

Australian Medical Association Limited
ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



AMA CALLS FOR STRONG URGENT ACTION AND ANSWERS ON THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF ASYLUM SEEKERS ON MANUS ISLAND

The AMA Federal Council has unanimously passed a motion calling on the Federal Government to provide comprehensive transparent reporting of the health and wellbeing and living conditions of the asylum seekers residing on Manus Island.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said today that the Federal Council, meeting in Canberra, discussed the issue at length before reaching unanimous agreement to call for more information and for the Government to agree to send an independent group of medical experts to Manus to assess the health situation of the men.

“The AMA has made many representations on this matter, both publicly and in private but, with a worsening and more dangerous situation emerging on Manus, the Federal Council strongly believes that urgent action and answers are needed,” Dr Gannon said.

“We strongly urge the Government to take note of our call and respond accordingly.

“These men have escaped from dangerous and, for some, life-threatening circumstances, and are now in the care of the Australian Government.

“It is our responsibility as a nation with a strong human rights record to ensure that we look after the health and wellbeing of these men, and provide them with safe and hygienic living conditions.

“The AMA stands ready to work with the Government to select an expert group of doctors with the appropriate specialised skills and experience to independently assess and report on the health of these asylum seekers, and report back to the Government and the Australian people.”

Here is the full text of the motion unanimously passed by the AMA Federal Council:

Preamble:

The World Medical Association (WMA) *Statement on Medical Care for Refugees, including Asylum Seekers, Refused Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)* states that:

Physicians have a duty to provide appropriate medical care regardless of the civil or political status of the patient, and governments should not deny patients the right to receive such care, nor should they interfere with physicians’ obligation to administer treatment on the basis of clinical need alone.

Physicians cannot be compelled to participate in any punitive or judicial action involving refugees, including asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, or IDPs or to administer any non-medically justified diagnostic measure or treatment, such as sedatives to facilitate easy deportation from the country or relocation.

Physicians must be allowed adequate time and sufficient resources to assess the physical and psychological condition of refugees who are seeking asylum.

National Medical Associations and physicians should actively support and promote the right of all people to receive medical care on the basis of clinical need alone and speak out against legislation and practices that are in opposition to this fundamental right.

AMA Motion:

The AMA Federal Council expresses its grave concerns about the health and wellbeing of the refugees and asylum seekers currently residing on Manus Island. The AMA calls on the Australian Government to provide comprehensive answers to the following questions, which relate directly to the health and wellbeing of these men, for whom Australia has responsibility under international law:

1. What are the healthcare arrangements, both physical and mental, in place for the men on Manus?
2. Do the men have access to all essential medication, vaccinations, basic hygiene, clean and safe drinking water?
3. Are there measures in place to deal with the significant risk of violence breaking out between the men and the locals on Manus?
4. Is the accommodation being provided for the asylum seekers and refugees at a standard acceptable to the UNHCR?

Further, the AMA calls on the Federal Government to facilitate granting of access by the Government of PNG to Manus Island for a delegation of Australian medical professionals, to be appointed in consultation with the AMA, to assess these issues in an independent fashion. This would include access to the detainees, as well as the PNG officials administering the facilities.

An appropriate delegation would include a psychiatrist, public health expert, general practitioner, and an infectious diseases physician.

The purpose of the delegation is to make an independent assessment and to make public the findings of its inspections and interviews to assure the Australian public that the Australian Government has done all that is possible to protect the health and wellbeing of the asylum seekers and refugees.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753