital alcohol protections remain in place when Interim Alcohol Protected Areas (IAPAs) expire in February 2027.

AMSANT CEO Donna Ah Chee said the Northern Territory could not afford a repeat of the devastating consequences seen after previous alcohol protections lapsed in 2022.

“We have seen exactly what happens when these protections are removed,” Ms Ah Chee said. “We cannot afford to repeat those mistakes. Women and children cannot afford that risk.”

The call came during a keynote address delivered by Ms Ah Chee at the Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies Northern Territory (AADANT) Conference in Garramilla/Darwin this week, outlining both the successes and ongoing challenges in reducing alcohol-related harm across the Northern Territory.

In her address, Ms Ah Chee warned the expiry of IAPAs in nine months’ time presents a significant threat to community safety if replacement protections are not secured.

IAPAs were introduced in 2023 after the lapse of Stronger Futures dry area provisions led to dramatic increases in alcohol-related harm across the Northern Territory, and especially in Central Australia.

AMSANT and other Aboriginal community controlled organisations had warned governments at the time that removing dry area protections would lead to increased violence and social harm. Following the expiry of the dry area provisions in July 2022, official police crime statistics show that alcohol-related domestic violence assaults in Alice Springs increased by 93% over subsequent months.

There were also significant increases in assaults, property crime and alcohol-related Emergency Department presentations.

This led to substantial negative national and international media coverage about the NT.

“Aboriginal organisations and communities warned what would happen if these protections were removed,” Ms Ah Chee said. “Unfortunately, those warnings were ignored, and a very high price was paid.”

Ms Ah Chee said the introduction of alcohol restrictions in 2023 demonstrated that evidence-based alcohol policy works. Following the introduction of new supply restrictions and the reinstatement of dry area protections:

- alcohol consumption in Alice Springs fell by 20% compared to the previous period
- domestic violence presentations at Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department fell by 39% in the first five months

- around 100 hospital-treated domestic violence cases were prevented every month.

AMSANT said the protections are also consistent with the Northern Territory Government's commitments to improving community safety and reducing family, domestic and sexual violence.

"The right of people to drink alcohol is less important than the right of communities to live safely. In particular, the right of women and children to be safe must remain the overriding concern," Ms Ah Chee said.

"If governments are serious about protecting women and children and reducing violence in our communities, then we need to maintain the measures we know are working."

"The evidence is clear that effective alcohol supply regulation reduces alcohol-related violence, trauma and harm."

Ms Ah Chee said the Northern Territory Government must now provide clarity well before the February 2027 expiry date to ensure communities are consulted and remain protected.

"There is limited time remaining and no clear roadmap from government," she said.

"Failure to act will not only lead to greater health and social harms. As we saw in 2022, it also has the potential to damage the Northern Territory economy, deter tourism, and undermine our national and international reputation."

Ten years ago, the cost of alcohol in the NT was estimated at around \$1.4 billion per year in deaths, health system costs, child abuse and neglect, and road crashes.

Ms Ah Chee said the Territory needs a holistic approach to reducing alcohol-related harm — including action on housing, early childhood development, education and poverty, alongside evidence-based restrictions on alcohol supply.

"While those long-term investments are essential, we also know that removing effective protections leads to immediate increases in violence and harm," she said. "We cannot afford another backward step."

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