



RACGP

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Healthy Profession.
Healthy Australia.

1 September 2017

Mr Tim Watling
Committee Secretary
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Email legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Watling

RE: Australian Border Force Amendment (Protected Information) Bill 2017

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) thanks the Department for Immigration and Border Protection for this opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Australian Border Force Amendment (Protected Information) Bill 2017.

The RACGP is the peak professional body for general practice in Australia representing more than 35,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice. The RACGP has consistently called for an end to mandatory restrictive detention for asylum seekers on humanitarian grounds.

Members of the RACGP were greatly concerned when the Australian Border Force Act 2015 was enacted, specifically in relation to the secrecy and disclosure provisions that applied to medical practitioners working in immigration detention health facilities. We welcomed the subsequent amendment to the Act excluding medical practitioners from these provisions.

However, the RACGP remains concerned that other professionals employed in or contracted to work in immigration detention centres funded by the Commonwealth are still governed by these secrecy and disclosure provisions. We understand this includes teachers, social workers and caseworkers. The RACGP welcomes the current Bill that proposes to clarify the secrecy provisions and amend the definition of protected information in the Act to matters of security and defence.

The RACGP commends the Department for Immigration and Border Protection for referring to Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression") when making these amendments. As medical practitioners, we are conscious of our ethical responsibilities and strive to uphold the values detailed in the Declaration of Geneva.

While the RACGP welcomes changes proposed in the Australian Border Force Amendment (Protected Information) Bill 2017, we maintain our position that restrictive mandatory detention of asylum seekers is harmful to their health and wellbeing and once again call for an end this practice.

The RACGP thanks you for your consideration of this feedback. If more information is required, please contact

Yours sincerely,

Dr Bastian Seidel
President