

ALCOHOL POLICIES AND LEGISLATION REVIEW IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Department of Education input

Alcohol misuse and alcohol-related harm impact on a child's access to education opportunities. The Department of Education supports students whose lives are affected by alcohol misuse through a focus on education and awareness, ensuring student's health and wellbeing, and keeping students engaged in schooling. The department's role is limited, however, and would strongly support the development of a broader integrated framework which addresses impact on individuals, families and communities.

An outline of the Department's current initiatives that directly and indirectly relate to alcohol misuse is outlined below.

Delivery of Alcohol and Other Drug education in schools linked to the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum Health and Physical Education curriculum includes a focus area dedicated to alcohol and other drugs. It addresses a range of drugs (including alcohol), prescription drugs, alternative medicine, caffeine, tobacco, illegal drugs and performance-enhancing drugs.

The Alcohol and Other Drugs focus area supports students to explore the impact drugs can have. The curriculum has a strong focus on supporting students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills they require to make healthy, safe and active choices that will enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing. All students from Transition to Year 10 will learn about the following:

- safe use of medicines
- alternatives to taking medicines
- the effect of drugs on the body (including energy drinks and caffeine)
- factors that influence the use of different types of drugs
- impact of drug use on individuals and communities
- making informed decisions about drugs (including an awareness of assertive behaviour, peer influence, harm minimisation, blood-borne viruses)
- performance-enhancing drugs in sport.

In the senior years, drug education programs address dealing with challenging or unsafe situations and harm minimisation. More broadly, the general capabilities learnt within the Australian Curriculum, particularly *Personal and Social Capability* and *Ethical Understanding* play a significant role in equipping young people to live and work successfully in complex and changing circumstances of the twenty-first century. This is further detailed below:

- *Personal and social capability*: Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and a sense of self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world around them.
- *Ethical understanding*: Students identify and investigate the nature of ethical concepts, values and character traits, and understand how reasoning can assist ethical judgement. Ethical understanding involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented

ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others

School Counsellors

There are 28 school counsellors across NT government schools who work in collaboration with school leaders and wellbeing team members to promote and respond to the mental health and social emotional wellbeing of students and their school communities.

School counsellors are based in schools and regional offices and provide services to clusters of schools located within their proximity. A central NT-wide senior supervising school counsellor provides supervision, professional support and development and intervention strategies to all the other school counsellors.

The Department is currently undertaking an independent study of school counsellors to determine the right number and placement of counsellors in NT government schools to ensure that critical support is provided to areas of most need.

Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program

FaFT is currently being delivered in 32 remote, very remote and urban communities across the Northern Territory. FaFT is a key early intervention program delivered to vulnerable and disadvantaged children aged from birth to the year before they commence preschool, and their families. The program works in partnership with a range of support programs to enhance the lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes of young children and ensure that parents and carers remain engaged in, and support their children's learning and development from birth.

The program strengthens parent engagement and builds strong relationships between families and wellbeing support services. FaFT programs are being enhanced through the development of a Social and Emotional Learning curriculum for children aged 0-4 years and the progressive roll out of an early years development assessment tool specifically modified for Aboriginal families (Ages and Stages Questionnaire: ASQ-TRAK).

Supporting students with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD)

The Issues Paper notes feedback from health workers, educators and communities which indicate a high incidence of FASD in the NT.

As at Semester 1 2017, 81 students in NT government schools have been diagnosed with FASD and are being supported through special education support programs. Students with FASD are assigned an education advisor who work with the school to provide professional learning for the whole school or targeted staff, and advise on strategies to use when developing education adjustment plans so that the students can access appropriate learning. Teachers of students with FASD work closely with families, regional advisory staff and relevant health professionals to provide appropriate learning support to the student in the classroom.

NT Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

Children and young people with higher resiliency are more likely to thrive in learning and achieve greater educational outcomes. A whole-of-system approach to social and emotional learning and a positive behaviour framework is being trialled in NT government schools throughout 2016 - 2018. The social and emotional learning curriculum is being adapted to the NT context and includes trauma informed, strengths based, culturally responsive, relationships based and community engaged principles and practices.

Engagement Programs

The department provides engagement programs to support student engagement and positive learning outcomes. Programs are aimed at disengaged and 'at risk' students to assist them to return to mainstream schooling or progress to employment or further training. Key programs are:

- *Healthy Life, Creative Life* will enable students to return to mainstream schooling or progress to a job or training through re-engagement activities such as sport, creative arts, social and emotional learning, culture, language and learning on country
- *Malak Re-Engagement Centre* provides flexible learning pathways to help students with high level learning, behavioural and wellbeing needs to re-engage in schooling or transition to employment/training
- *Clontarf Foundation* operate school-based academies for Indigenous boys, providing mentoring and support to attract and maintain engagement until year 12
- *Role Models and Leaders Australia* and *Stars Foundation* operate similar school-based academies for Indigenous girls, providing mentoring and support until year 12.

Key considerations

Young people need the opportunity to develop skills and understanding of challenging or unsafe situations and harm minimisation.

However, school staff regularly identify that a crowded curriculum results in difficulties delivering all Australian Curriculum content. Additional resources to increase professional learning and support for school staff would help to build skills and knowledge of the importance of delivering integrated evidence based health (including drug) education programs across all stages of schooling.

Increased capacity is required to support schools in the delivery of consistent and sequential evidence based health education programs, including drug and alcohol education, which helps to build students' knowledge, understanding and skills required to make informed and positive lifestyle choices. In particular, the consistent delivery of drug education programs each year will assist young people develop knowledge, understanding and skills to strengthen their sense of self, build and manage positive relationships, make decisions and take actions to promote their health and safety.