



Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Monday 20 December 2012**

### **CALL FOR BARKLY-TENNANT CREEK COMMUNITY COVID LOCKDOWN—NOW!!**

The opening of NT borders at midnight last night is deeply concerning for our people whilst the NT is unable to contain the Katherine outbreak which has now spread to the highly vulnerable Barkly region with a very concerning escalation of cases in the last 24 hours including to Ali Curung,” AMSANT CEO John Paterson said this morning.

“We are calling—now—for a community-by-community lockdown on our communities in the Barkly-Tennant Creek region until at least COB Friday,” said Mr Paterson.

“No ifs or buts.

“The outbreak comes at the worst possible time with the Commonwealth surge vaccination workforce now ceasing work till January and with primary health care staffing shortages at an unprecedented level

“We are calling on the army to be bought in to work with the police on enforcement and to bolster our health workforce if we are unable to get health staff from other sources urgently’.

All of the seven remote clinics in the Barkly LGA needs to be well staffed so any cases can be detected promptly through screening and so that vaccination can be offered to all eligible community members given low vaccination rates across the region. We also need to ensure that there is enough surge vaccination and testing staff in Tennant Creek.

“This requires additional staff to be bought in immediately across the Barkly given we are facing unprecedented staffing shortages and the Barkly is struggling more than most areas to staff remote clinics across the region.

“It will be very difficult to find nurses through usual sources at this time of year so army clinical staff or AUSMAT teams should be mobilised to ensure there is enough support.

“We know, and both Territory and Commonwealth governments know, that the Barkly is the LGA with the lowest Indigenous vaccination rates in the NT, with Commonwealth data from last week demonstrating that only 45% of Aboriginal people are fully vaccinated. The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Barkly is one of the worst in the NT with very high rates of diabetes and kidney disease.

“We are pleased that Tennant Creek is in lockdown—this is very necessary and needs to be extended despite the hardship this is causing.

“We are urging the Government to put every single community in the Barkly into a community lockdown to stop people moving between communities. At present people can move between remote communities in the Barkly but they are unable to leave the whole region without permission. We do not know how many communities may be harbouring the virus and we need to take action to reduce the risk that the outbreak spreads to further communities.”

The Barkly is a vast and sparsely populated region with many back roads.

“We just do not have enough police across the whole Barkly region enforce the lockdown in Tennant and lockout in the Barkly,” said Mr Paterson.

“AMSANT still thinks it is unwise to open the borders today. The government needs to have a low threshold for reversing the decision and requiring at least one week of home quarantine.

“We are the most at risk jurisdiction in Australia with the sickest population and the most fragile health system. We cannot afford to take the risks that other jurisdictions are taking.

“AMSANT is asking that the NT government immediately introduce a mask mandate for all indoor spaces and large outdoor gatherings, and institute a vaccine passport system for entertainment venues including pubs, clubs, restaurants and non-essential shops right across the NT.

“Tasmania has just introduced a mask mandate, and Victoria and Queensland have a strong vaccine passport system. These are prudent measures which will reduce the risk of super spreader events and drive up vaccination rates in our people which are still too low.

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