



**Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)**

10th March 2010

Hon. N. Roxon,
Minister for Health,
Parliament House,
Canberra
ACT 2600

By email and post

Dear Minister,

We write in order to seek your immediate intervention in the Central Australian cross-border health crisis, wherein end-stage renal dialysis patients from the APY Lands SA and from WA communities in and West of Warburton on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands are being refused treatment in Alice Springs. We understand from the NT Health Minister that this will continue to be the case even when additional new Commonwealth-funded facilities become available, due to happen in May this year.

We note the Prime Minister's recent comments about State (and presumably Territory) leaders 'kidding themselves' if they believe the public is satisfied with health care, and Mr. Rudd's stated determination to put an end to bickering about cross-border health care.

SA APY Lands renal sufferers (and remote WA renal patients from outside the newly defined 'catchment' area) are nothing less than Australians in exile, living far from home while the respective Health Ministers obfuscate and pass the buck. Please see comments below from the NT's Kon Vatskalis and SA's John Hill. Someone is not being entirely honest in this matter.

Meanwhile your Minister for Indigenous Health claims that the Australian Government, despite being the source of funding, can do nothing. This goes on and on while very sick people with limited life expectancy, whose votes make not a whit of difference to anyone, lead unnecessarily miserable, dislocated lives scattered around the outer suburbs of Adelaide. Apart from sixteen SA patients in Alice Springs, there are now six or seven dialysis patients in Adelaide, some accompanied by family members, others with spouses left behind. They all use resources including renal treatment and housing whose cost could and should be transferred to the NT.

The APY Lands health service, Nganampa Health Council Inc., has advised NPY Women's Council that in the very near future *twenty* new renal patients will be moved to Adelaide. Based on current experience this is likely lead to the relocation, either

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temporary or ongoing, of two hundred or more family members, who wish to provide companionship or support. Further, visitors frequently become 'stuck' while visiting, and then seek local resources to get home, whilst also putting additional pressure on the patient's meagre household arrangements.

Again we note your government's contribution to new facilities in Alice Springs, but the restriction to NT patients seems very unfair, and adequate provision for the increasing numbers - hardly unforeseen - must be made closer to home.

NPY Women's Council believes the following is precisely the sort of nonsense that Mr. Rudd is so determined to eradicate, and we seek your urgent assistance to do so:

"The current redirection of people to Adelaide and Perth for treatment is an interim measure."

Kon Vatskalis NT Health Minister. 2nd November 2009. Letter to Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku (Abor. Corp.) (Western Desert dialysis mob)

"Under the agreement I want Alice Springs to be the hub for renal dialysis treatment across Central Australia – with all states contributing funding."... "The NT government wants to see renal dialysis patients treated closer to where they live, and we have invested millions of dollars over the last four years to expand on renal services in Central Australia." ... "We¹ have also funded construction of a new \$16.7 million, 15-station dialysis renal unit due for completion in Alice Springs next year."

Kon Vatskalis NT Health Minister. 13th November 2009. Media release.

"Newly diagnosed renal dialysis patients residing in the far north of the state will be treated in South Australia."

Government of South Australia, 4th December 2009. Media Release, SA Health

"WA and NT are now brokering an agreement for WA residents who live west of Warburton to be treated in Alice Springs."

Kon Vatskalis NT Health Minister. 24th February 2010. Email to NPY Women's Council.

"I want to stress that there is no new deal which has been struck between Western Australia and the Northern Territory."

John Hill, SA Health Minister, 5th March 2010. Email to constituent.

"Whilst we would be happy to have an agreement with SA similar to the one we have with WA this is something that the SA government has to decide."

Kon Vatskalis NT Health Minister. 24th February 2010. Email to NPY Women's Council

¹ [The NT? Cth?]

“I am disappointed that you feel the South Australian Government lacks compassion for the APY people needing dialysis; I can assure you that this is not the case; in fact what we lack is right of entry to the Alice Springs Hospital for South Australians who require renal dialysis due to a ban enforced by the Northern Territory Government in February last year.... It is important to note that the Northern Territory Government has not requested anything extra from South Australia, to enable South Australian patients to use their service. I also want to stress that there is no new deal which has been struck between Western Australia and the Northern Territory, in regard to the Northern Territory treating renal patients.

The Northern Territory Government has simply made a decision to exclude South Australian renal patients while continuing to take patients from the remote areas of Western Australia. The exclusion of South Australian patients is most unfortunate.”
SA Health Minister John Hill: reply to letter from Uniting Church Minister Dean Whittaker 9th March 2010.

There is no avenue for the Commonwealth to intervene. It is up to South Australia to decide how it spends its money.

Warren Snowdon, Minister for Indigenous Health. Position put during meeting with NPY Women’s Council, 3rd March 2010.

We respectfully submit that you not be distracted by SA’s claims to be considering, or planning, in consultation with Nganampa Health, a dialysis unit on the APY Lands. Whilst it would be most welcome, to our knowledge Nganampa is (understandably) dubious about the practicality of establishing such a unit and it is our submission that it is highly unlikely to happen in the lifetime of any current APY renal patient, if at all.

The SA Government has been unable properly to staff and run a Commonwealth-funded substance abuse facility near Amata, located at that community against the advice of NPY and Nganampa. It therefore beggars belief that SA could find specialist renal staff and a dialysis facility established at a foreseeable time. NT Health has difficulty in attracting such staff to the largest regional centre, Alice Springs.

We have previously provided your office with information on this matter and are happy to supply more if you require. What is needed immediately, however, is your intervention to resolve this crisis. For the forced shunting of seriously ill, sometimes aged, citizens to a city 1500 kilometres or more from home to be occurring in a country like Australia when there is a regional centre around a third of the distance away is cruel, inhumane and a disgrace. Again, we believe this is precisely the sort of situation that Mr. Rudd and you seek to, and must, address.

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