Controls on prescription medication will be strengthened when an amendment to the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act* is passed in Parliament today, further enforcing the NT Government’s tough stand against illicit drug use in our community.

Minister for Health and Community Services Jane Aagaard said the changes will address issues surrounding the misuse and over-prescribing of medications, incorporating the recommendations of the Taskforce on Illicit Drugs.

"In particular we will be increasing controls on Schedule 8 drugs to make it mandatory for doctors to obtain a permit prior to subscribing this medication," Mrs Aagaard said. Schedule 8 substances are drugs which may lead to dependence such as the many forms of prescription morphine.

"Until now, the Northern Territory has been the only jurisdiction without this type of legislation in place – inexcusable given that historically there is a significant problem with morphine dependency in the NT.

"In fact when this Government came to office, prescriptions for morphine in the NT were being dispensed at seven times the national average."

The amendments will:

- subject all S8 substances to regulatory control – including mandatory contracts to limit patients to one doctor and one supplying pharmacy;
- subject medications of particular concern – such as maintenance pharmacotherapies (methadone, buprenorphine) – to additional controls, including needing authorisations to prescribe;
- set up an effective control system to warn of over-prescribing and/or ‘doctor shopping’;
- set up a Schedule 8 Clinical Advisory Committee

Mrs Aagaard said the Labor Government was committed to breaking the drug-crime cycle through measures like the those in this bill and initiatives such as the NT Drugs Courts, which came into effect last week.

"Drug addiction is devastating for the individual, for their family and for the community in general," Mrs Aagaard said. "Evidence shows addiction can lead people into committing break-ins and other crime to fund drug habits."