The Northern Territory’s chronic pain service will be expanded to help Territorians suffering from chronic pain.

Minister for Health Dr Peter Toyne said the Chronic Pain Service will be upgraded this year and another $290,000 will be allocated each year to continue its life-changing programs.

“The service will see a multi-disciplinary assessment and care planning team provide group treatment in Darwin and Alice Springs,” Dr Toyne said.

“This will translate into increased access to visiting medical pain specialists and support, and advice to GPs managing people with chronic pain.

“The improved service will forge links to an interstate centre of excellence and will also include funding to enable client assessments in locations where the multi-disciplinary team is not available.

“This will ensure Territorians who suffer chronic pain can get the best treatment possible when the new service begins in July 2005.

The upgrade coincides with changes to legislation controlling the use of Schedule 8 drugs which come into effect today.

“The prescriptions of these medicines will be more tightly controlled and monitored,” Dr Toyne said.

“The Territory has the highest prescription rate of S8 drugs in Australia and many of these drugs can cause harm in the community.

“So we need to tighten up the way they are prescribed while also improving our pain service and looking at alternative treatment options to pain management other than S8 medications.

“This is another key initiative of the Building Healthier Communities Framework.

“Substance abuse is not just a problem for one sector of society.

“It affects individuals, families and communities across the Territory and holds us back from making progress in many areas.

“We are committed to reducing dependence on S8 drugs while also providing compassionate, easy-to-get access to the Chronic Pain Service,” Dr Toyne said.

Contacts: Richard O’Leary 0401 119 586
Karen Stringer, chairperson, Top End Division of General Practice, 0438 175264