

Submission to the inquiry on the Migration amendment (Repairing medical transfers) bill 2019

We are a regional advocacy group that has been in operation for over 15 years here in the Bega Valley, with 164 members.

Our local government , The Bega Valley Shire is a Welcome Town for Refugees, and a number of local organisations provide support and respite for refugees who come to our community.

Our membership is alarmed at the suggestion that this bill be repealed.

The legislation was passed by the Australian parliament, and supported by a majority of the Australian people. It should not now be used as a political issue when it is clearly an issue about human rights and duty of care .

Refugees on Manus island and Nauru are there because of Australia's offshore detention policy. This policy does not mean that Australia is not responsible for the care and well being of these people. PNG and Manus island governments are simply providing what was meant to be a short term accomodation solution to our refugee crisis, but we are responsible for the healthcare and service provision.

As Australians and as signatories to the Human Rights Convention, we have a legal responsibility to provide adequate health care and services to people in our care.

The long term detention of people has been shown to be having serious issues for

their mental health and well being .

The lack of adequate trauma counselling services and appropriate cultural understanding for the people held in our offshore centres has been shown to be severely impacting on their mental and physical well being.

This would be obvious in the 13 deaths that have occurred in the last 6 years, as well as the number of attempted self harm events that have been reported.

Refugees have already endured fear and physical turmoil in their journeys away from family and restrictive and violent regimes in their homelands.

To not provide on the ground trauma counselling services on Manus and Nauru has contributed to the long term impacts of these traumas on people held indefinitely in detention.

From documents I have read and films viewed, it would seem that to receive even basic medical services is a long drawn out beurocratic process, and that basic services of dental care and optical healthcare are not readily available.

The local hospital of Lorengau does not have adequate staff or services to provide health care for the number of refugees who are held, and create a disruption in services being available for the local people of the island.

Refugees have also been exposed to infectious diseases such as Typhoid and Malaria as well as intestinal parasites.

The nutrition and food services have also been reported as being inadequate as well as lacking any cultural appropriateness for those held.

Lack of adequate nutrition impacts on the health and development of what is largely a young population of people. It is people in the prime of their lives who have been languishing in detention for 6 years now, and the long term results of poor nutrition will result in further issues for these people as they age.

The United Nations predicted a year ago that there was an unfolding health crisis in our offshore detention system and that people should be evacuated immediately.

We need this legislation to stay and be providing a safe pathway for refugees in our “care” to receive the services that they clearly need.

To deny them this is paramount to torture, and not appropriate for a country that calls itself a democracy.

We recommend that the Committee continue to bring refugees to Australia for professional health care services and NOT to support the repeal of the Medevac law.