

Report urges simpler liquor permit management in communities

22 August, 2017

Liquor permit schemes in the Northern Territory (NT) can be made easier to implement and more accountable to local communities, a NT Government-commissioned report has found.

The review, led by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) researcher Professor Peter d'Abbs, and private consultant Dr Ian Crundall, evaluated the uptake and success of liquor permit schemes since their inception in 1981.

Under the *NT Liquor Act*, communities that choose to restrict access to liquor have the option of recommending that permits be issued to approved individuals, subject to conditions specified by the communities.

Although they require formal approval by the Director-General of Licensing, liquor permits are intended as a community-based measure.

They are unrelated to the Banned Drinker Register or other restrictions placed on drinkers. More than 20 communities in the NT operate liquor permit schemes.

Professor d'Abbs said the review found that, in practice, two kinds of liquor permit schemes had evolved over time.

"In some communities, permits are a mechanism that allows staff employed in remote communities – mainly non-Aboriginal staff – to bring liquor into an otherwise 'dry' community and consume it in their own homes," Prof d'Abbs said.

The review found that in most instances there was little or no community input into these schemes, with responsibility falling by default to local police, who operated without guidelines or administrative support.

"In some of these communities this has led to resentment at perceived double-standards for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal drinkers, and a perceived lack of transparency on the part of police," Prof d'Abbs said.

"In the second type of scheme, liquor permits are a central mechanism for managing purchases of takeaway alcohol. In these communities, takeaway alcohol cannot be purchased without a permit, which in turn requires endorsement by a local Liquor Permit Committee."

The review found that this type of scheme had contributed to a reduction in alcohol-related problems and enjoyed broad community support. However, the schemes had become administratively cumbersome.

The report recommends the introduction of police guidelines, and other measures aimed at simplifying the administration of permit schemes.

“The research team hopes that the review will not only contribute to overcoming flaws in existing liquor permit schemes, but also provide useful evidence and guidelines for other communities that might introduce similar schemes in the future,” Prof d’Abbs said.

The review (available on the links below) has been released in two parts:-

1. [Liquor permits as a measure for controlling alcohol problems: a literature review](#)
2. [Review of Liquor Permit schemes under the NT Liquor Act. Final Report](#)

- ENDS

Media contact:

Paul Dale, senior communications officer

Phone: 0439 108 754 or (08) 8946 8685 | Email: communications@menzies.edu.au

Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.