

Central Australia Response

Current issue

Alice Springs is experiencing serious rates of anti-social and criminal behaviour, as well as family violence and harmful use of alcohol.

- My Government is working in partnership with the Northern Territory (NT) Government and local communities to take action in response to the urgent challenges currently facing Alice Springs to deliver better outcomes.
- On 6 February 2023, we announced \$250 million to invest in a plan for a Better, Safer Future for Central Australia (Central Australia Plan). This includes:
 - \$50m for Central Australia community and regional infrastructure;
 - \$40.4m for On-Country Learning to improve school attendance, engagement and learning outcomes for First Nations students in Central Australian schools;
 - \$23.5m to expand the Child and Youth Assessment and Treatment Services and fund the building of a Health Hub in Alice Springs;
 - \$10m to support digital connectivity needs for First Nations people;
 - \$30m investment over four years to establish the Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership;
 - \$7.6m to support women and children experiencing domestic violence and expand temporary accommodation; and
 - \$30.2m over five years to establish up to seven Remote Training Hubs in Central Australia.
- My Government has established the Aboriginal Leadership Group to coordinate and guide implementation of the Plan. We will continue to work closely with local communities to design and prioritise proposals for the remaining funding.
- These announcements are in addition to the \$48.8 million investment in community safety announced on 24 January 2023, including \$25 million for funding certainty for frontline safety and community services and \$14.2 million for high visibility police and law enforcement operations.
- The Government welcomes the measures taken by the NT Government, including the temporary curfew in Alice Springs, to improve community safety after the widespread unrest on 26 March 2023.
- The Government will continue to work with the NT Government, local community and leadership for a better, safer future for Central Australia.

Key facts

- On 12 April 2024, Chief Minister Eva Lawler announced that the curfew would be extended to 16 April 2024, but extra high visibility policing will continue until the end of June. The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities will also have a presence in the Alice Spring CDB.
- On 27 March 2024, NT Chief Minister, Eva Lawler announced:
 - a youth curfew will be in place for under 18 year olds from 27 March 2024, 6pm to 6am for a period of two weeks;
 - 58 police will be deployed from Alice Springs; and
 - the 16 police auxiliary liquor inspectors that were removed are now being reinstated.
- New NT laws came into effect on 16 February 2023 introducing an opt-out system for alcohol restrictions, and on 20 July 2023, the NT Government announced it would extend restrictions on the sale of takeaway alcohol in Alice Springs for a period of at least 12 months.
- From February 2023 to end November 2023, compared to same period in 2022 statistics from NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services show alcohol related assaults are down 28.5%; alcohol related domestic violence assaults are down 27.9%; and overall domestic violence assaults are down 8.3%.
- On 6 June 2023, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released new child protection data which shows that the rate of substantiated child abuse in the NT for Indigenous children has fallen very slightly (from 51 per 1000 children to 48) but remains significantly higher than the NT rate for non-Indigenous children (6.1 per 1000). Emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse for Indigenous children (50 per cent), while sexual abuse was the least (4.6 per cent).

Sensitivities

- On 12 April 2024, Minister Burney was questioned about possible Commonwealth support for Alice Springs, including the extending of funding for NT police, the purchase of liquor licenses owned by Tradition Owners, and changing the Centrelink payment date to Mondays.
- On 5 April 2024, it was reported by ABC News that South Australia Police will send 20 officers to Central Australia from next week after a request from the Northern Territory police commissioner.
- On 4 April 2024, ABC News reported that the NT Chief Minister, Eva Lawler, would consider extending the curfew beyond April 10 and past the end of the school holidays on April 14. Ms Lawler also told News Corp Australia that towns struggling with crime, such as Katherine or Tennant Creek, could see curfews based on the "positive impact" of the curfew in Alice Springs.
- On 2 April 2024, ABC News reported that the NT's police union advised its members the curfew imposed on Alice Springs may be unlawful.
- On 28 March 2024, Marion Scrymgour MP told ABC Radio National that consideration should be given to extending the youth curfew beyond two weeks and potentially to a broader area.
- On 27 March 2024, Alice Springs Mayor Matt Paterson called for the Commonwealth Government to take over the NT. Senator Nampijinpa Price also called for Commonwealth assistance: "whether it's a riot squad or the presence of the ADF on our streets...until the people of Alice Springs...feel safe." NT Chief Minister Eva Lawler rejected calls for a federal response: "skills for the deferral policy are very different...we can ramp up and have additional policy in Alice Springs."
- On 20 March 2024, CEO of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress said the impact of the removal of police auxiliary liquor inspectors from bottle shops was being felt with increasing chaos. Marion Scrymgour MP said she had been talking to the Prime Minister's Office about a "federal intervention".
- On 19 March, NT Police Minister Brent Potter announced that 20 additional police officers would be sent to Alice Springs.

Contact Officer: s 22(1)(a)(ii)

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