The Northern Territory Government will use the short term patient accommodation centre at Royal Darwin Hospital as an interim facility for delivery of alcohol mandatory treatment services.

Alcohol Rehabilitation Minister, Robyn Lambley, has been in contact with Commonwealth Ministers Tanya Plibersek and Jenny Macklin about utilising the facility during the roll-out stage of its alcohol mandatory treatment policy.

Alcohol mandatory treatment programs are expected to begin operating in July.

The $18 million 100-bed so-called medi-hotel was constructed by the Commonwealth to provide short term accommodation of up to 12 weeks for Royal Darwin Hospital patients.

However no operational funding, estimated at about $5 million a year was provided and the Northern Territory Government deferred usage of the facility.

The Commonwealth Government’s decision to cut in excess of $100 million a year from the Territory’s GST allocations has served to exacerbate the Territory’s financial plight.

Under the Territory Government’s landmark alcohol reforms, repeat problem drinkers will be required to undertake alcohol mandatory treatment in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy.

Repeat problem drinkers will be required to undergo a clinical assessment and referral to an Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Tribunal for recommendation to appropriate mandatory treatment.

“The use of this facility for alcohol mandatory rehabilitation is consistent with the agreed purpose of the building to provide short term accommodation of up to 12 weeks for patients,” Mrs Lambley said.

“Those participating in alcohol mandatory treatment will receive a program of therapeutic intervention, work activity and life skills through structure programming and chronic disease management.

“It is anticipated that this is the same cohort of patients who present frequently at remote health centres and hospital emergency departments.

“The stabilisation of their health status will be critical to the success of alcohol mandatory treatment.”

Mrs Lambley has been in discussions with rehabilitation providers including CAAAPU in Alice Springs and Venndale in Katherine. Their support for the measures is encouraging and further talks are scheduled in coming weeks.

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