

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 SUPPORTS PHELPS BILL TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Having gained assurances on key amendments to the legislation in recent days, the AMA supports the asylum seeker Urgent Medical Treatment Bill being promoted by Independent MP and former AMA President, Professor Kerry Phelps.

The Phelps bill will allow the temporary removal of children from offshore detention, create a workable system providing proper health care for refugees and asylum seekers under the protection of the Australian Government, and keeps in place deterrents that prevent asylum seekers risking their lives at sea and endangering themselves and others.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said that it is vital that all asylum seekers and refugees in the care of the Australian Government have access to quality care.

“There is compelling evidence that the asylum seekers on Nauru, especially the children, are suffering from serious physical and mental health conditions, and they should be brought to Australia for appropriate quality care,” Dr Bartone said.

“This week’s alarming Médecins Sans Frontières report on the health of detainees on Nauru was another signal that urgent action is needed.

“This is a health and human rights issue of the highest order. We must do the right thing.

“The amended Phelps bill is an important measure that will allow the temporary transfer to Australia from Nauru and Manus sooner for those in need of urgent care.

“The AMA has been advocating strongly for better health care for asylum seekers for many years.

“Our 2015 Position Statement, *Health Care of Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, called for the removal of all children from offshore detention, among other measures.

“We want a new national statutory body of clinical experts, independent of government, with the power to investigate and advise on the health and welfare of asylum seekers and refugees.”

The AMA is pushing for further legislation that incorporates the following reforms:

- asylum seekers and refugees should have access to the same level of health care as all Australian citizens;
- asylum seekers and refugees living in the community should have continued access to culturally appropriate health care, including specialist care, to meet their ongoing physical and mental health needs, including rehabilitation;
- all asylum seekers and refugees, independent of their citizenship or visa status, should have universal access to basic health care, counselling, and educational and training opportunities; and
- asylum seekers and refugees living in the community should have access to Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), state welfare and employment support, and appropriate settlement services.

Dr Bartone wrote to Prime Minister Morrison in September calling for the children on Nauru to be brought to Australia for appropriate medical care, with similar letters going to all MPs and Senators.

“We have worked closely with the Chief Medical Officer of the Home Affairs Department, and we acknowledge that the Government has since removed some of the children from Nauru,” Dr Bartone said.

“But we need a compassionate and enduring long-term solution that ensures quality appropriate health care for all asylum seekers and refugees in the care of the Australian Government.”

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