

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING: 9 FEBRUARY 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(48) Program 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management

Senator Hanson-Young (L&C 100-101) asked:

- a) Are mental health checks mandatory for immigration detainees, and, if so, at what intervals are reviews done?
- b) What are the arrangements for children?
- c) Is there always an independent party present when children and minors are interviewed and, if so, who is the accompanying person?

Answer.

a) All people entering immigration detention undergo mental health and torture and trauma screening as part of their health induction assessment (which is conducted within 72 hours of their arrival in immigration detention). This information is used to inform an ongoing care plan.

Due to the high proportion of Irregular Maritime Arrivals (on Christmas Island) who have experienced torture and trauma, the health induction assessment also includes an automatic referral for torture and trauma assessment by the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service.

As part of the ongoing health care provided to all people in immigration detention, re-screening for mental health concerns is conducted after seven days in immigration detention. It is then conducted every 12 and 18 months or when triggers for concern are identified. If a person remains in immigration detention for longer than 18 months, re-screening occurs every three months or whenever triggers for concern are identified.

b) Current mental health arrangements in place for minors are consistent with those for adults. However, the Department is working with the Detention Health Advisory Group to ensure that specific issues for minors are addressed. This includes appropriate screening arrangements specific to minors and ensuring that the family unit as a whole receives assistance when required. For example, where mental health concerns are raised for any member of a family unit that includes a minor, then all members of that family unit will be referred to mental health professionals for appropriate assistance, which may include assessment or treatment.

c) Yes. In cases where a minor is not accompanied by a parent or guardian, an Independent Person is required to be present for the Department's immigration processing. The key role of the Independent Person in these cases is to provide pastoral or physical care to the child throughout the interview process.

An Independent Person is required to have no relationship with either the Department or the minor.

Currently, suitably qualified staff from Life Without Barriers act in the role of Independent Persons.