

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 ON PRIME MINISTER TO MOVE ASYLUM SEEKER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OFF NAURU TO BETTER HEALTH CARE

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, has written to Prime Minister Scott Morrison demanding that the Government move asylum seeker children and their families off Nauru to more appropriate settings for their deteriorating physical and mental health and wellbeing, preferably in Australia.

The AMA wants to see a more compassionate Government approach to the health care of refugees and asylum seekers in the care of the Australian Government.

Dr Bartone said there had been a recent groundswell of concern and agitation across the AMA membership and the medical profession about conditions on Nauru and the escalation in reports of catastrophic mental and physical health conditions being experienced by the asylum seekers, especially children.

“Put bluntly, we want some urgent action to help these vulnerable people who find themselves in a hopeless, despairing situation,” Dr Bartone wrote in his letter to the PM.

“The AMA has been calling for a more humanitarian approach, including independent assessment of health care arrangements, for many years now.

“The medical situation for the children on Nauru has been described by health experts, including medical staff who have worked on Nauru, as critical and getting worse. It is a humanitarian emergency requiring urgent intervention.

“We have been given some hope at the bureaucratic level, but a slammed door at the political level.

“The AMA and the medical profession are demanding a change of policy – a change of policy that reflects community concern for the health of asylum seekers.

“As a suburban Melbourne GP for more than 30 years, and a grassroots Australian with strong community connections and Christian values, I passionately believe we can and must do more to look after the health of these people, many of whom have fled war, conflict, or persecution.

“There are now too many credible reports concerning the effects of long-term detention and uncertainty on the physical and mental health of asylum seekers.

“It is within the power of the Government to move on this issue and play its part in allowing traumatised people to begin rebuilding their lives.

“Australia is a caring nation with a long history of compassion and respect for human rights. We need to show the Australian people and the world that we are still a caring nation.

“The AMA believes that asylum seeker children and their families on Nauru must be removed and given access to physical and mental health care of an appropriate standard.

“We also want the Government to facilitate access to Nauru for a delegation of Australian medical professionals to assess the health and welfare of child refugees and asylum seekers.

“This includes access to the children and their families and/or carers, the International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) medical professionals administering to the children, and any Nauruan Government officials administering to the children.

“Membership of the delegation would be determined in consultation with the AMA and the delegation would 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 asylum seekers and refugees.”

In a separate letter to all MPs and Senators urging support and advocacy for the AMA position, Dr Bartone reminded politicians that, in April 2017, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee released the report of its inquiry into asylum seekers on Nauru.

The inquiry made two recommendations about the availability of medical services and medical transfers:

- **Recommendation 1:** The committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, as a matter of urgency, commission an external review of its medical transfer procedures in offshore processing centres.
- **Recommendation 2:** The committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake to seek advice in relation to whether improvements are required to the medical treatment options available to asylum seekers and refugees in the Republic of Nauru and Papua New Guinea, particularly mental health services.

The Government has not yet responded to the inquiry.

Dr Bartone said that the AMA praised the hard work and dedication of doctors and health workers who have been providing care with IHMS on Nauru.

“These health professionals and their employer have been doing their best in very trying conditions in isolation – and under a veil of secrecy not of their doing,” Dr Bartone said.

“The Government must get fair dinkum and give these long-suffering asylum seeker children, many of whom are extremely ill, and their families a fair go – bring them to Australia for proper care in the best possible environment for their severe mental and physical health conditions.”

20 September 2018

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

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: http://twitter.com/ama_media

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>