



**CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINAL ALCOHOL  
PROGRAMMES UNIT**

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**Submission to  
The Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 'Ice' Select  
Committee**



***A PLACE OF HEALTH, HOPE AND HEALING***

Our vision is to have Indigenous men and women free from alcohol misuse and addictions and to live a healthy lifestyle.

May 8, 2015

*The CAAAPU definition of sobriety is the maintenance of sober habits from alcohol consumption and other substance abuse.*

**BEATING THE GROG TOGETHER**

## Introduction

The Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit (CAAAPU) is an Aboriginal-controlled primary provider of culturally appropriate alcohol counselling and residential treatment services in Alice Springs.

CAAAPU was formed in 1991 to provide a place of health, hope and healing for Aboriginal people suffering the effects of alcohol and substance abuse.

The organisation delivers successful mandatory treatment programs, along with residential and outreach programs, with clients referred through the justice system, Community Corrections, health services and self-referrals.

The Board of Management believes it is important to offer clients a safe environment where clients can receive treatment to recover from alcohol abuse, to become stronger and healthier and better able to make informed decisions about how they live their lives.

CAAAPU's approach is unique but it is proven to work. We are proud that we do a better job of looking after our own mob than other services that may be better resourced in terms of capital, but not in terms of cultural competency or caring.

The CAAAPU staff and management operate an effective, culturally appropriate service and have been at the forefront in helping develop delivery of the NT's mandatory treatment regime. CAAAPU's work has attracted positive comment locally and nationally.

The CAAAPU Board of Management is very strong and seven Central Australian language groups are represented in our members. Our cultural competence and authority and language skills give CAAAPU strength and resilience as an effective and respected organisation with an authentic Indigenous voice.

CAAAPU welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 'Ice' Committee. Our experience at the front line in delivering alcohol treatment services gives us a unique insight into the challenges of dealing effectively with issues around Indigenous substance misuse and addiction.

## **The current context**

CAAAPU offers residential and mandatory rehabilitation facilities and programs to Aboriginal people in Central Australia suffering from the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Our Men's Treatment facilities provide an 8 week residential rehabilitation program providing individual and group counselling and education in a healthy, safe and caring environment. Clients who wish may stay longer. Clients are self-referred or are referred through the health or justice systems.

Women's Treatment Programs are delivered in a separate facility and are restricted to day programs due to current funding constraints.

The residential and mandatory programs include life skills and job readiness training as well as alcohol treatment and counselling. These programs are delivered in partnership with external providers such as Holyoake, RedDust Role Models, Lift4Life, BIITE, ADSCA, Tangentyere and others.

Classes and skills in financial management, art, sewing, fitness, literacy and numeracy, cooking are offered as part of the residential and mandatory programs.

We recognise AOD abuse and dependency to be a complex social and health issue requiring a holistic approach to treatment which addresses enabling factors and reinforces and builds on existing strengths.

CAAAPU also has a strong Outreach program team who are acknowledged as going anywhere and everywhere to deliver services and supports. Our programs also have good relationships developed over many years with other AOD organisations in the region.

While CAAAPU is focused on delivering alcohol treatment services, many of our clients present with poly drug use issues. Currently methamphetamines have not presented as a huge factor with our clients but given expert predictions and interstate experience we expect this to change in the short term.

While current data and evidence in the Northern Territory context is mainly anecdotal we can draw from interstate experience about the possible impact of methamphetamine use on our community.

The Council of Social Services has reported a sharp increase in the number of people using the drug, and the Australian Crime Commission said ice was the third most common illicit substance being used in Indigenous communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the 12 months to February, Northern Territory Police detected 17 drug labs. In the first three months of this year, they seized three to four times more ice than in the same period last year.<sup>2</sup> A review of recent court listings in Alice Springs also reveals growing numbers of offenders charged with methamphetamine use and possession.

A forum on family violence in Alice Springs on May 7, 2015, heard concerns that methamphetamine use will exacerbate the already endemic levels of violence in Central Australia. Perpetrators of violence who use ice are unpredictable in their behaviours and potentially violent episodes can last for much longer periods of time with than with perpetrators who abuse alcohol.

The Victorian experience shows that 1 in 10 young Aboriginal people use methamphetamine compared to 1 in 20 young non-Aboriginal people. There was little evidence about the effectiveness of methamphetamine health education and prevention programs that work with Aboriginal people.<sup>3</sup>

The Victorian inquiry also revealed for many young Aboriginal people in particular, methamphetamine has replaced alcohol and cannabis as a drug of choice or is used in conjunction with these substances. It was also easier to access than other drugs.<sup>4</sup> Given the already high use of alcohol and cannabis in the Central Australian community, these findings are a concern.

The use of methamphetamine, particularly over an extended period, can cause a broad range of physical, psychological and social harms. These are extensively documented in expert research documents, but in summary include neurotoxicity, reduced immunity, elevated blood pressure, damage to teeth and gums, cardiovascular problems and kidney failure. Long-term use can lead to psychological, cognitive and neurological impacts including, depression, impaired memory and concentration and aggressive or violent behaviour.

CAAAPU is very concerned about the potential health impacts of methamphetamine use among a population whose health is already compromised by alcohol misuse.

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<sup>1</sup> ABC NT March 25, 2015

<sup>2</sup> NT Police March 25, 2015

<sup>3</sup> VACCHO submission to Vic Inquiry into supply and use of amphetamines Oct 2013

<sup>4</sup> Parliament of Victorian, Inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines Sept 2014

## The role of CAAAPU in treatment and prevention

The CAAAPU Board believes CAAAPU's experience in delivering culturally safe AOD treatment programs to Aboriginal people provide a strong basis for developing services and programs aimed at treating and preventing methamphetamine use in the Central Australian community.

In 2013 The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations ran three forums with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The results are tabled below:<sup>5</sup>

Prevention	Participants thought early intervention for young at risk clients, providing self-care, and holistic programs for young people were important interventions.
Treatment	Participants wanted clarity on what harm reduction and treatment options should be implemented for clients. More places in detox and rehabilitation were needed.
Family support	Participants asked for better support and advice about how they can make a difference with supporting loved ones
Service access	Making sure mainstream services were culturally safe and running support programs for drug users and their families.
Sharing information	Participants wanted to know more about helpful strategies that work with Ice users and sharing of best practice models. Participants also wanted more information about what Ice users need for their journey to improved health.

The results show services that are culturally safe and offer family and user supports are required. CAAAPU's holistic approach and experience in offering treatment and support services to Aboriginal people who misuse alcohol can be transposed to help fill the gaps in services aimed at treating and preventing methamphetamine use with Aboriginal people in Central Australia.

The Victorian experience also showed that family sensitive and responsive practice should be seen as central to AOD treatment. Services must be adequately resourced to provide effective support to families.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> VACCHO submission to Vic Inquiry into supply and use of amphetamines Oct 2013

The Victorian inquiry highlighted that addressing methamphetamine use should not be about dealing with the problems once they have occurred. One of their key themes was that prevention of drug-related harms is an important strategy to pursue.

Given the findings of the impacts of methamphetamine use on Aboriginal communities in other states, CAAAPU believes that Ice poses a real threat to the health, safety and wellbeing of Central Australians. Preventative and treatment programs that build on the already considerable amount of expertise present in services such as CAAAPU, DASA and other providers should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

The Board of CAAAPU believes strong outreach services that are focused on delivering healthy lifestyle messages, that offer support to families and Ice users and are grounded in culturally safe practices, should be developed as a priority in Central Australia. Support services could be delivered in a half-way house facility where users who have received therapeutic treatments are adequately housed and supported. The facility could also be used as a base for trained outreach workers.

CAAAPU has a highly qualified staff of counsellors who could be further trained to gain skills specific to the treatment of methamphetamine users. Similarly our outreach workers and programs could be strengthened to provide supports for users and families. This would build on our strong base of culturally competent staff with local community and family linkages.

## **Recommendations**

There is no one-size fits all approach to dealing with Aboriginal substance abuse.

In CAAAPU's more than 23 years' experience there must be flexible options around the delivery of services and this having treatment options delivered in a culturally appropriate manner and setting, supported by strong aftercare and outreach services.

CAAAPU's vision is to have many more Indigenous men and women free from addictions and living a healthy lifestyle,

With government policies that recognise the importance of culturally competent service deliveries, relevant place-based solutions derived with local community input and support, and properly resourced treatment provision and after care services, the CAAAPU Board is confident our vision can be achieved.

We present the following recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> Parliament of Victorian, Inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines Sept 2014

1. That organisations with proven experience in delivering Indigenous-focused substance misuse programs be consulted when developing policy and funding frameworks for programs aimed at tackling methamphetamine use in the Northern Territory
2. That Aboriginal controlled health services such as CAAAPU be strengthened to deliver evidence based methamphetamine dependence treatments suited to local community needs
3. Improve access to treatments that address the specific needs of Aboriginal methamphetamine users
4. That organisational partnerships be encouraged to ensure the most effective delivery of treatment, outreach and education programs
5. That consideration be given to funding a dedicated outreach service focused on delivering services to Aboriginal people in Central Australia, with a focus on harm reduction approaches suited to local community needs and delivered in a culturally safe manner
6. That consideration be given to funding a facility external to current facilities that provides a halfway house with support programs for people who have undertaken methamphetamine treatment
7. That programs be developed and funding dedicated to training Aboriginal people to deliver treatment programs for Aboriginal users of methamphetamines
8. Develop best practice work place health and safety measures for those in the health system who come into contact with methamphetamine users.