

An open letter to the Australian Parliament to support immediate evacuation of those detained in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

20/02/2023

An open letter to the Prime Minister and all members of the Australian Parliament,

We are a group of Australian healthcare professionals and organisations (doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals) who wish to express our concern about the harmful effects of Australia's system of offshore and indefinite detention on refugee and asylum seeker health. We also wish to express our strong support for the immediate evacuation of those detained in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Our position is not new. Since the re-commencement of offshore processing of asylum seekers in 2013, the medical community has publicly voiced its concern about the conditions of immigration detention both onshore and in offshore facilities in Nauru and PNG.

Fourteen deaths have occurred in offshore detention, with unacceptable delays in transfers to tertiary centres for urgent medical care being cited as a direct contributor to their deaths in coronial inquests. We do not view these incidents as tragic isolated events. The medical care that can be provided in offshore detention, despite investment from the governments of Australia, Nauru, and Papua New Guinea, remains far below the standard of that accessed by the general Australian public. Australian medical professionals who have worked in immigration detention facilities offshore have detailed the difficulties in escalating medical care, the lack of appropriate access to basic medications, and minimal emergency medical training of local health staff.

Conditions such as cellulitis (easily treated in Australian healthcare settings with oral antibiotics), have progressed to septicæmia and death in offshore detention without early intervention. Multiple reports of physical and sexual assault have been reported in offshore and onshore immigration detention. Currently, 148 men remain in Nauru and PNG, some without any path to resettlement. We hold grave concerns for their mental health after a decade in immigration detention. There is no question that their being trapped on Nauru and PNG is actively harming their mental health.

As medical professionals, we have already seen the destructive effects of indefinite detention on an individual's physical and mental health; this is recognised by the United Nations as a form of torture. Those of us in contact with refugees and asylum seekers detained in Nauru and Papua New Guinea note that incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide have occurred as recently as within the last two weeks. At least 13 men have reported severe symptoms of depression, reduced intake of food and water and feelings of hopelessness to a degree they can no longer meaningfully engage with any resettlement process. Most have already experienced significant trauma prior to and during the last decade of indefinite detention and are separated from their families. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the health inequities in this vulnerable group (many of whom suffer from chronic medical conditions because of an extended period of detention).

Outbreaks of COVID-19 have occurred in immigration facilities, worsened by overcrowding and low vaccination rates.

There are currently approximately 1100 individuals in Australia who have been transferred from Nauru and PNG. We ask for the almost 150 men remaining on Nauru and PNG to be evacuated immediately and brought to Australia for urgent medical evaluation and treatment. We also advocate for appropriate provision of medical care to those who were brought to Australia under the now repealed Medevac legislation who continue to wait for the medical care that they require.

This is not a politically motivated request. The healthcare of any individual detained in immigration detention by our government transcends politics. This is a call for immediate action on issues of basic and universal human rights. Australia, as a signatory to multiple international conventions protecting the rights of those seeking asylum (including children), is not fulfilling these obligations. The Australian medical community have united to call for action on refugee and asylum seeker health for many years.

The refugees and asylum seekers who are held on Nauru and PNG should be brought immediately to Australia (with their consent) so that we do not cause further harm to their health, and so that the medical care that they require can be provided.

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned members of the Australian healthcare community (see individual and organisational signatories below)

Dr Nilanthy Vigneswaran MBBS, MPTHM, Infectious Diseases Registrar

Professor David Isaacs MBBChir MD FRACP FRCPC Senior Staff Specialist Dept of Infectious Diseases & Microbiology Clinical Professor in Paediatric Infectious Diseases, University of Sydney

Dr Neha Kumta, MBBS, Intensive Care Registrar

Dr Viveka Prakash MBBS

Dr Lauren McShane MBBS FRACP Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Emma Kelly ED Registrar Royal Darwin Hospital MBBS

Dr Cassandra Doig MChD

Dr Jessie Lu BMedSc/MD

Adrienne McConvell RN retired

Dr Shearne Wilkie MBBS

Daphne S Cohen

Meshelle Clark- Doctor- MBBS

Lara Bronwen Grady BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy, MSc Early Interventions in Psychosis

Jessica Scott - Accredited Practicing Dietitian

Dr Kevin Sweeney MB.BS, DA(UK), DipRACOG, FRACGP

Dr Joshua Bramwell MBBS

Jessica Daglas, MS, Registered Nurse

Dr Matt Martin BMedSc/MD

Dr Natalie Hunt, MD, Psychiatry registrar

Dr Ming Fan, MBBS, O&G registrar

Dr Helena Niu MBBS(Hons) Psychiatry Registrar

Professor Katie Flanagan, ASID President

Clinical Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann AO, MBBS, MSc

Clin A/Prof Sarah Cherian MBBS(Hons) FRACP PhD

Professor Gail Matthews MBChB MRCP FRACP PhD

Dr Thomas Volkman, MBBS FRACP Paediatrician

A/Prof Asha Bowen MBBS FRACP PhD

Dr Phillipa Edmiston, MBBS DCH MPHTM, Paediatric Infectious Diseases Fellow

Dr. Nerida Moore MBBS Infectious Diseases Registrar

Dr Emma Smith MBChB

Dr Sam Brophy-Williams, MBBS MPH FRACP, paediatrician

Dr Dharmenderi Sathiaselalan, MBBS, MPsych,FRANZP

Dr Tanya Sinha BA/MD, Infectious Diseases Registrar

Nila Dharan MD FRACP PhD

Christopher Lemoh BMedSci MBBS DipClinEpi PhD FRACP

Moses Wante Lutaaya

Associated Professor Andy Redmond, Infectious Diseases Physician

A/Prof Krispin Hajkovicz FRACP, MPH Senior Staff Specialist, Infectious Diseases Unit, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and University of Queensland Centre for Clinical Research

Richard Malik DVSc PhD FACVSc

Dr Katherine Langan BMBS BBioMedSc (Hons) DTMH FRACP Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Ian Woolley MBBS FRACP MD DTMH

Dr Elise O'Connor MBBS

Dr Sarah Coghill B Biomed Sci, MBBS (hons) FRACP (infect dis)

Assoc Prof Catherine Cherry MBBS, PhD, FRACP, Grad Dip (Cli Epi), GAICD

Dr Khai Lin Kong MBBS FRACP Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Shobini Sivagnanam MBBS

James McCarthy FRACP FAHMS

Dr Aiveen Bannan MBBS FRACP

Dr George Drewett

JENNIFER O'HERN FRACP MPHTM MBBS(hons) BMedSci

Dr Sonja Janson, Infectious Diseases and General Medicine physician

Dr Sharmin Nusrat, MbChB

Dr Chong Wei Tiong, MBBS

Dr. Linda Mayer FACRRM

Associate Professor Anindita Das, MBBS, MS, DNB, FRCPA

Dr Nomvuyo Mothobi BBioMedSc MBBS MIPH FRACP FRCPA

Dr Lucy Attwood MBBS MPH DTMH BSc FRACP

Dr Uma Devi MB BS, FRACP, PhD

Dr Mohana Sathiaseelan, MBBS FRACP

Ethan MacMinn MBBS

Dr Susan Maddocks MBBS FRACP FRCPA PhD DTM&H

Dr Thomas Solano MBBS FRACP FCICM

A/Prof David Andresen, FRACP FRCPA

Steve McGloughlin FRACP FCICM

Joanna Wallace - pharmacist

David Burgner FRACP PhD

Dr Kate Lim MBBS FRACP Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Anna Brischetto FRACP (Infectious Diseases) FRCPA (Microbiology)

Dorothy Ling MBBS FRACP MPHTM

Bart Currie Infectious Diseases and Public Health Physician Darwin NT

Dr Alexander Padiglione MBBS(hons) FRACP PhD

Dr Sarah McGuinness MBBS MPHTM PhD FRACP

Dr Robert Norton, MBBCh, FRCPA, FAFPHM, MD.

Jung Yeun (Jenny) Park BPharm Antimicrobial Stewardship Pharmacist

Siddhartha Mahanty MBBS FRACP

Dr Jennifer Ho FRACP FRCPA PhD

Dr Brendan McMullan FRACP FRCPA

Dr Yi dan Lin, MBBS, FRACP

Dr Alice Coe BMedSci MBBS MPHTM FRACP Infectious Diseases and General Medicine Physician

Dr Brian Hughes MBBS DipSHM FFACSHM FRACP infectious Diseases and Sexual Health Physician

Tasnim Hasan MBBS, FRACP

Dr Ann Hofmeyr, FRACP/FRCPA

Dr Naomi Whyler MBChB FRACP

Professor Joshua Davis MBBS FRACP PhD

Ben Knippenberg BSc MSc FRACP FRCPA

Dr Bryant Koh MBBS(Hons) FRACP FRCPA

A/Prof Holly Seale

Daniel Tilley, Physician

Dr Nadia Chaves, MBBS FRACP, Infectious diseases and general medicine physician

Zofia Perkowska- Guse, MBBS, FRACGP, FRCPA

Dr Michelle Mahony, MBBS DTMH

Dr Satwik Motaganahalli MBBS MPH FRACP

Dr Thei Hla MBBS DTM&H FRACP

Lana Sundac FRACP FRCP

Dr Meryta May FRACP FRCPA Paediatric Infectious Diseases Physician and Microbiologist

Dr Raquel Cowan MBBS, FRACP, PhD

Shreya Achar - Medical Student

Dr Sarah Garner MBBS BMedSci(Hons) FRCPA FRACP PhD Infectious Diseases Physician and Medical Microbiologist

Dr Sarah Tustian FRACP MBBS BMedSci

Dr Stephen Begbie MB BS FRACP

Dr Phoebe Williams BSc BCom MBBS(Hons.) DCH MSc FRACP DPhil

Dr. Luke Cardamone

Dr Connor Wright MBBS FRACP

Dr Ameneh Khatami MD FRACP

Dr Maxwell Braddick MBBS FRACP

Professor Clare Nourse AM BA MB BCH BAO DCH MRCPI FRACP MD

Dr Anne Hoey, Infectious Diseases Physician MSc FRACP

Prof John McBride MBBS DTM&H FRACP FRCPA PhD

Dr Chris Lowbridge RN DrPH, Epidemiologist

Dr Helen Baxter BA LLB MBBS Infectious Diseases registrar

Dr Helen Willoughby Dip Physio; B Med.

Dr Angus Lane MBBS MPHTM

Dr Nicholas Routley

Dr Phillippa Gray, MBBS BSc

Dr Roger Parnis, MBBS Paediatric Registrar

Professor Roy Robins-Browne, AO, FAMHS, MB

Dr Jaimie Frazer MBBS BVSc(hons) MVPHMgt MANZCVS

Dr Christine Dwyer MD

Dr Sarah Whiting, General and Infectious Diseases Physician, MBBS FRACP

Helen Sheppard RN, PGDip, BSc (Psy)

Yana Albrey, Clinical Nurse Manager Infection Prevention & Control, CICIP-A

A/Prof John Ferguson

Marion Gevers, Clinical Psychologist, NAATI Certified Health Care Interpreter & Translator

Dr Matthew Pitman MBBS BMedSc FRACP PhD

Dr Myong Gyu Kim MD FRACP

Dr Paras Valeh, MBBS(Hons) FRACP MPHTM MSc (Epi), Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Trish Richardson (FRACGP, Retired GP)

Jacqueline de Witt B.App.Sc.(Physiotherapy) DPT

Georgia Elizabeth McCluskey, BSc/BA, PhD, MD

Jon Iredell, Professor of Medicine and Microbiology University of Sydney and Senior Staff Specialist, Westmead Hospital

Melissa Iredell, BHSc, RN,

Kym Brown

Dr Progga Saha MBBS

Dr Danielle Ferraro, MBBS FRACP

Finlay Macneil MBBS, FRCSEd, FRACS

Dr. Paul Chapman, infectious disease physician

Professor Karin Leder, MBBS, FRACP, FAAHMS, PhD, MPH, DTMH

Dr Ksana Horgan, RACP Trainee

Professor Lyn Gilbert AO, MD FRACP FRCPA M.Bioethics - infectious disease physician

Dr Sushena Krishnaswamy, Infectious Diseases Physician, MBBS FRACP DTMH PhD

Dr Annaleise Howard-Jones, MBBS DPhil

Dr Marianna Campbell MBBS BSc FRACGP DRANZCOG

Dr Ellen Sweeney BMed, Palliative Care Advanced Trainee

Dr Isabella Ludbrook BMed

Dr Sarah Browning BMed MPHTM FRACP

Dr John Cavill MD, Medical Registrar (Basic Trainee)

Dr Anne Drake MBBS FRACP

Dr Haddijatou Hughes - MBBS DCH BBiomedSci

Dr Joel Winney, BMedMD, GP Registrar

Dr Brad Gardiner MBBS FRACP PhD

Dr Freya Langham MBBS DTMH FRACP (ID physician)

Dr Sarah Smith-Wade, Paediatric Registrar, BMed/MD

Dr Amanda Paterson, BMed

Dr Olivia Flynn BMed FRACP

Dr Kiersten Liddy BSc (Hons I), MD, PhD

Dr Sudharsan Venkatesan Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr Kathleen Hayes MBBS DCH FRCPA, Honorary Virologist

Dr Tessa Hood MD

Margaret Grey (retired nurse)

Dr Lucy Coles BSc MD

Dr Yvette Vardy, BA(hons.), M Clin Psych, D Clin Psych.

Dr Zainab Ridha, MChD, Haematology Registrar

Dr Nile Ulgen MBBS, MD

Praveen Gounder Haematologist FRACP FRCPA

Dr Tasha Patel BMed FRACGP

Dr Hayley Anderson, BMed, MD

Dr Ravin Hettiarachchi MBBS (Infectious Diseases and Microbiology AT)

Dr Jovitta William, MBBS, FRACP

Dr. Olivia Smibert MBBS, BSc (Hons), FRACP, DTMH

Dr Marilyn Hassell, MBBS FRACP MPH

Debbie Smith RN

Dr Nita Durham MBBS, FRCR, MRACR

Dr Heather Wilson, MBBS FRACP FRCPA PhD

Dr Zoe Jennings MBBS FRACP FRCPA

Zoe Colman, BPhysio(Hons), APAM

Dr Kristen Overton BSc MBBS MPHTM FRACP PHD

Dr Kevin O'Callaghan, Infectious Diseases and General Physician, MBBChBAO MPHTM
FRACP

Dr Sumudu Britton, MBBS, FRACP

Assoc. Prof. Patrick Charles MBBS, PhD, FRACP

Dr Ruth Mitchell BA BSc BMBS MAICD FRACS FFSTEd

Dr Christopher Coulter MBBS FRACP FRCPA Infectious Diseases Physician and Microbiologist

A/Prof Philip Russo, PhD, M.ClinEpid, BN

Dr Kylie McArdle, MBBS FCICM, Intensive Care Specialist

Dr Bill O'Brien Neurologist NSW

Dr Anne Walton, MBChB, FACEM

DR. TONY CHU ANAESTHETIST

David Nugent BSc BMBS MPhil FACEM

Dr Stephen Cameron MB ChB FACEM Senior Staff Specialist Emergency Physician, Senior Lecturer The School of Medicine, The University of Newcastle

Dr David Gilbert MBChB, FRACP, Gastroenterologist

Dr Tilman Ruff AO MBBS(Hons) FRACP Hon Senior Fellow, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne

Dr James Gatenby, MD

Dr. H Sharifi MBBS

Dr Andrew Gador-Whyte MBBS/BMedSci

Dr Jo Levis MBBS

Dr Samantha Bannister MBBS MPH, Paediatric Infectious Diseases and Immunology Fellow

Dr Fiona Clarke BSc MBBS DTMH

Dr Manogna Metlapalli, MBBS

Dr Richard McGee, BMedSci, MB BCh BAO, PGDipSurgAnat, DCH, MMed(ClinEpi), PhD, FRACP. Paediatric Endocrinologist

Dr Judy Di Chiou MBBS FRACP

Dr Anjali Prakash MBBS DCH FRACGP

Dr Shio Yen Tio, ID and General Med Physician

Alicia Martin, MBBS

Dr Tarini Srivastava, MBBS BMedRes, Paediatric Registrar

Dr Nigel Sutherland BPhysio MD FRACP