



18 September 2018

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2611

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Dear Prime Minister

On behalf of the AMA Federal Council, AMA members, the broader medical profession, and medical students – many of whom have contacted me personally on this issue – I am calling for a more compassionate Government approach to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers who are in the care of the Australian Government.

Put bluntly, we want some urgent action to help these vulnerable people who find themselves in a hopeless, despairing situation. The AMA has been calling for a more humanitarian approach, including independent assessment of health care arrangements, for many years now.

Our immediate priority is the physical and mental health and wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers, especially children, on Nauru.

The medical situation for these children 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.

The AMA wants your Government to look at the health care of refugees and asylum seekers in isolation from your broader Border Force policies.

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 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.

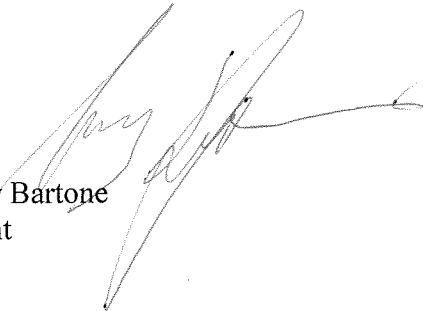
The AMA also holds concerns for the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees in Papua New Guinea on Manus Island and in Port Moresby, and we seek assurances from the Australian and PNG Governments that the standard of health care in PNG is of an appropriate standard.

I have written to all MPs and Senators today urging them to support the AMA's call to provide better health care for refugees and asylum seekers.

I hope you will give our request serious consideration.

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Bartone
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Bartone', written over a white background.