



Aboriginal alcohol ban sees switch to marijuana

BY SOPHIE McNAMARA

THE Federal Government's emergency response in the NT may be having some unwanted consequences, with research suggesting that alcohol restrictions have led to an increased use of marijuana in one remote Aboriginal community.

While the community was technically already 'dry', the six-year observational study found that the intervention made alcohol even more difficult to access.

"For this reason, marijuana is becoming a more convenient drug," the authors from the NT's Menzies School of Health Research wrote.

Marijuana was previously smoked mainly by young people but was now being used by entire families and was associated with domestic violence and family neglect.

The researchers found that children in the community, which has about 1000 residents, imitated smoking and dealing marijuana.

"Kids play at selling ganja, they fill the



Marijuana use in an Aboriginal community is associated with violence and neglect.

empty bags with grass and pretend to sell them. Before they used to play drunks with empty cans and bottles," one community member said.

The researchers said the study suggested that the alcohol restrictions might do more harm than good because they "focused on controlling the alcohol supply, without understanding the underlying reasons why community members are using mood-altering substances".

Meanwhile, the Federal Health Department said about 7600 health checks in 49 communities had now been completed under the NT intervention, but only about 57% of the children in the communities had received the voluntary health checks.

Some follow-up care, including paediatric services and echocardiograms for children with heart murmurs, was already under way.

About 28% of children examined have been referred for dental care and 350 of these children have already received follow-up dental treatment in the NT health system.

A spokeswoman for the health department said three additional surgeons had been recruited to conduct ENT "surgery blitzes" that are due to start in April.

About 8% of children examined have been referred for specialist ENT services and 200 of these children will receive surgery in the first round.

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