

12 August 2019

Ms Sophie Dunstone
Committee Secretary
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Senate Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Dunstone,

RE: RACGP Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee regarding the Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 (Provisions).

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee regarding the Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 (Provisions).

The RACGP is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation representing over 40,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice.

The RACGP supports an active specific interest group of general practitioners (GPs) in the area of refugee health. This group advocates for the provision of adequate health care to people with refugee or asylum seeker status and understands the particular health care needs of this vulnerable population.

The RACGP:

- believes in universal access to healthcare
- supports the intent of the Medevac legislation and the Independent Health Advice Panel (IHAP)
- recommends the applications for transfers under the legislation be adequately resourced and that medical professionals involved in undertaking assessments and treatments are adequately informed about their indemnity requirements and that any additional cover required is Government funded

1. Universal access to health care

The RACGP advocates for universal access to adequate and timely health care. As such, the RACGP supports processes that ensure that all people can receive medical treatment and that this is not compromised by citizenship or residency status.

2. Support for the continuation of the Medevac Legislation

The RACGP provided in principle support for the implementation of the Home Affairs Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill (Medevac Bill) in February 2019 including the establishment of the IHAP.

The RACGP expresses its continued support of the intent of this process in Australia, including the role of the Independent Health Advice Panel (IHAP), which the RACGP nominated representatives for.

By maintaining a process whereby trained medical professionals undertake objective health assessments of a person and make subsequent recommendations about required treatments, individuals with significant, ongoing medical and psychiatric illnesses can access appropriate and timely health care.

3. Ensuring adequate resourcing of the process and sufficient legal indemnity for involved GPs

Currently, applications for temporary transfer of people for the purpose of accessing physical and psychiatric health care under the Medevac legislation are being coordinated and written by volunteer doctors. If the Medevac legislation is maintained, the RACGP recommends the processing of applications for transfer under the Medevac legislation is adequately resourced. This will ensure the provision of timely health care; mitigating risks to the individuals in need of health care, to the Department of Home Affairs and to the doctors providing the support.

If the legislation is maintained, information and advice regarding sufficient medical indemnity for medical practitioners involved in the provision of healthcare to refugees temporarily transferred to Australia, (and those involved in the IHAP) should be readily available. Further, any medical practitioners involved in undertaking assessments as part of the legislation should be covered by Government funded indemnity insurance.

Concluding comments

The RACGP supports the intent of legislation that allows the temporary transfer of people to Australia to receive appropriate medical, surgical and psychiatric care, that otherwise would not be available to them.

We welcome the opportunity to work with government to strengthen processes that support universal health care access for people seeking asylum or declaring refugee status. Again, the RACGP thanks you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Harry Nespolon
President