

3 December 2020

## Statement in opposition to proposed Dan Murphy's, Darwin

I write this statement in opposition to the proposed Dan Murphy's development on McMillans Road in Darwin, Northern Territory.

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory (NT). AMSANT has been established for over 25 years and has a major policy and advocacy role at the NT and national levels. Our 26 members are located right across the NT from Darwin to the most remote areas. The ACCHSs sector is the largest provider of primary health care to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. ACCHSs deliver comprehensive primary health care in an integrated, holistic, culturally secure framework which combines a population health approach with primary health care service delivery; in addition, ACCHSs are also involved in diverse health research activities. AMSANT provides guidance and advocacy on a wide range of research, public health issues, education, workforce, continual quality improvement programs, social and emotional wellbeing, housing and other determinants of health that affect NT Aboriginal people. AMSANT has high level collaborations with the NT and Commonwealth Governments on these issues.

For decades, AMSANT has been a strong voice for our people in speaking up about the devastating harm caused by alcohol. Too many people, including some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community, are affected by alcohol-related harms.

Drinking is not inherently an Aboriginal problem. But there are compounding factors that adversely impact upon Aboriginal people that cannot be separated from the conversation about alcohol-related harm. Intergenerational trauma; the ongoing impacts of colonisation; entrenched poverty and disadvantage; and discriminatory government policy that serves to disempower people and disconnect people from their rights to their land, culture and language are factors that impact on the social, emotional and physical wellbeing of our people.

Whilst Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to abstain from alcohol altogether, of the Aboriginal people who do drink, it is more likely that they drink at harmful levels. A comprehensive study done in 2010 found that alcohol related deaths in the NT were 3.5 times the national average whilst hospitalisations were double the national rate. In Aboriginal people, death rates were 9-10 times higher than the national average – indicating a devastating impact on our communities.<sup>1</sup> The economic impact is also huge with a Menzies School of Health Research study finding that alcohol costs the NT \$1.387 million which includes \$701 million dollars of tangible costs and \$686 million dollars of indirect costs. This is clearly a huge burden for a small jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Skov, Steven J., Chikritzhs, Tanya N., Li, Shu Q., Pircher, Sabine and Whetton, Steven (2010) How much is too much? Alcohol consumption and related harm in the Northern Territory. *Medical Journal of Australia* 193 (5): 269-272.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, J., Whetton, S. & d'Abbs, P. (2019). *The social and economic costs and harms of alcohol consumption in the NT*. Darwin, Menzies School of Health Research

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Alcohol and substance misuse has been associated with intergenerational and other types of trauma, including childhood trauma. Alcohol often becomes a coping mechanism for dealing with unresolved trauma and psychological stress.

Alcohol misuse impacts on children as the most vulnerable members of our community. Parental alcohol misuse is frequently associated with lack of responsive care, stimulation and neglect of children during their critical early years. Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy can result in developmental vulnerabilities, which may include (but not limited to) Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Whilst there are not yet reliable data on the prevalence of FASD in Australia, there is an established high prevalence of developmental vulnerability in children across the Northern Territory which can no doubt be in part attributed to FASD, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed. Parental neglect in early childhood will also worsen cognitive and social outcomes.

Alcohol rips families apart. Alcohol is a well-known contributor to domestic and family violence and this is especially dire for Aboriginal families. Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be hospitalised as a result of family violence. Aboriginal men are also far more likely than non-Aboriginal men to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.<sup>3</sup>

In Darwin, where it is proposed this new Dan Murphy's be built, the number of alcohol-related domestic violence offences has *increased* over the last 10 years, whilst in other parts of the Northern Territory such offences have seen a marked *decrease*.<sup>4</sup>

We don't need more alcohol-related violence in our community.

We don't need more domestic and family violence.

We don't need more FASD.

We don't need more access to alcohol as a tool for people to cope with past and ongoing trauma.

AMSANT opposes the proposed Dan Murphy's development on McMillan's Road, or in this general vicinity.

We cannot state this any clearer than we already have, and will continue to state our opposition as long as we need to.

Yours sincerely,



John Paterson  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>3</sup> ANROWS (2019). *Fast Facts: Indigenous Family Violence*. Accessed 2 December 2020: <https://www.anrows.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Fast-Facts-Indigenous-family-violence.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Northern Territory Government (2020). Domestic violence alcohol-related assaults. *Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Reform*. Accessed 2 December 2020: <https://alcoholreform.nt.gov.au/data-and-evaluation/domestic-violence-alcohol-related-assaults>