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Preventing and Reducing Substance Abuse in Remote Communities

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Family and Community Services Minister Marion Scrymgour will today open a Drug and Alcohol Seminar at Ntaria, 120km west of Alice Springs, as part of the Third Australasian Drug Strategy Conference.

Ms Scrymgour will present a paper on the battle against substance abuse in communities, in which she will speak about legislative reform to deal with the issue of petrol sniffing.

“Substance abuse is one of the most difficult and challenging areas Governments have to face, but tackling it is a major priority of this Government, as outlined in our policy framework document Building Healthier Communities,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“Substance abuse affects individuals, families and communities … it often leads to violence, family breakdown and community dysfunction, and is one of the biggest barriers to achieving positive health outcomes.

“One of the problems we have had historically is the inability for police to play a role and proactively deal with the problems associated with petrol sniffing. But the NT Government is looking at these gaps and examining a legislative reform process to give police increased controls in this area.”

Ms Scrymgour said Federal, State and Territory Governments all had important roles to play in tackling substance abuse through policy implementation and service delivery. But she added that community control was still at the core of this challenge.

“All the Government commitment in the world is not going to solve the issue of substance abuse unless Aboriginal communities themselves are engaged and harnessed,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“The NT Government is making legislative changes and developing partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations and helping them move towards community control.”

Ms Scrymgour said that Governments need to encourage, support and facilitate the establishment of community-based programs.

“The right policies and the right programs do make a difference,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“While I have seen first hand, as the former CEO of the Katherine West Health Board, the harmful effect of substance abuse, I have also seen how positive and credible initiatives have worked and have improved people's quality of life.”