

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Re: Inquiry into the administration and operation of the Migration Act 1958, terms of reference (c) the adequacy of healthcare, including mental healthcare, and other services and assistance provided to people in immigration detention; and (d) the outsourcing of management and service provision at immigration detention centres.

I offer this submission as a psychiatrist. I first visited Woomera in 2002, and have since carried out detailed psychiatric assessments on more than 10 children and as many parents in detention. I have discussed in detail another 10 families seen by colleagues from the division of mental health of the Women's and Children's Hospital. I have also carried out more than 10 assessments on single men in Baxter.

The implementation of immigration detention over the last 5 years has caused severe psychological damage to detainees. I know of no other cohort where such universal mental ill-health has been demonstrated. Parents have been crippled by their experiences to a point that they could not protect their children, and all children have been damaged by having witnessed frightening violence and adult self-harm. Most single men who have been in detention for longer periods of time are grossly damaged. Their characteristic coping methods (eg, working, camaraderie, exercise) collapse after 1 or more years. Gradually protest and self-harm emerge, only to be replaced by withdrawal, with men isolated to their rooms, ruminating unproductively about their misfortune or the future and with grossly disrupted sleep and other bodily functions.

Better mental health services in detention will not help, because the environment is so toxic that meaningful treatment cannot occur. It is not clear to what degree the detainees will recover, but some show significant signs of continued traumatisation a year after release. I can provide the committee with detailed information about cases that I have seen.

In his enquiry into the Rau affair, Mr. Palmer noted that individual employees within the Immigration Detention system mostly have the best interests of detainees at heart. If we accept this judgment, then responsibility for the gross mistreatment of detainees cannot reside with the workers themselves. The enormous psychological damage is not the responsibility of individual guards or officials but of the overall system. Some of the worst abuses of that system include its failure to protect people from exposure to violence, the inappropriate use of isolation facilities, and the cruel failure to process and respond in a consistent and timely manner to reasonable requests from detainees. Some of this cruelty is a product of the sub-contracting of services to private businesses, and subsequent poor collaboration between DIMIA and those contractors.

Whilst there is no clear evidence that the system has been deliberately designed to damage the mental health of detainees, the continuation of prolonged detention in the face of clear evidence of its damaging effects constitutes a reckless disregard for the welfare of asylum seekers.

Evidence of the physical and psychological damage done to detainees has been readily available for at least several years. Nothing has prevented Ministers Ruddock and Vanstone and Prime Minister Howard from having had full access to the information about the suffering of detainees. They have been sent countless

letters and reports documenting the amount of harm being done in Immigration Detention.

Therefore the direct responsibility for the damage being done to detainees resides with the Ministers and Prime Minister who have either ignored or turned a blind eye to the suffering caused by the implementation of their policies. I hope that your committee will find a way to bring those responsible to account.

I am happy to expand on this submission in person.

Jon Jureidini PhD MBBS FRANZCP

Clinical Senior Lecturer

Department of Psychiatry, University of Adelaide

Senior Research Fellow

Department of Philosophy, Flinders University of South Australia

Head, Department of Psychological Medicine

Women's and Children's Hospital

North Adelaide, 5006

South Australia

ph 08.81617226

fax 08.81617032

email jureidini@wch.sa.gov.au