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Mr Jeff Collins MLA
Chair
Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for
Addictive Behaviours
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801

16 September 2018

Dear Mr Collins

**Call for submissions - Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for
Addictive Behaviours**

Thank you for your correspondence of 23 July 2018 inviting the Department of Education to make a submission to the Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for Addictive Behaviours (the Select Committee).

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and I am pleased to attach department's submission for the consideration of the Select Committee.

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please contact Ms Susan Bowden, Executive Director Education Policy and Programs. Ms Bowden can be contacted on 08 8944 9234 or susan.bowden@nt.gov.au.

I wish the Select Committee well in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Vicki Baylis
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Submission to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for Addictive Behaviours

This submission provides the Select Committee (the Committee) with information to support the inquiry into a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for Addictive Behaviours.

Introduction

The Department of Education (the department) provides education and training options for children and young people, from birth to Year 12. Education services are delivered to over 33,000 school-aged children in 153 government schools providing programs from the early years to post schooling pathways. Seventy-three per cent of schools are located in remote and very remote locations, providing education to 47% of Northern Territory (NT) students. Over 50% of schools are located in areas classified in the lowest decile on the index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage. Aboriginal students make up 44% of the total student cohort in the Northern Territory¹.

As with services provided in the health and family support domains, the department is cognisant of the considerable challenges in providing education to the Territory's children and young people. A review of Indigenous education² by Professor Bruce Wilson (the Indigenous Education Review) acknowledges the logistical and economic challenges facing the department in fulfilling its responsibilities and delivering services to a small, diverse population spread over an area of 1.35m km². Professor Wilson identifies the impact of 'substantial disadvantage' that exists in the NT and highlights that students' 'right to an education that gives them power over their lives' may be best supported by an integrated approach to service delivery in remote communities.

While the terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry are broad in scope, the department's submission will respond primarily in relation to Terms of Reference 2, 3(3), 3(7) and 3(8), to provide information on current harm reduction measures and strategies and best practice evidence in the education domain.

Strategic direction in education

In 2018 the department set a strong strategic direction with the ambition that every child in the Northern Territory has the best start in life, and through early learning and school education, gains a bright future. The *Education NT strategy 2018-2022*³ (the Strategy) outlines the department's commitment to a strong public education system that ensures equity and gives every child the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve.

Community Engagement and Quality Teaching are two of the focus areas in the Strategy which specifically address the strong evidence demonstrating that teacher and school relationships with children and families are a key determinant in children successfully accessing educational opportunities and reaching their full potential. In formulating the Strategy, the department has been responsive to the extensive research, such as that by the Northern Territory's former Children's Commissioner, Dr Howard Bath, which states that '[m]any of the children and young people found in

¹ Department of Education *Annual Report 2016 - 2017* (2017) p. 10.

² Wilson, Bruce, *A share in the future - Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (2014) pp.14-15.

³ Department of Education *The Education NT Strategy 2018-2022*.

child welfare, mental health, special education, and justice settings have been exposed to trauma in their early years' and that 'the most pervasive and far-reaching impact of complex trauma is the dysregulation of emotions and impulses'⁴. Drug use and abuse is known to cause trauma as highlighted by Wolkow, '[b]eyond its devastating effects on individual health, methamphetamine abuse threatens whole communities, causing new waves of crime, unemployment, child neglect or abuse, and other social ills'⁵.

Complementing the Strategy is the ten-year Indigenous Education Strategy⁶, informed by the Review, which emphasises the importance of wellbeing and educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The Indigenous Education Strategy encompasses parent involvement in early childhood and development programs, mandated literacy and numeracy programs in remote and very remote communities, tailored secondary education, a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing, student engagement programs for young adults and strong transition from school pathways. These school and system changes aim to ensure that all students, including Indigenous students, are 'successful and confident in their education journey' and have 'real career choices and opportunities both within and beyond their communities'.

By focusing the education systems' energy on what we know from the evidence are the key determinants for educational success for the Territory's children, the department mitigates the potential for social issues to derail a child's future. This includes acting to reduce the harms from addictive behaviours which affect our children's lives.

Specific strategies and programs for student wellbeing

As part of the Indigenous Education Strategy the department developed and implemented the *NT Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour* which highlights the importance of social and emotional learning and wellbeing support for students. This assists students to develop a positive mindset, be resilient to life's challenges, and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy and safe decisions. Phased implementation of this approach began in 2016 with pilot school's trialling the NT Social and Emotional Learning program.

Schooling transitions

The department is committed to supporting children as they move into, through and from school and recognises the significance of ensuring students have seamless transitions through their education journey. Cahill et al. (2017)⁷ report *Supporting Students in Transition* identifies that 'students who have negative transition experiences are more likely to experience depression, lower learning attainment, poorer peer connections, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anti-social behaviour'⁸.

The department continues to support students at transition points through initiatives such as: Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in early childhood education; the Middle Years Approach which supports students moving from primary to middle years and then to senior years of schooling; and vocational pathways that support young adults into post school training and careers. These initiatives aim to optimise learning and student confidence in themselves and in the future, thereby the aforementioned risks and the likelihood of future drug use or addictive behaviour.

Inter-agency collaboration

The department is collaborating across government agencies to develop and implement joint initiatives that are relevant to reducing the impact of addictive behaviours (in particular drug use) in communities. These include the *Northern Territory's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence*

⁴ Bath, H. (Reclaiming Children and Youth), *The Three Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care* (2008) https://reclaimingjournal.com/sites/default/files/journal-article-pdfs/17_3_Bath.pdf (last accessed on 23 April 2015)

⁵ Wolkow, N. (National Institute on Drug Abuse) *Letter from the Director* (2013) <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/methamphetamine/letter-director> (last accessed on 22 April 2015)

⁶ Northern Territory Government *A Share in the future: Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2018*, p. 4. www.education.nt.gov.au.

⁷ Cahill, Smith, Crofts, Farelly *Supporting Students in Transition*, Youth Research Centre, Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, 2017 (unpublished)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3

Reduction Framework 2018 - 2028 and the NT Suicide Prevention Strategic Action Plan 2018-2023. The NT Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour, which builds student resilience and positive behaviour, aligns with these cross government initiatives.

Responding to the impact of drug use and abuse on Education

There is significant research which highlights the negative impact of parental substance abuse on child development, school readiness and engagement in education. As determined by the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (2014)⁹, parental substance abuse places children at higher risk for emotional, physical and mental health problems, and makes them 3-4 times more likely to become addicted to alcohol or other drugs themselves. This is supported by the earlier research, cited above, by Dr Howard Bath on the effects of trauma on children and dysregulation of emotions in impulses¹⁰.

Students may also be impacted by their own substance abuse leading to behavioural and learning issues –and the need for external professional support. Hence, the department is committed to reducing the impact of addictive behaviours through both prevention and intervention strategies that target student wellbeing.

Following is a summary of current programs and initiatives in place in NT schools:

- [National Safe Schools Framework](#) - implemented by school communities in order to build a positive school culture and support students to develop healthy relationships with peers and adults, and to seek help when required
- National Education Initiative led by [BeyondBlue](#) – provides an online professional learning for staff across early childhood to secondary schools regarding wellbeing and mental health strategies
- Families and First Teachers (FaFT) program – provides family support and quality early learning opportunities in urban and remote settings (expanded below)
- NT Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour and the NT SEL Curriculum – evidence based whole school approaches coupled with explicit social and emotional learning implemented across all NT schools (expanded below)
- Health Education – delivery of drug education programs aligned to the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education which develop student knowledge and skills necessary to enhance health, safety and wellbeing (expanded below)
- targeted programs such as the Clontarf Foundation, Stars Foundation and Girls Academy which empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to realise their potential and to participate meaningfully in society
- Top End School of Flexible Learning and Positive Learning Centres – alternative settings which provide intensive social and emotional learning and differentiated support for students
- case management – case management by attendance officers, wellbeing officers and school counsellors for students impacted by drug use/abuse
- Referral pathways – where appropriate the department refer students to outside agencies for assistance in addressing addictive behaviours and associated harms
- mandatory reporting to Territory Families and the Northern Territory Police of harm or neglect of young people as appropriate. This includes the delivery of mandatory reporting training to all education staff twice a year.

⁹ American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress *Effects of Parental Substance Abuse on Children and Families* <http://www.aaets.org/article230.htm> (last accessed on 23 April 2014)

¹⁰ Bath, H. (Reclaiming Children and Youth), *The Three Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care* (2008) https://reclaimingjournal.com/sites/default/files/journal-article-pdfs/17_3_Bath.pdf (last accessed on 23 April 2015)

Families as First Teachers (FaFT)

FaFT is an early childhood program that is currently delivered in 38 remote, very remote and urban communities across the NT. It provides family support and quality early learning to families with children from birth to four years of age. FaFT aims to promote children's early development and enhance their lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Quality early childhood education is vital for building the social and emotional skills critical to succeeding at school and employability in the long term. Evidence¹¹ on parent involvement shows that active parent and family engagement in the educational lives of children and youth positively influence student learning, engagement and achievement. FaFT strengthens parent engagement and builds strong relationships between families, schools and wellbeing support services.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

A departmental priority is to ensure that schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing. The *NT Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour* is being developed to support and assist schools in building safe environments and assisting students to form healthy relationships and make safe and appropriate choices. It supports the National Safe Schools Framework which identifies key elements for schools in planning, implementing and maintaining school safety.

This approach helps schools to plan and implement practices across the whole school, to improve educational, wellbeing and behaviour outcomes for all students. Whole-school programs that build respectful relationships and resilience in students are effective in reducing risk-taking behaviour. The NT Social and Emotional Learning program that will be launched in October 2018 provides, evidence informed lessons from Transition to Year 10 that assist students to develop the decision making, relationship, problem solving, critical thinking and self-management skills that underpin positive peer relationships, school connectedness and responsible decision making.

School connectedness and a sense of meaning and purpose, involving positive school climate, strong teacher-student relationships, opportunities for success and recognition of achievement are also shown to be protective factors for children and young people in relation to substance use¹². Schools support students by offering a wide range of Education programs catering for student needs and abilities.

Drug Education

The Australian Curriculum is used by schools to plan teaching and learning programs. Of particular relevance to reducing addictive behaviours is the Health and Physical Education learning area which promotes health literacy through a strengths based, critical inquiry approach, and outlines *Alcohol and other drugs* as a key focus area for all stages of schooling, see Appendix A. In addition, the Australian Curriculum: General Capabilities support students to develop personal and social skills, ethical understanding and critical thinking. The evidence underpinning the approach identified that 'skill-focussed, harm minimisation drug education can remain effective, subsequent to programme completion, in reducing students' alcohol consumption and harm'¹³. With this evidence, drug

¹¹ Ingram, M., Wolfe, R. B., & Liberman, J.M. (2007). The role of parents in high-achieving schools serving low-income, at-risk populations. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(4), 479-497.

¹² Cahill, H., Beadle, S., Farrelly, A., Forster, R. and Smith, K. *Building resilience in children and young people: A Literature Review for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)*. Last accessed on 20 August 2018 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/documents/about/department/resiliencelitreview.pdf>

¹³ Midford, R., Cahill, H., Lester, L., Ramsden, R., Foxcroft, D., Venning, L. *Alcohol prevention for school students: Results from a 1-year follow up of a cluster-randomised controlled trial of harm minimisation school drug education*. Last accessed on 20 August 2018 <https://researchers.cdu.edu.au/en/publications/alcohol-prevention-for-school-students-results-from-a-1-year-foll>

education in NT schools focusses on building resilience and enhancing each student's ability to make positive decisions about personal health and safety.

NT Schools are also provided with the Australian Government's *Principles for School Drug Education*¹⁴ which provides a framework of core concepts and values to support effective drug education practices within schools. The principles are based on research on effective drug prevention within school contexts and support a comprehensive, whole-school approach where drug education is embedded within broader health promotion. Significant teaching and learning resources are available to teachers through the Health Education Toolkits for Lower Primary, Upper Primary and Middle Years. A summary is provided as Appendix B.

In most instances, education about specific illicit drugs such as cannabis and methamphetamine is included in the middle school curriculum (Years 7-9). The department suggests that the sensitive issues in the Health and Physical Education learning area, including drug education programs, need to be developed in consultation with the school community to ensure content caters for school community needs as well as addressing the curriculum.

From a Senior Secondary perspective, the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training subject *Stage 1 Health* and *Stage 2 Health* includes relevant options for study including '*The effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs on health*'. This option provides teachers with an opportunity to assess students on their understanding of the impacts of drugs.

An area for development within the department could be to ensure the consistent and sequential implementation of drug education throughout the stages of schooling, to better focus professional learning for teachers, and to expand the scope of drug education to include parents. Such a task could be managed with the support of School Councils.

Into the Future

While it is difficult to determine the extent of the impact of addictive behaviours on the education of young Territorians, the department recognises the importance of the collective work between relevant government and non-government agencies as being critical to our response to addictive behaviours.

The department will continue to:

- implement the Indigenous Education Strategy
- implement the NT Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour and the NT Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum
- support student transition points through implementation of FaFT, the Middle Years approach and VET programs
- be proactive in collaborating with other departments.

The department acknowledges the need for continual improvement in reducing the harm related to addictive behaviours, and has identified the following areas of improvement into the future:

- ensuring that all students have access to consistent and sequential drug education
- providing evidence based professional learning to school staff to enhance the delivery of the Australian Curriculum, in particular the General Capabilities and Health and Physical Education Learning Area
- improved referral options to support students impacted by substance abuse
- increased information sharing to better inform and prioritise departmental efforts.

¹⁴ Meyer, Cahill, Principles for school drug education, Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training 2004
<http://apo.org.au/system/files/33720/apo-nid33720-7796.pdf>

Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

The development of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE) learning area was informed by extensive current research into best-practice teaching and learning. It supports a strengths-based approach to drug education, focussing on the capabilities, competencies, values and hopes of all students, regardless of their current circumstances, to optimise their own health and that of others. Alcohol and other drugs is a focus area for Foundation to Year 10 and is represented through the AC: HPE achievement standards below.

Year Level	Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Relevant Elements of the Achievement Standard
Foundation / Transition	Students use personal and social skills to include others in a range of activities. They demonstrate, with guidance, practices and protective behaviours to keep themselves safe and healthy in different activities. They recognise actions that help them be healthy and safe.
Years 1 and 2	Students demonstrate positive ways to interact with others. They select and apply strategies to keep themselves healthy and safe and are able to ask for help with tasks or problems. They examine messages related to health decisions and describe actions that help keep themselves and others healthy and safe.
Years 3 and 4	Students interpret health messages and discuss the influences on healthy and safe choices. They use decision-making and problem solving skills to select and demonstrate strategies that help them stay safe and healthy.
Years 5 and 6	Students access and interpret health information and apply decision-making and problem-solving skills to enhance their own and others' health, safety and wellbeing.
Years 7 and 8	Students investigate strategies and practices that enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing. They apply personal and social skills to establish and maintain respectful relationships. Students demonstrate skills to make informed decisions, and propose and implement actions that promote their own and others' health, safety and wellbeing.
Years 9 and 10	Students critically analyse contextual factors that influence their identities, relationships, decisions and behaviours. They analyse the impact attitudes and beliefs about diversity have on community connections and wellbeing. Students access, synthesise and apply health information from credible sources to propose and justify responses to health situations. They apply decision-making and problem-solving skills when taking action to enhance their own and others' health, safety and wellbeing.

Australian Curriculum: General Capabilities

The general capabilities most relevant to harm reduction and addictive behaviours include:

Personal and social capability: Through this capability students develop the skills to manage themselves and feel positive about the world around them. Students develop self-discipline, confidence, and resilience, and learn to recognise and express emotions, relate to others, resolve conflict and make decisions.

Critical and creative thinking: Through this capability students develop the skills to clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems. Students learn to pose questions, reflect, apply logic and reasoning, draw conclusions and design a course of action.

Ethical understanding: Through this capability students develop skills identify ethical concepts and to develop a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook. Students learn to manage context, conflict and uncertainty, consider consequences and reflect on ethical action.

Drug Education Resources

The table below outlines a number of resources available to teachers and schools:

Principles for School Drug Education http://apo.org.au/system/files/33720/apo-nid33720-7796.pdf
National Drug Strategy www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/
National Drugs Campaign http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/
Australian Drug Information Network http://www.adin.com.au/content.asp?Document_ID=1
Australian Drug Foundation www.adf.org.au/
Healthy Spirit Healthy Community: A guide to drugs and alcohol in our community http://adf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NSWHEALTH_BOOKLET_13-Updated-03.02.17-1.pdf
Learning from each other: Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People http://www.dovetail.org.au/media/98715/guide%2004%20learning%20from%20each%20other.pdf
Get Ready – Drug Education in Victorian Schools (DEVS) project https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Search/Results?AssociatedPackageId=&QueryText=get+ready&SearchScope=All
School Drug Education and Road Aware (SDERA) - Government of Western Australia http://www.sdera.wa.edu.au/resources/
The Other Talk http://theothertalk.org.au/
Tune In Not Out http://www.tuneinnotout.com/topics/alcohol-other-drugs/
Your Room http://yourroom.com.au/
Your Guide to Dealing with Teenagers and Grog http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources/?lid=21271
Alcohol and Safety: Look After Your Family and Friends http://thumbsup.org.au/alcohol-and-drugs-resources/physical-resources/
Alcohol and your body - animated DVD http://www.adac.org.au/alcDVD/alcoholDVD.php
Tackling Indigenous Smoking Portal http://www.aodknowledgecentre.net.au/aodkc/aodkc-tobacco/tackling-indigenous-smoking/
Tobacco: A case for action https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stratman/Policy/schoolgov/druged/tobaccolegalcase.pdf
Smarter than Smoking http://www.smarterthansmoking.org.au/
No Smokes http://quit.nosmokes.com.au/
Starting to Smoke: Experiences of Indigenous Youth – The Lowitja Institute & Menzies Health https://www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/Starting%20to%20Smoke-FINALweb.pdf