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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Radio Darwin, *Drive with Kate O'Toole*, Thursday 31 May 2018

Subject: Dirty Ashtray Award

KATE O'TOOLE: Happy World No Tobacco Day. Yeah, have you had a good one? Have you celebrated in style perhaps? Well, I have to admit that, in what's becoming a bit of a habit, the Northern Territory has again been awarded the Dirty Ashtray Award. It is three in a row, and more over the course of the life of this award than we should probably admit to.

Tony Bartone is the AMA President; that is the Australian Medical Association. So exactly how ashamed should we be of receiving this award yet again, Tony?

TONY BARTONE: Good evening, and thank you. Look, it's an interesting – unfortunately - another interesting award to win. It's one States shouldn't be proud of, the Territories shouldn't be proud of. And unfortunately, on this occasion, if we look across the country it was actually not a stellar effort by any State, Territory, or Federal Government in particular. The winning state only had a C – a C for complacency - and even then, there's still a lot that needs to be done across the nation in terms of trying to eradicate, trying to reduce the level of smoking in the community and the burden to health that it causes.

KATE O'TOOLE: So what have we done so wrong?

TONY BARTONE: So look, if we look at the things that particularly have been suggested as part of the process here. Nationally, we're not spending enough on both public education, public health campaigns, media campaigns, trying to sort of instil the message. We had a really active, very forceful campaign up 'til many years ago. We can all remember the ads.

It seems like it's become, as I say, a bit on the complacent side now, you would say. But consequently, we've now sort of dropped the ball. We had a very successful campaign leading to rates of something like 22, 23 per cent across the nation of people who were smoking, and now those levels have really reduced down to 11 per cent nationally.

But if we particularly look at some of the things that we need to try and see from the Territory point of view, we want a Tobacco Control Action Plan to be implemented and developed - there isn't one in the process - with strong media campaigns to try and produce further declines in the smoking levels in particular. As we understand, the Northern Territory doesn't have any funding for a media campaign to address the high prevalence of smoking in Australia.

Also, strengthening the controls on the sale of tobacco. So you're looking at licence fees which aren't in place. We're looking at training the retailers in terms of point of sale of tobacco, in terms of resources to try and -

KATE O'TOOLE: [Interrupts] Exactly - sorry, how would you train the retailers? I mean, the retailers are there to sell the product, right, so what would they be- yeah.

TONY BARTONE: Correct, but they still have an obligation. There are laws around how it's sold, but even just employing staff that are underage to sell - you know, that's not the right message to- the right way to be using that. In terms of where you place the product, in terms of the selling, yes, you're right, there is a perverse incentive to actually try and push the laws, but

they need education in terms of what the law is, the importance of abiding with the laws, and having some regulatory clout to then enforce those laws.

KATE O'TOOLE: What would happen if we banned vending machines? That's something you'd like to see?

TONY BARTONE: Yeah. So all forms- yeah - really the marketing around a product that we know has no safe level of use, and only results in significant ill health and eventually - for those who continue to smoke - three out of four will die as a consequence of their smoking. So we just can't sit back and watch, and allow this to continue. We need to go further, we need to also protect the rest of the public from the effects of second-hand smoke, and we also need to have the – you know, when you think that we collect nearly \$11 billion in revenue from taxes on smoking, we need to invest some of that back in the community for the benefit of those who don't smoke, as well as trying to improve the outcomes for those who do.

KATE O'TOOLE: Well, is the Northern Territory doing anything right? Can you give us any sort of glimmer of hope?

TONY BARTONE: Look, you know, cessation support for brief intervention programs and referral services is one of the things that are mentioned, especially for Aboriginal medical services and as part of the Territory Government services, that was one that was notably a positive. And of course, the Territory was the first region in Australia to implement a comprehensive ban at correctional facilities. So they're two positives that the Territory has done.

KATE O'TOOLE: And you're still pushing for a ban on designated smoking areas at schools, aren't you? What's the situation in other States and Territories?

TONY BARTONE: So there, you know, it varies between some certain States. There's a time – not a time - a distance enforcement, what have you. But again, the enforcement - the penalties or the regulations around those penalties being enforced - is still fairly light, if at all. So you know, more needs to be done right across the board into ensuring that this becomes something that we, you know, like when we watch some of the films from yesteryear and we see a phone on the wall or we see a polaroid camera, we have this sort of resemblance of: oh, that's how it used to be, and we need to really condemn smoking to that kind of- an attitude or an awareness of something from the past.

KATE O'TOOLE: Thank you, Tony Bartone. Appreciate your time this afternoon.

TONY BARTONE: Not a problem, have a good night.

KATE O'TOOLE: Tony's the President of the Australian Medical Association in Australia, just giving us this not-so-good award, the Dirty Ashtray.

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