



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

Tony Abbott MHR

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Kava abuse

The Commonwealth Government has asked the Northern Territory Government to review its regulations on the use of kava, following evidence that this intoxicant is being abused in some remote Indigenous communities.

Pacific Islanders throughout Australia use kava but in the NT kava is consumed by some Indigenous communities at up to 100 times the usual rate. At least eight communities in Arnhem Land, comprising about 7,700 people, have identified significant kava use as a problem.

Heavy use of kava can cause weight loss, malnutrition, liver damage, hypertension and skin disorders.

The *1997 National Code of Kava Management* restricts the sale and advertising of kava. Current NT law allows kava to be consumed as long as permission is given by the Northern Territory Treasury's Racing, Gaming and Licensing Division and a community kava management plan regulates such matters as hours of sale. In Western Australia, by comparison, the sale and use of kava is banned except for specific cultural events, notably for ceremonies and celebrations by Pacific Islander peoples.

The Government is determined to work with all state and territory governments to tackle substance abuse.

For more information call Mr Abbott's office on ph 02 6277 7220.