The Minister for Health and Community Services Jane Aagaard today announced the formation of a Ministerial Taskforce on Illicit Drugs.

Mrs Aagaard said the taskforce will be chaired by Dr Valerie Asche, a widely respected microbiologist and member of the community. Other members would include representatives from a range of stakeholder groups, the selection of whom is currently being finalised.

“This government promised the community it would tackle the hard issues of community safety. We committed to being tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime.

“The drug problem effects all of the community from the users themselves, their families and friends through to the people who have their houses broken into by those seeking to support their habits.

“Our 3 Point Plan to Get Tough on Drugs comprises the following priorities:

- A law enforcement strategy of zero tolerance on drug production and distribution;
- Compulsory treatment of addicts arrested on drug related crimes; and
- A properly resourced drug prevention strategy, including family support policies and education campaigns directed at our schools.”

Mrs Aagaard further emphasised the need to have widespread community and expert input into the development of solutions, particularly given the lack of services currently in place to deal with illicit drug-related harm.

“To this end, I am establishing a Taskforce on Illicit Drugs to consult broadly with the community, frontline workers and experts, and to provide me with evidence-based advice on strategies, issues and proposed directions. I have asked that it canvass withdrawal, treatment, rehabilitation, education and prevention strategies relevant to the Northern Territory context.”

The scope of the taskforce will cover illicit drugs as defined by the National Drug Strategic Framework. This includes heroin, amphetamines, prescription drugs used in an illicit manner, hallucinogens, cocaine, and designer drugs such as ecstasy.

It will not cover such substance abuse issues as cannabis use, petrol sniffing, kava, alcohol and tobacco use, which remain of deep concern to this government and will continue to be a focus of the Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the community.

“The taskforce will investigate illicit drug issues throughout the Territory and report back to government by 31 May 2002.”

“The recommendations of the taskforce will then be used in formulating our illicit drug strategy, which in turn forms a key component of our 3 Point Plan to Get Tough on Drugs.”