



Alcohol, hurting people and harming communities

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs has tabled its report 'Alcohol, hurting people and harming communities'. The report is the result of an extensive inquiry by the Committee into the harmful use of alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, holding hearings around Australia and receiving a large number of submissions.

Chair of the Committee, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP said "The social and economic determinants of harmful alcohol use such as unemployment, poor housing, racism, trauma, poor education and peer pressure mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are hugely impacted by the harm caused by alcohol abuse."

"Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) describe the brain damage and other disabilities which may occur when a mother drinks alcohol when pregnant. Tragically, the rates of FAS and FASD in some Aboriginal communities are amongst the highest in the world and yet FAS and FASD are still not recognised as a disability for social security allowances or in the education and criminal justice system." Dr Stone said. "We also know that early intervention can assist those with FAS and FASD, however the lack of official recognition of the conditions as a disability prevents timely intervention; so does the lack of diagnoses and help for alcohol addicted women."

"The harmful use of alcohol has become an intergenerational problem with tragic consequences. We need to treat this situation with a real sense of urgency. It is time to do more than try to patch up the victims of violence or neglected children." Dr Stone added

The Committee's report includes 23 recommendations which address the harmful use of alcohol through pricing and access, adding the harmful use of alcohol to Closing the Gap targets and implementing a justice reinvestment approach to spend the \$400,000 currently spent on jailing alcohol abusers each year on ameliorating the causes of alcohol abuse. This measure should reduce numbers incarcerated as a result of harmful alcohol use.

The report notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community driven strategies to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol are a starting point and need to be supported. The report also found many alcohol treatment programs were short term, under resourced, with little follow-up in the community, and hence little long term impact.

The full report and background information from the inquiry, including copies of submissions and public hearing transcripts, can be found on the committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/indigenousaffairs

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP on (03) 5821 5371 (Electorate Office) or (02) 6277 4477 (Parliament House).

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4559 or indigenousaffairs.reps@aph.gov.au