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## Report recommends plan for Needle & Syringe Program in ACT prison

ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher MLA has today on *World Hepatitis Day* released a report entitled *'Balancing Access and Safety: Meeting the challenge of blood borne viruses in prison'*, which was commissioned by the ACT Government. The report, which was undertaken by the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has put forward a plan for the introduction of a Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) in the ACT's prison.

"The Government engaged Michael Moore to investigate and report on models for the implementation of an NSP at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) and the project included an assessment of the barriers to implementation and undertook broad consultations with key stakeholders," Ms Gallagher said.

"I am pleased to note that Mr Moore has developed an implementation plan designed to ensure optimal health and safety outcomes for prison staff and the broader community, as well as prisoners. The Government will now consider the specific recommendations, and will seek the views of the community about the report, with a view to providing a formal response in relation to next steps in the near future," Ms Gallagher said.

"World Hepatitis Day provides an excellent context for the release of the NSP in AMC report, given the need to develop new and innovative approaches to reducing the spread of blood borne viruses (BBVs) in the community. It has already been established that 65% of prisoners in the AMC have hepatitis C, including one prisoner who has been proven to have contracted the virus within the facility. It is vital that consideration of the NSP concept is understood within the broader framework of public health responses to BBV prevention," said Michael Moore, PHAA Chief Executive Officer.

"The report identifies key themes emerging from the consultation process, and uses these to assess models for implementation of an NSP in the AMC. Despite the differing views of the very broad range of stakeholders consulted in relation to this project, there was a surprising level of consensus with regard to the main considerations and characteristics necessary to guide implementation. The analysis identifies the key considerations for AMC staff, prisoners and community stakeholders regarding barriers to introducing an NSP and outlines how these could be addressed by various model options.

"The models explored in detail all demonstrate the potential and the capacity to address the agreed criteria. Hence a contingency process has subsequently been proposed for implementation of an NSP in the AMC, which would begin with the introduction of an initially preferred model, acknowledging that another two models also represent viable fall-back options.

"The options for the implementation of an NSP in the AMC put forward in this report, along with the complementary recommendations in relation to key supporting measures, demonstrate that implementation of an NSP in the AMC is capable of delivering significant health benefits for prisoners, staff working within the prison and the broader community," said Mr Moore.

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[www.phaa.net.au](http://www.phaa.net.au)



The report is available on the PHAA and ACT Health websites at: [www.phaa.net.au](http://www.phaa.net.au) and [www.health.act.gov.au/communityconsultation](http://www.health.act.gov.au/communityconsultation) .

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