

grog woes are better



LAUREN ROBERTS
Health Reporter

ALCOHOL-RELATED problems are costing Territory taxpayers an eye-watering \$1.38 billion a year – more than double the 2009 figure, shows new research.

Menzies School of Health Research Father Frank Flynn Fellow Professor James Smith yesterday released a report which examined the social and economic costs and harm of grog in the NT.

Prof Smith said while federal figures showed alcohol consumption in the NT had decreased slightly in the past decade, the new report showed the scale of alcohol-related harm continued to climb.

In 2015-16, the NT spent \$110.1 million on grog-related healthcare; \$170 million on alcohol-related child protection costs and \$57.6 million on road crash costs.

However, Prof Smith cautioned against directly comparing the new data with the 2009 figure, which, based on information from 2004-05, found the NT's total social cost of grog was just \$642 million.

"The way in which we've measured it has changed, and

"It used to be the police brought us more people than the ambulance," he said. "Simply because there was nowhere for them at the watch house – that isn't the case any more."

Dr Gourley said Alice Springs Hospital was now a "totally different place to work" compared to this time last year.

"It's not that we aren't seeing drunk people, we still are, but we're seeing a huge reduction in the number of domestic violence assaults, stab wounds, fractured arms," he said.

Health Minister Natasha Fyles agreed, claiming the NT Government's alcohol reforms had helped reduce crime and alcohol-related ED visits.

Government figures show a 24.5 per cent decrease in the number of alcohol-related ED presentations in NT hospitals in December 2018 compared to December 2017.

"In terms of the smaller regions, we are seeing – with the point of sale intervention, the Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspectors, the BDR and the floor price – we are seeing significant reductions in harm from alcohol but there is a lot more work to do, which is why we will stay focused," she said. "The next phase will be a

"We're seeing a reduction in domestic violence"

DR STEPHEN GOURLEY

child protection costs – but this report provides a baseline," he said. Prof Smith said the NT Government needed to do a similar review in three to five years to see if its grog reforms were working. Cautiously, Prof Smith said the Banned Drinker Register had a positive impact on alcohol-related harm.

"Early signs show that it is working – as for minimum floor pricing, it is really early days and time will tell," he said.

"The NT Government has been clearly making lots of investment in the alcohol investment space."

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine NT faculty chairman Dr Stephen Gourley, who works in the emergency department at Alice Springs Hospital, threw