

MEDIA RELEASE

NT: TOO MUCH GROG, TOO MUCH HARM

10 August 2016: Alcohol is responsible for two deaths, 52 hospitalisations and 69 assaults every week in the Northern Territory (NT). Territorians who want a government that's willing to embrace real action to stop the harm have asked candidates, including Chief Minister Adam Giles, to present their policies at a public forum in Alice Springs today.

The People's Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC), based in Alice Springs, and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) have released an election platform highlighting the extent of alcohol-related harm in the Northern Territory and have put forward a comprehensive plan of action.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of people in Australia who drink daily and the lowest proportion of non-drinkers.

PAAC spokesperson Dr John Boffa says those consumption patterns are reflected in the high level of preventable alcohol-related illness, injury, and death.

"Unfortunately the Northern Territory is the booziest jurisdiction in Australia and, as a direct result, we have the highest proportion of alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations," Dr Boffa said.

"These statistics are damning. Our drivers are 20 times more likely to return a breath test above the legal limit; alcohol's a factor in at least 42 per cent of road deaths. It's a factor in 53 per cent of all assaults, and in up to 65 per cent of all family violence reported to police."

The reintroduction of the Banned Drinkers Register and a minimum price for alcohol are among nine priority areas identified in the *Northern Territory 2016 election platform: Calling time on too much grog in the NT*.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says alcohol-related harm is a big problem but not one without a solution and called on all sides of politics to support a comprehensive and long-term approach that prioritises community health and safety above commercial interests.

"Governments need to do more than show concern about the damage caused by too much alcohol, while in the same breath approving more liquor outlets and relaxing regulation. What's needed is a comprehensive approach to ensure that workable solutions remain in place beyond the next election," Mr Thorn said.

"We know what works, and armed with that evidence we now need the political will to introduce measures that will be effective in saving lives and reducing the damage wrought by alcohol across the Territory."

The PAAC and FARE *Northern Territory 2016 election platform* also calls for greater investment in treatment services, a reduction in the number of liquor outlets, increased community involvement in liquor licence regulation, and a greater investment in the prevention, diagnosis, and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Dr Boffa says that importantly, the nine priority items and actions contained within the election platform have a deliberate focus on supply reduction measures guided by the uncontested and widely accepted evidence of what is known to be the most effective.

“This is a problem that affects all Territorians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples suffer disproportionately but it touches all who live here. Ahead of the election, we have an opportunity to put excessive grog consumption and its dire consequences, on the agenda, and to demand that our political representatives acknowledge the scale of the problem and embrace those measures proven to be successful,” Dr Boffa said.

The pre-election alcohol policy forum will be held at Witchetty’s at the Araluen Arts Centre, Larapinta Drive, Alice Springs, at 5:45pm for a 6pm start on Wednesday 10 August.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

The **People’s Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC)** is an Alice Springs-based community alcohol reform group. It developed in response to a growing awareness of excessive alcohol use and associated harm in the central Australian region, providing a platform for community action to reduce alcohol-related harm, and followed a public rally on alcohol problems instigated by the late Dr Charles Perkins, Aboriginal activist and Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Central Zone Commissioner.

PAAC aims to work towards reducing the impact of alcohol-related harm through a number of strategies including: developing constructive reforms to the sale of alcohol; advocating controls on public consumption; advocating responsible service of alcohol; and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Members include social workers, lawyers, medical practitioners, Aboriginal organisations, trade unions, churches, social service organisations and individuals. Collaborating organisations include the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Central Land Council, Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory, Northern Territory Council of Social Services, Central Australian Youth Link Up Service, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council, churches and the Public Health Association of Australia NT.

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