The Territory’s first ever drug court program, that aims to target and reform offenders addicted to illicit drugs through treatment and rehabilitation, has opened in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Justice Minister Dr Peter Toyne said the new drug court program is a key part of the Government’s Tough-on-Drugs plan and over time, will have a significant impact on breaking the link between illicit drug use and crime.

"Government has committed to tackling the illicit drug problem and associated property crime and this new drug court program will move offenders into treatment services to help them get off the drug-crime cycle.

"This type of program has had success on other states and our model has been developed on best practice occurring around Australia."

Under the new drug court program Magistrates can divert offenders who have allegedly committed crime to fund their drug habit to drug intervention and treatment programs.

Suitable offenders will enter a treatment and rehabilitation program extending up to 5 months as part of their bail conditions. They will be regularly monitored through Court Reviews and their treatment progress taken into account at sentencing stage.

The program is largely based on the successful Victorian CREDIT program (Court Referral, Evaluation for Drug Intervention and Treatment), which has operated since 1998. The program aims to reduce illicit drug use and related crime by participants, reduce the likelihood of a sentence involving incarceration, reduce the cost to the justice and health systems and improve the health and social contribution of the participants.

Magistrates in Darwin and Alice Springs have undergone training in drug court programs and observed their operation interstate, and two Court Clinicians have been appointed to conduct assessments and case manage an expected 300 clients per annum through the drug court program.

Dr Toyne said the new program has commenced using referrals to existing rehabilitation programs. It is anticipated that new Federal funding through the National Drug Strategy will be secured later this year which will support additional treatment and rehabilitation placements.

"We recognise the scarcity of drug treatment places in the Territory and the interim drug court program will only place participants where and when appropriate placements are available."

"When placements are not available offenders will go through normal court processes."