



**Central Australian  
Aboriginal Congress**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION | ICN 7823

**Donna Ah Chee Address to the Public Hearing of the  
Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job  
Opportunities in the Northern Territory  
9 December 2022, Alice Springs**

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Good morning Committee Members,

Thank you for inviting me to address you.

I have some exhibits here which will support what I am saying this morning.

Congress is a large Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service based in Alice Springs.

We are one of the most experienced organisations in the country in Aboriginal health, a national leader in primary health care, and a strong advocate for the health of our people.

We deliver services to more than 17,000 Aboriginal people living in Alice Springs and remote communities across Central Australia.

We have long been an advocate for the prevention of family violence in the communities we serve.

Family violence has many complex causes (please refer to Figure 1 of the Exhibits attached).

Some of the drivers of family violence are specific to our First Nations experience of colonisation; others are common to other populations experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage.

What is clear to us is the strong link between the unrestricted availability of alcohol and family violence.

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**Aboriginal health  
in Aboriginal hands.**

This is something Aboriginal people have understood through our own experience over many years.

Of course alcohol is not the only cause of family violence: there are many causes.

However, it is vital that the concept of many interacting causes for complex social problems is properly understood.

If we keep the mindset that there is just one cause of family violence, we will stay in what I call the “either/or” rather than the “both/and” approach that is needed.

We need to address all of the causes outlined in this diagram if we are to significantly reduce family violence.

For this reason, Congress has advocated for many years for restrictions on the availability of alcohol in the Northern Territory.

Over many years successive Northern Territory governments have made attempts to reduce the flow of alcohol in Central Australia.

This began in 2006 with the introduction of the Alice Springs Liquor supply plan.

The Banned Drinker register began in 2011 and after a period of a few years when it was removed, was re-introduced in 2017 along with a range of other important measures from the Riley review.

In 2018, the Northern Territory Government listened to our concerns again and those of many other Aboriginal organisations and communities, as well as the evidence around the world.

They introduced a package of alcohol reforms that included a floor price to prevent the sale of cheap alcohol; and Police Auxiliary Licensing Inspectors or PALIs at takeaway outlets in three regional centres, including Alice Springs.

The PALIs required those purchasing take away alcohol to show a residential address that is not on alcohol-prohibited land.

What became clear is the need to ensure that all take-away outlets are covered all of the time for this measure to be effective.

It was very noticeable to people in Alice Springs that when the outlets were not fully covered, public drunkenness and alcohol harm went up immediately.

The results of the new measures introduced on 1 October 2018 were immediate and dramatic (refer to Figure 2 in the Exhibit).

The alcohol reforms led to a significant decrease in the amount of alcohol sold in Alice Springs, which fell by 8%.

They were very effective in reducing the sale of the cheapest and most dangerous forms of alcohol – cask wine and low quality bottled wine.

The results of less alcohol flowing in Alice Springs was seen in the 41% fall in the number of alcohol-related emergency department presentations at Alice Springs Hospital.

Alice Springs also saw 220 fewer domestic violence assaults in the year after the introduction of the reforms, a fall of 22% (see Figure 3).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 had a very significant effect, with domestic violence assaults increasing markedly.

This is consistent with other research showing that the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with increases in family violence all over the world.

However, just when the worst of the pandemic was receding and we were hoping we could return to a more peaceful town, the Stronger Futures provisions on Alcohol Protected Areas expired.

This happened following a period since March when there were many vacant PALI positions and therefore many take-away alcohol outlets had no PALIs on them.

In May of this year we wrote to the NT Chief Minister warning that unless her Government took action to protect the communities and town camps covered by Stronger Futures, many of the gains from the alcohol reforms would be lost.

Unfortunately, we were right and the price is being paid primarily by Aboriginal women and families (please see Figure 4).

Across the Northern Territory, there was an immediate and significant increase in the number of alcohol related assaults, and the number of domestic violence assaults where alcohol was involved.

The proportion of assaults where alcohol was involved also increased.

The Northern Territory Government has made it clear that they will not return to a 'race-based' policy where access to alcohol is different depending on whether you live on Aboriginal land or not.

Congress has fought racial discrimination since we began in 1973.

But Aboriginal women and families also have the right to conduct their lives free of alcohol-fuelled violence.

This is a fundamental human right which helps to ensure that the next generation of children can develop free from the family violence that we know is so harmful to healthy brain development.

Put simply, children repeatedly exposed to violence in their early years do not develop in a healthy way.

They suffer from the stress and trauma created by violence which then stops the healthy development of their young brains.

Such children often suffer from a range of developmental issues including with emotional regulation, impulse control and cognitive development.

Young children have a right to expect to be protected from these impacts of preventable violence.

We expect government to be sophisticated enough to be able to balance these rights in the best interests of the most vulnerable.

We are now waiting for a response from the Northern Territory Government: now they have let the genie out of the bottle, how are they going to get it back in again?

Thank you for your time.

I am now happy to answer questions.



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## **EXHIBITS FOR**

**DONNA AH CHEE (Central Australian Aboriginal Congress CEO)**

**presentation at the Public Hearing of the**

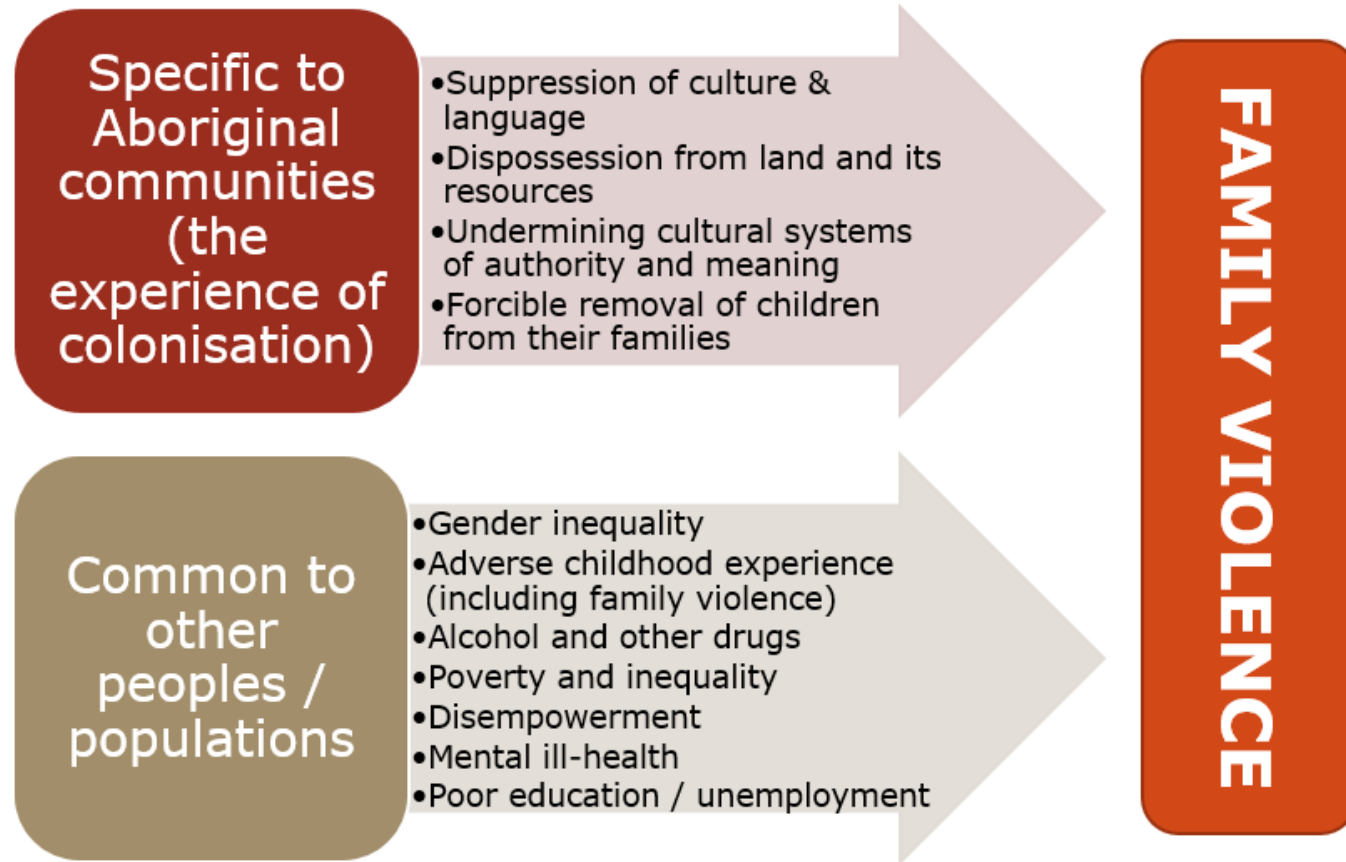
*Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs*

*Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services & Job Opportunities in the Northern Territory*

**Alice Springs – 9 December 2022**

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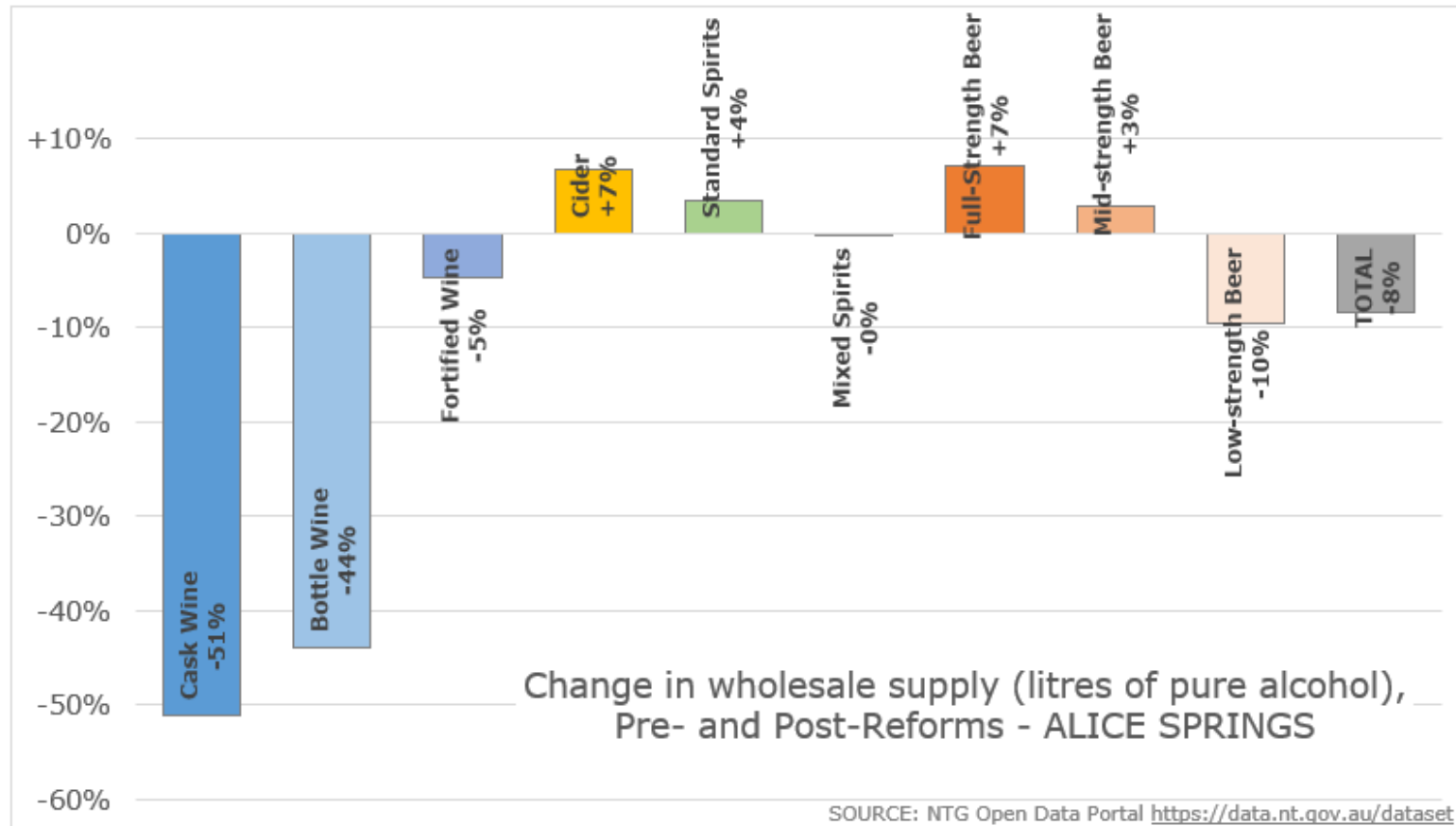
**FIGURE 1: An ecological model of the drivers of family violence in Aboriginal communities**



Adapted from Olsen A and Lovett R, *Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities: State of knowledge paper*. 2016, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS): Sydney

**There is no simple, single systemic cause of Aboriginal family violence.** Many factors contribute, some of them specific to the experience of Aboriginal peoples of the processes of colonisation; others are common to other populations experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage.

**FIGURE 2: THE EFFECT OF THE ALCOHOL REFORMS ON SUPPLY**

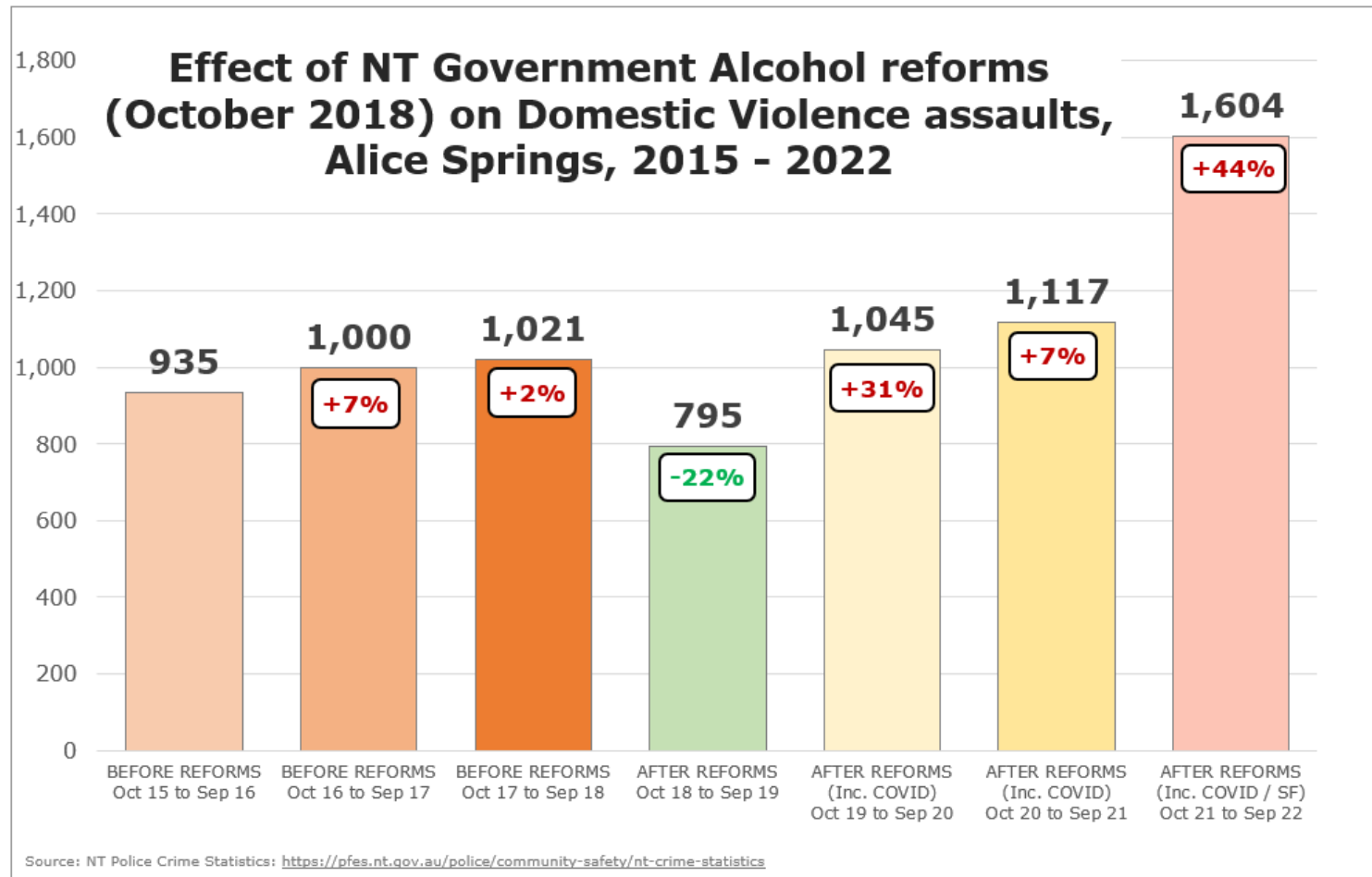


The Northern Territory Government’s package of alcohol reforms introduced in October 2018 led to a **significant decrease in the amount of alcohol sold in Alice Springs, down 8%** (grey bar at right), comparing the year immediately before the reforms and the year immediately after the reforms.

The reforms (which included a world-leading Minimum Unit Price on alcohol) were particular effective in reducing the sale of the cheapest and most dangerous forms of alcohol – cask wine and low quality bottled wine (blue bars at left).



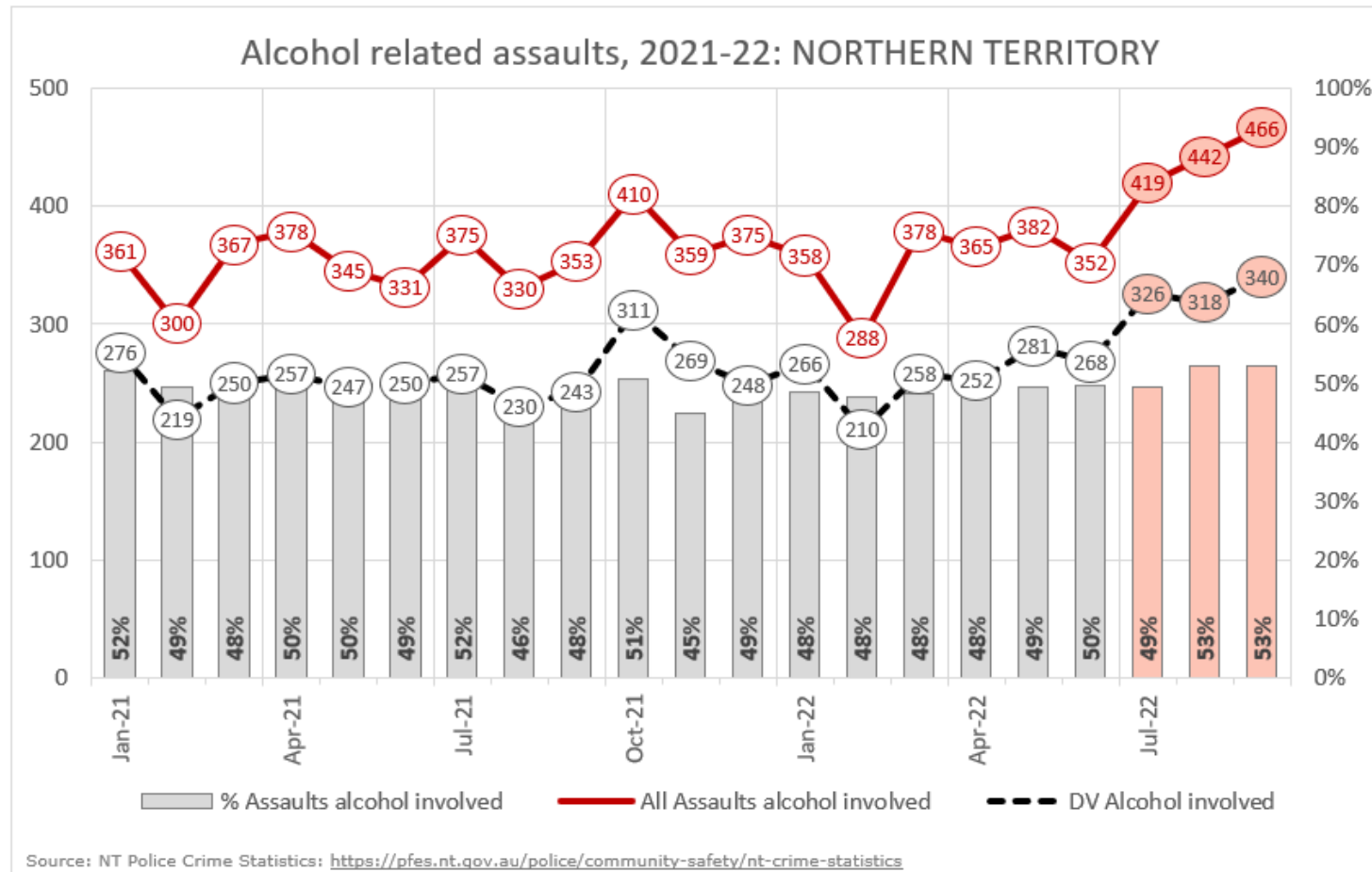
**FIGURE 3**



The decrease in alcohol availability led to dramatic decreases in alcohol related harm in Alice Springs. This graph shows how **Domestic Violence assaults decreased by 22%** in the year after the introduction of the Alcohol Reforms (green bar).

Unfortunately, as seen across the world, the effect of COVID has been to increase the frequency of Domestic Violence.

**FIGURE 4**



This graph shows the effect of the expiry of the Strong Futures (Alcohol Protected Area) provisions in July 2022 across the Northern Territory. There was **an immediate and significant increase in the number of alcohol related assaults and the number of DV assaults where alcohol was involved** (red shaded bubbles). The proportion of assaults where alcohol was involved also increased (red bars).