Petrol sniffing will be banned in the Northern Territory when new legislation is introduced to Parliament next month, Family and Community Services Minister Marion Scrymgour announced today.

The new Bill is titled the Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Bill.

The Parliamentary Committee into Substance Abuse will table its final report later this month which will provide recommendations on programs and services. And the NT Government has allocated $10 million over five years to ensure that its recommendations can be implemented as quickly as possible.

“Petrol sniffing has been the scourge of our community for many, many years … it is destroying our children, debilitating Indigenous communities, and leading to crime and anti-social behaviour in our towns,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“What we are announcing today is the most important initiative in fighting petrol sniffing ever seen in the Northern Territory.”

“We are giving police the powers they need to combat petrol sniffing. We are giving the courts the powers they need to combat petrol sniffing. And we are giving communities the support they need to help their young people get back on track.

Ms Scrymgour said the Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Bill includes:

- Police powers to seize inhalants such as petrol, glue and paint where they are being abused.
- Police powers to apprehend people under the influence of volatile substances to take them to a place of safety.
- Giving courts the capacity to order compulsory treatment programs for serial substance abusers.

The legislation will be comprehensive and wide ranging to ensure that it can tackle petrol sniffing in a remote community just as strongly as it tackles chroming in Darwin.

The legislation bans petrol sniffing but it does not criminalise it and substance abuse will not involve prison sentences.

“This is a new Bill that has a strong emphasis on prevention and the rehabilitation and treatment of those affected by inhalant misuse,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“Unlike the CLP’s proposed legislation we do not plan to throw sniffers in prison. The CLP plan is an unproductive, out of sight - out of mind approach that will ultimately lead to further self-destruction and further crime.

“Our Legislation insists on treatment to make sure these people are safe.
And given the connection between petrol sniffing and crime, it will also have a positive effect on bringing down anti-social behaviour in remote and urban areas.”

Ms Scrymgour said anyone convicted of selling or supplying a volatile substance where they knew it would be misused would be dealt with harshly by the courts, increasing the current maximum penalty.

Ms Scrymgour pointed out that the new legislation did not change the way people who committed crimes while under the influence of volatile substances would be dealt with.

“This legislation does not make petrol sniffing an excuse for crime. Petrol sniffing will banned but it won’t be a crime. Property offences and violence are crimes and will be treated as such by the police and the courts.”

“In many communities, the traditional family-based programs and approaches currently in place have no legal status. This Bill ensures that community control is at the core of this challenge.”

Following the tabling of the Substance Abuse committee’s report and recommendations next week the Government will determine how to best allocate the $10 million.

Programs and services that will be supported will include appropriately resourced Safe Houses in urban areas and Outstations in remote areas.

The new Bill is part of the Government’s Building Healthier Communities framework tackling substance abuse throughout the NT.