

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)

MEDIA RELEASE

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APO NT calls for urgent Commonwealth support as the NT COVID response falters

Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) today called for urgent action from the Commonwealth Government in the face of a growing emergency in the COVID-19 response in the Northern Territory.

“Despite a lot of hard work and good collaboration on the part of government and Aboriginal community sector organisations, the haste towards living with COVID is pushing the health system, Aboriginal community service organisations and the communities they serve to the brink”, APO NT spokesperson, John Paterson said.

“We need urgent direct support from the Commonwealth Government”.

“The multiple outbreaks we are now seeing in remote communities and in our towns have been fuelled by a critical shortage of workforce, testing and logistical capacity that is overwhelming local health services and exhausted staff, leading to rapid, avoidable spread of the virus”.

“Critical shortages in availability of Rapid Antigen Tests is leaving Aboriginal health and community service organisations with insufficient capacity to test their own staff, let alone the needs of the community members they serve. The result is that infected individuals are not being identified and are spreading the virus undetected.

“The dispute between the NT Government and the Commonwealth over who is responsible for providing RAT tests must be resolved and sufficient stocks made available to communities free of charge without delay”.

“Without access to RAT tests, free of charge, vulnerable communities and community members remain exposed and unprotected”.

“The health system response is also facing critical transport, logistical and isolation capacity shortfalls, meaning that infected people are not removed into isolation rapidly or are being left to isolate in overcrowded and inadequate accommodation”.

“We need to see infected people rapidly moved into adequate, supported isolation accommodation”.

“Recent outbreaks across different custodial and other centres serving vulnerable populations such as dialysis accommodation and aged care, is further cause for concern and requires urgent action to improve access to testing, isolation and treatment”.

“A critical health workforce shortage is also slowing efforts to improve vaccination rates, with primary doses ongoing and the urgent need to provide boosters and the commencement of vaccinations of 5-11 year olds stretching vaccination teams”.

“A surge workforce is urgently needed to deal with the current crisis”.

“Concern is also being raised at the local level about a looming food security crisis”.

“The Commonwealth Government, including through the specialised capacities of the Australian Defence Force, must be requested to bolster the overstretched capacities of the NT Government and Aboriginal community controlled organisations”.

“This is the time, when the essential elements of the COVID response are faltering, to enlist the direct support of the Commonwealth and Defence Force to assist in critical areas of the response”.

“This can include transport and logistics, emergency isolation accommodation, and clinical support teams, including doctors and nurses etc. – that can make the difference between success or failure”.

“APO NT is only too aware that the high price to be paid for failing will fall heavily on our communities and those most at risk”, Mr Paterson concluded.

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