

## **Key priorities for alcohol harm reduction in the Northern Territory: findings from a forum of health, social welfare, policy and justice professionals**

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**Introduction:** There is limited investment in harm reduction in the Northern Territory, reflecting limited resourcing but also a public discourse focused on alcohol and drugs (AOD) as a crime rather than issue. We aimed to generate discussion between professionals across policy, alcohol and drugs, health and social services, lived experience advocacy and policing sectors and people to identify cross-sectorally supported initiatives.

**Method:** We facilitated an interactive workshop that included 50 professionals from across sectors who serve or interact with people who use alcohol and drugs. Attendees moved through a series of activities culminating in the ideation of harm reduction initiatives that would address NT context-specific needs. Workshop notes and materials were analysed thematically to identify key directions for harm reduction going forward.

**Results:** Three program types emerged as having strong support. First, approaches that coordinated care across multiple agencies. This would ensure that a person-centred and health-focused approach was embodied across organisations that intersect with AOD, ensure basic needs were met and improve efficiencies and continuity of care. Second, services that provided safe spaces for people experiencing co-occurring homelessness and substance use problems were discussed as a significant gap in care. Finally, stakeholders identified a strong need for improved child and youth AOD care.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** We identified priorities that were supported by NT stakeholders working across different health and social agencies, lived experience organisations, policy and policing. These initiatives reflect agreement of the need to better meet peoples' basic needs (i.e. housing) in order to reduce AOD harms.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** We saw significant benefit in bringing together stakeholders from across sectors, to discuss what they saw as being vital to improve outcomes for people who use alcohol and drugs. These initiatives can serve as a focal point for advocacy across agencies.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

*The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. In 2022, CW was supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Early Career Fellowship.*