Repeat problem drinkers in Katherine will be required to undertake mandatory alcohol rehabilitation under a new plan to reduce alcohol related harm and anti-social behaviour in the town.

Minister for Alcohol Rehabilitation, Robyn Lambley and Member for Katherine, Willem Westra van Holthe, said the town has substantial problems with public drunkenness and anti-social behaviour and that a new approach is required to end the cycle of alcohol abuse.

Under the new reforms, problem drinkers placed in protective custody three times in two months will be assessed for mandatory rehabilitation.

From July 1, problem drinkers in and around Katherine who meet the criteria will undertake a program of mandatory alcohol treatment at the Venndale rehabilitation facility for a period of up to 12 weeks.

At the implementation stage, at least 40 problem drinkers a year are expected to be placed in rehabilitation.

Territory wide, up to 800 problem drinkers will receive alcohol mandatory treatment at centres in Katherine, Darwin, Alice Springs and Gove.

“This is a new approach to dealing with the harmful effects of alcohol consumption on individuals and the Northern Territory community,” Mrs Lambley said.

“The Country Liberals Government is committed to helping problem drinkers overcome the cycle of drunkenness and harm that is a way of life for a small minority of Territorians.

“Alcohol abuse costs the Territory $642 million every year in police time, hospitalisations and lost productivity. It affects individuals, families, neighbourhoods and businesses and a fresh approach to dealing with problem drunks is long overdue.

“The 12 week rehabilitation program will include therapeutic alcohol and drug treatment, chronic disease and other health management and work readiness training.

“Venndale and its parent, the Kalano Community Association, have established a strong reputation as providers of rehabilitation for problem drinkers in Katherine.

“I recently met with Venndale Program Manager Casey Bishop and Kalano CEO Rick Fletcher and they were supportive of the concept of mandatory rehabilitation. I look forward to working with them in coming weeks as we move towards the implementation of alcohol mandatory treatment.”

Mr Westra van Holthe said residents and businesses want direct action against problem drunks who reduce the town’s amenity and cause serious harm to themselves and others.
"The high visibility of drunks in the main streets of Katherine is a blight that shifts focus away from the town’s magnificent history and substantial role in the Territory’s economic future," he said.

"The Government’s measures are not punitive, they are about providing treatment for the problem drinkers who have lost control of their lives and clearly require help."

Venndale Program Manager Casey Bishop supports mandatory rehabilitation for repeat problem drinkers and said the organisation is in talks with Government about increasing capacity.

"Venndale are very excited and keen to play a part in the mandatory rehabilitation process because we are fully aware of the back-log of people needing treatment," Mr Bishop said.

"There is a substantial number of people in and around Katherine who are placed in Sobering Up Shelters, police cells and Katherine hospital who never make the rehabilitation process."

Media Contact:
Camden Smith 0488 588 754