

The Australian (illicit) drug policy timeline: 1985-2013

The Australian (illicit) drug policy timeline provides a list of key events, policy and legislative changes that have occurred in Australia between 1985 and February 28 2013. Events are listed by jurisdiction, at the national and state/ territory level. All events added in the last six months are highlighted in blue.

Here we list events in the **Northern Territory only**. For events in other jurisdictions please see the relevant timeline.

DPMP will continue to update the timeline every June and December. Please feel free to email through any comments or suggested inclusions.

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Year	Northern Territory
2012	<p>The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) announced that the NT Government had agreed to fund a peak AOD body for the NT: the Alcohol and Other Drugs Association of the Northern Territory (AADANT) (Jan 31).</p> <p><i>Justice (Corrections) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2011</i> entered into operation. This introduced two new sentencing options: Community Custody and Community-Based Orders. This gave the Courts the power to order offenders into rehabilitation, education and training, and community work programs as an alternative to imprisonment (Feb).</p> <p>The NT adopted into law the new Poisons Standard (SUSMP) under the <i>Therapeutic Goods Act 1989</i>, including the Schedule 9 prohibition of synthetic cannabinomimetics: <i>Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2012</i> (Apr).</p> <p>NT Country Liberal Party elected, under Chief Minister Terry Mills (after 11 years of labor rule). Key policy platforms included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory drug testing for anybody arrested for an assault on or about a licensed premise; • Tougher bail conditions for any crime that poses a risk to the general public; • Tougher penalties for offenders who breach bail (Aug 27). <p>The Australian Medical Association's Northern Territory branch says it would consider supporting the decriminalisation of a range of drugs (Sep).</p> <p>The Alcohol and Other Drugs Association of the Northern Territory (AADANT) became an incorporated body and held their first Policy Forum for the AOD Sector (Nov 30).</p> <p>NT Mini-Budget 2012-2013 released. Revealed intent to abolish the Smart Court and the Alcohol and other Drug Tribunal (as a means of saving funds) (Dec).</p> <p>NT Police seized crystal methamphetamine, steroids and 362 tablets containing PMMA and arrested three males in connection with a suspected drug syndicate that was sourcing drugs from a Sydney-based Middle Eastern crime group and selling them out of a Darwin hotel room. The PMMA tablets were being marketed as 'ecstasy' (Dec).</p>
2011	<p>The Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS) initiated moves to establish a formal AOD Peak for the Northern Territory: the Alcohol and Other Drugs Association of the Northern Territory (AADANT).</p> <p>NT Drug Summit: "Forging the Future – Practical Responses to Contemporary Issues" (Apr 13).</p> <p>A large two day police operation in the aim of deterring drug and alcohol distribution to the Northern Territory resulted in the seizure of \$2385 in cash and 367 grams of cannabis. Operation revolved around 48 hr road blocks on both Larapinta Drive and the Tanami Highway and was undertaken by the Alice Springs Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk, Drug Intelligence Unit and Dog Operations Unit, members of the Darwin Remote Community Drug Desk and Hermannsburg Police and Southern Traffic operations (May).</p> <p>Regulations amending the <i>Misuse of Drugs Act</i> banned a total of 18 substances used to manufacture synthetic cannabis (including Kronic) (12 Aug)</p> <p>A further five substances were added to the banned list of synthetic cannabis (31 Aug).</p> <p>NT Attorney General released the "Review of the Northern Territory Youth Justice System." Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NT youth offending is trending upwards in a number of areas • The no. of young people involved in the justice system is small but is increasing. • Young people in detention are more likely to be on remand than serving sentences <p>Key recommendations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investment in police diversion, and expand diversion programs • Establish a new unit with responsibility for administering all youth justice system services • Develop a new youth justice strategy (Oct).
2010	<p>Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk targeted cannabis and amphetamine trafficking on major routes and highways entering and exiting the Northern Territory.</p> <p>Review of the Alcohol and Other Drug Service Components of the Northern Territory Emergency Response - Final Report released. This noted that while the Northern Territory Intervention (introduced 21 June 2007) expanded some AOD services due to fears that it would lead to more demand for AOD detoxification/services, there</p>

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	<p>were a number of problems with the process. Key problems included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of involvement of the NGO sector in the discussions. For example, while the AOD Working Group (established in Nov 2007) was consulted this did not include representation from this sector. • Swift timelines led to some poor decision making which was not in the best interest of the NT AOD services e.g. emphasis upon expansion rather than capacity of organisations. <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the operation of an independent peak body be funded for all AOD programs in the NT regardless of the nature of the organisation in which they operate. <p>That a long term cooperative plan for the development of AOD services in the Northern Territory be developed (May).</p>
2009	<p>The Prison In-Reach Program commenced at Darwin Correctional Centre. The program consists of five multi-disciplinary team members who offer comprehensive alcohol and other drug assessments, intensive counseling, group work and aftercare support to all prisoners at DCC and the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre (Jan).</p> <p>New Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) and Drug Operation Unit (DOU) established in Katherine, in the goal of reducing cross-border supply of licit and illicit substances in the the Northern Regional Police Command, including East Arnhem, Nhulunbuy, Groote Eylandt and the Milingimbi areas. This followed the success of the first SAID established in Alice Springs (Feb).</p> <p>Northern Territory Government announced a "new era in corrections". Key to this was the development of a new Darwin Correctional Precinct that would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an 800 bed Correctional Centre with additional capacity for a further 200 beds; • a 30 bed Secure Mental Health and Behavioural Management Facility (MHBMF); and • a 48 bed Supported Accommodation and Program Centre for community based offenders (Feb). <p>Following an internal departmental review the Opioid Pharmacotherapy Program and withdrawal treatment services introduced a new time effective treatment approach to case management. Under the new approach clients attend an eight-session relapse prevention program followed by a four-session coping skills program.</p> <p>Completion of \$4M capital redevelopment of Banyan House. This enabled the centre that was first established in 1978 to be converted into a modern residential rehabilitation centre.</p> <p>New arrangements to support withdrawal service options introduced in Alice Springs. These arrangements were based on a partnership between Drug and Alcohol Services Association (DASA) and Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Central Australia (ADSCA) in the aim of streamlining referral pathways, enhancing medical supervision and support and assisting clients to access services they need.</p>
2008	<p>NT Government adopted roadside drug testing for cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy (Feb).</p> <p>Federal Government provided \$2 million in funds to expand drug detection dogs and establish a new drugs intelligence desk to assist in drug supply reduction efforts in Arnhem Land and the Katherine region (Mar).</p> <p>New research by Senior and Richard, published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health released: 'Lukumbat marawana: A changing pattern of drug use by youth in a remote Aboriginal community.' Found that the restrictions in the availability of alcohol and petrol (as part of the Commonwealth Northern Territory Intervention) led to increased use of marijuana (Mar).</p> <p>Study released showing rates of cannabis use during 2005-06 were three times higher in Arnhem land than in the general population, with 61% males and 58% females aged 13-36 reporting weekly use compared to 24% males and 21% females in the general population (May).</p> <p>Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill made trafficking drugs into remote communities an aggravated offence and increased the maximum penalty for from five years to nine years imprisonment (Jun).</p> <p>NTPFES Police report that the tri-state Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk had cracked a number of long-standing crime rings that ran cannabis from Adelaide into remote central Australia, selling at about 16 times the supply price.</p> <p>Partnerships were developed and/or enhanced between NT Health and Families and a number of service providers including Top End Mental Health Services, NT Families and Children, Aged and Disability, NT Police, Department of Justice and NT Correctional Services. Development and strengthening of these networks and partnerships was seen as a critical step in improving the effective delivery of services to all client groups affected by illicit drug use (2008-2009).</p>
2007	<p>Substance Abuse Committee formed to provide strategic advice (Jun).</p> <p>Northern Territory Intervention adopted. Included widespread alcohol restrictions, increased policing, medical examinations of all Indigenous children and reforms to welfare system (Jun).</p> <p>Legislation for Northern Territory Intervention passed - Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007 (Aug).</p> <p>The NT incorporated PSYCHECK into its clinical practice to improve screening and brief intervention for high prevalence mental health disorders in alcohol and other drug services.</p> <p>Establishment of an AOD Working Group (Nov).</p>
2006	<p>First Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) established in Alice Springs in a joint operation between the Commonwealth, Northern Territory, South Australian and Western Australian governments to coordinate and target the trafficking of licit and illicit substances/alcohol in the cross-border regions (Jan).</p>

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	NT Road Safety Taskforce Report 2006 found that the risk of being killed in the NT was 3 times greater than anywhere else in Australia and indeed greater than in all other nations in the developed world. 48% of fatal crashes were alcohol-related and a Drug-Use Monitoring in Australia pilot in NT indicated one in three people detained for driving offences tested positive to illicit drugs. Taskforce called for laws to test for drug-driving (Jun).
2005	Profile of Services and Interventions Project commissioned (Jan). Report on Profile of Services and Interventions released (Jul).
2004	<p>Alcohol and Other Drug Program convened forum for drug and alcohol treatment agencies to advise on the improvement of service delivery and outcomes (Mar).</p> <p>New NT health strategy adopted - "Building Healthier Communities: A framework for health and communities services 2004-2009." Framework had six priority areas included strengthening families and tackling substance abuse through increasing availability and quality of treatment services for substance abuse (Apr ???).</p> <p>Health Advisory Council established, chaired by Dr Charles Kilburn, as part of the Building Healthier Communities strategy. Council aimed to provide the NT health minister with community views on the effectiveness of current health (including drug and alcohol) policies/services, and issues of concern (Apr).</p> <p>Northern Territory Police Remote Communities Drug Strategy commenced (later named the Remote Area Drug Strategy). This was a proactive strategy targeting the supply of illicit drugs.</p> <p>Northern Territory Police Remote Community Drug Desk (RCDD) established to coordinate and implement the Remote Communities Drug Strategy. The RCDD is comprised of strategic officers of the Drug Enforcement Section who pool intelligence from local level policing initiatives and undertake strategic and tactical operations aimed at disrupting the distribution of drugs to and within remote communities (May).</p> <p>Drug Dog Detection Unit established within NT police (Dec).</p> <p>Release of the Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community Report: Confronting the Confusion and Disconnection. The report concluded that there were significant shortfalls in the Northern Territory Government's response to substance abuse, particularly within remote communities and that there was insufficient coordination for substance abuse for the three main substances of abuse: alcohol, petrol and cannabis. Key recommendations were to increase coordination between government agencies, to identify and address the gaps in service delivery and that a community audit be conducted to assess the needs, assets, resources and views of each remote community, with the goal of prioritizing future programs on the basis of the community audit.</p> <p>Drug detection dogs commenced operation (Dec).</p>
2003	<p>Margot Laughton, an Indigenous grandmother, became first person to have her home declared a drug premises. She was evicted from her Territory Housing unit in Darwin (Jan).</p> <p>CREDIT NT (Court Referral and Evaluation for Drug Intervention and Treatment, Northern Territory) introduced (May)</p> <p>A private member's bill – <i>Legislative Assembly Members (Random Drug Testing) Bill 2003</i> – was introduced to the NT Legislative Assembly by Mr Stephen Dunhum MLA. The bill sought mandatory annual illicit drug testing for members of the legislative assembly. Bill subsequently lapsed.</p> <p>Establishment of the NT Clinical Advisory Committee</p> <p><i>Criminal Property Forfeiture Act 2002</i> introduced, giving the DPP the power to apply to the court for an unexplained wealth declaration against a person, and reverse the onus of proof to prove assets are legally obtained. The act allows that assets from organized crime and drug trafficking to be seized, without need for conviction of criminal wrong doing.</p>
2002	<p>COAG-IDDI agreement signed (Jan)</p> <p>New user group established - Network Against Prohibition Northern Territory (NAPNT) (Mar).</p> <p>Report from Taskforce on Illicit Drugs. Concluded that compared to the rest of Australian the drug situation remained very distinct in NT. E.g. alcohol remained the major drug of concern. The Taskforce argued that the evidence on methadone was now substantial and strongly recommended amending the <i>NT Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act</i> to enable pharmacotherapies for the treatment of opioid dependence for maintenance and withdrawal. Other recommendations included better advertising of treatment services, more training of treatment personnel and that NSPs be expanded in the NT (May).</p> <p>Public Order and Anti-Social Conduct Act repealed (Jun).</p> <p><i>Misuse of Drugs Act</i> amended - introduced new rulings on drug premises orders. Enabled houses or business where there was evidence of supply or possession of drugs to be declared "drug premises" and for police to enter and search such premises and anyone on the premise without warrant for 12 months (Jul).</p> <p>Methadone maintenance program first provided in the Northern Territory, 33 years after methadone was first provided in Australia (Sep).</p> <p>Northern Territory Illicit Drug Pre-Court Diversion Program introduced (Dec).</p>
2001	<p>Labor party released three point tough on drugs election policy. Included zero tolerance on drug production and distribution, compulsory treatment for drug-related offenders and a drug prevention strategy (Mar).</p> <p>Country Liberal Party introduced Public Order and Anti-Social Conduct Act. Act gave police new powers to define, "move on" and arrest people for 'anti-social' behaviour and to signpost houses as anti-social (Jun).</p>

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	Change of government – NT election won by Labor party (Aug). Taskforce on Illicit Drugs established with the mandate of examining trends, and using national and international evidence to advise on the role of pharmacotherapy treatments and on the optimum responses for youth and other priority groups (Nov).
2000	The National Liberal Party proposed to extend mandatory sentencing to drug trafficking offences
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1997	Introduction of mandatory sentencing in NT for minor offences
1996	Cannabis expiation scheme introduced
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1990	Misuse of Drugs Act NT 1990 adopted. This entered into force in Nov.
1989	User group - Northern Territory Users Forum (TUF) formed First Needle and Syringe Exchange Program opened in NT
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