

**Statement by The People's Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC), 23 January 2023**  
<http://www.paac.org.au/>

### **NT Government must end alcohol-fuelled human rights breaches**

The NT Government must face up to the human rights breaches caused by its decision to allow take-away alcohol to flood into the community overnight last July, and either immediately reinstate Stronger Futures equivalent restrictions, or ask the Albanese Government to do so.

The People's Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC) says that what is happening now is exactly what leading Aboriginal health, justice and community organisations, along with PAAC, predicted. Towns that were already battling with excessively high levels of youth offending, especially Alice Springs, are awash with take-away alcohol and the results are stark and horrific.

"The upshot is that the rights of Aboriginal women to be safe from violence, and for their children to be free from neglect and harm and not to live in fear, have been thrown in the bin. In fact, the community in general is living in fear of violence and no longer enjoying the amenity of Alice as it once did. That is what happens when the privilege of access to alcohol is placed above fundamental human rights. There's more violence, more FASD on the way and a future looming where more kids have even greater developmental delay," said PAAC's spokesperson Dr. John Boffa.

"Many leading Aboriginal organisations, including the community -controlled health services and the Aboriginal legal service, NAAJA, wanted these provisions to continue. They warned that what we are now experiencing would occur. They said that people from remote areas would be attracted into the regional centres to buy take-away alcohol, and this is exactly what has happened."

It is very clear, as the Minister for Police and for Families Kate Worden has acknowledged (ABC Radio Darwin 20.1.23), that alcohol is a major driving factor of violence and family dysfunction (see graphs below)\*, and that police and child protection agencies are doing their best, but are fighting a losing battle since this return of the 'Rivers of Grog.'

It's also apparent that the Alice Springs Hospital is overwhelmed, with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation claiming that staff are leaving, and that the hospital is now heavily reliant on agency workers. The Federation's NT Secretary has supported calls for the declaration of a state of emergency in the NT.†

"The Northern Territory Government's attempts to deal with the disastrous flood of alcohol by encouraging retailers to impose voluntary limits on purchases is not a useful response. Firstly, the limits are too high, and

secondly, this type of self-regulation has never worked in the past. We have just seen two Alice pubs have trading temporarily suspended due to licence breaches. That's why we have legislative boundaries on the liquor industry and not voluntary measures."

"The same NT Government that has brought in so many progressive alcohol reforms has, in one fell legislative swoop, undone all the good, putting hundreds if not thousands of its citizens at risk of chronic health conditions, injury and violence.

"Alcohol misuse is an inter-generational problem that cannot be solved without long-term supply reduction and other targeted measures. That's what we had. We've now seen enough of this ill-advised experiment. The repercussions will continue if the tap is not turned down again.

"It is also concerning that there was a view that simply because the alcohol restrictions had been in place for some years it was time to move on. This shows a failure to understand that we have not yet dealt with the social determinants of addiction, including inter-generational trauma, that are the root cause of unregulated alcohol use.

"We need special supply reduction measures until key social determinants such as early childhood trauma, educational attainment, employment, poverty and overcrowding have been substantially addressed. Only then will it be possible to reduce alcohol regulations.

"It is time to put back in place what we know works, and accept that the harm that has been caused by the removal of these alcohol restrictions has been much greater than what the NT Government predicted. This can be achieved by either the NT Assembly or the Federal Parliament re-instating the Alcohol Protected Areas legislation. There is no time to muck around with anything new. We need to go back to the future on alcohol," said Dr. Boffa