



MEDIA RELEASE

Response to increased use of volatile substances by young people in Darwin and Palmerston

16 February 2021

The Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT (AADANT) is the peak body for non-government Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) treatment services in the Northern Territory.

We represent over 20 organisations providing drug and alcohol treatment and support to families and clients throughout the NT.

Recently, there has been coverage in the media relating to a perceived increase in occurrence of volatile substance use (sniffing/inhaling/chroming) in the Greater Darwin Area.

Rates of volatile substance use fluctuate over time with individuals using substances for a broad and varied range of reasons. Minimising rates of use and harms caused by volatile substances – as with all drug and alcohol use - requires a response which balances the three pillars of harm minimisation: supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction.

Our first and foremost priority is to try and reduce the potential harm for young people currently using volatile substances. It is vital those responding to these situations recognise the need for calm, measured responses that do not jeopardise the safety of individuals. An individual who has been acutely using inhalants has an increased risk of cardiac arrest and incurring injuries as a result of reduced motor function if chased or restrained.

We strongly urge any members of the public encountering young people using volatile substances which includes inhalants to contact emergency services for advice.

Successful supply reduction strategies have been implemented in regions where volatile substances are secured at the point of sale.

Key policy focuses need to consider a holistic approach to supporting young people to ensure they are safe, having their basic needs met and are being engaged as part of the community. Increasing engagement with our young people and providing alternative, positive activities and safe spaces can be a strong protective factor in preventing and reducing rates of harmful drug use.

Once we better understand and engage with our young people, education on the potential harms of drug use can help individuals make informed decisions. There is a clear need to increase the availability and accessibility of activities targeted at engaging young people.

AADANT supports increasing focused investment and coordination in the provision of services for young people. We have repeatedly highlighted the need for a comprehensive Youth Strategy in the Northern Territory and for the establishment of a Youth Peak Body to provide advocacy and representation for the needs of our young people.

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