



THE HON CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

21 June 2007

CP71/07

Drug Action Week – Future for Indigenous communities

A collective approach to tackling drug and alcohol abuse was vital to improving the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Minister responsible for illicit drug policy, Christopher Pyne, said today.

Mr Pyne used the fourth day of Drug Action Week to reiterate the Australian Government's commitment to working with Indigenous people to find solutions to drug and alcohol abuse.

“The release last week of the Northern Territory Government's *Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse* highlights the devastating impact that alcohol is having on some Indigenous communities,” Mr Pyne said.

“Substance abuse continues to harm many Indigenous communities, and achieving improvements in this area will require the shared commitment of these communities, along with government and non-government agencies.

“Up to about 50 per cent of all Indigenous people who drink do so at harmful levels, compared with up to 34 per cent for other Australians.

“Individuals as well as entire communities have had to bear the brunt of alcohol and drug-related violence, so it is important we involve those communities in finding a lasting solution.

“Some improvements have been made since the introduction of the \$10.5 million *Tough on Drugs* Indigenous Communities Initiative, which is part of a \$20 million package to tackle violence and child abuse in Indigenous communities.

“This initiative received a \$14.6 million boost in the 2007-08 Budget to further help Indigenous communities develop local solutions to alcohol and drug abuse as well as other problems that contribute to violence in those communities,” Mr Pyne said.

“The *Tough on Drugs* Indigenous Communities Initiative has been operating for the past four years, providing much-needed funding for a wide variety of projects to tackle the problems associated with substance abuse.

“Petrol sniffing in particular has been a difficult issue for Aboriginal communities to deal with, particularly in central Australia.

“However, there are strong indications that the Government's program to combat petrol sniffing is producing good results. The widespread introduction of non-sniffable Opal

unleaded fuel throughout central Australia has driven down sniffing rates by 80 per cent in some communities.

“These are great outcomes but we must continue to be vigilant and guard against other forms of substance abuse.”

Mr Pyne said Indigenous communities in designated regions would also benefit from the \$55.2 million allocated in the 2006-07 federal Budget *Reducing Substance Abuse (Petrol Sniffing)* initiative.

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