

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 OCTOBER 2008

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(70) Output 1.1: Migration and Temporary Entry

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

- (1) Can the Department provide a breakdown of the health and security checks that are required when processing boat people?
- (2) Are these the same health checks that are required when visa holders, already residing in the community, apply for permanent residency in Australia?
- (3) Do the health checks involve a mental health assessment?

Answer:

- (1) There are two health assessments undertaken for unauthorised boat arrivals:
 - a. Health Induction Assessment
 - b. Medical Examination for Visa application

(a) All people entering immigration detention are offered a **Health Induction Assessment (HIA)**. The purpose of the Assessment is to establish a person's health status including any physical or mental health issues or conditions that require immediate attention or ongoing health management while the person remains in immigration detention. The process involves the collection of a medical history, including vaccination history, a physical examination and a mental health assessment.

Additional screening may be undertaken where there is an indicated risk or it is required by a public health authority. For example, the HIA for people entering detention that have recently arrived from a country with a known increased risk of communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, includes screening for these conditions. The Health Care Provider conducting the HIA may perform additional screening or testing for different health conditions where they observe clinical symptoms indicating such a need. The decision to offer additional testing and the nature of the additional testing offered is made by the treating Health Care Provider based on their professional judgement and the information and observations they have collected during the health assessment process. Screening and testing of communicable diseases is conducted as per the *Guidelines for the Public Health Management of Communicable Diseases in Australian Detention Environments*.

(b) **Medical examination for a visa application** – where a person who is an unauthorised boat arrival, applies for a protection visa, a full medical examination is required.

Depending on the age of a protection visa applicant, they must undertake:

- a chest x-ray if 11 years or older
- a medical examination and
- an HIV test if 15 years or older.

A chest x-ray is undertaken to determine if the applicant has Tuberculosis. Pregnant women are excluded from a chest x-ray; a physical examination is undertaken instead. An applicant may be issued with a health undertaking for a follow-up medical examination or treatment by a state or territory health authority.

The medical examination differs from the initial Health Induction Analysis (HIA) (which is completed to determine any immediate/urgent health issues) in that a broader range of health issues are assessed including:

- Respiratory system
- Nervous system
- Mental state
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus test – for persons 15 years or older
- Urinalysis

Security Checks

Under his discretionary, non-compellable powers, the Minister may allow persons who arrive at excised offshore places (Offshore Entry Persons), who have been assessed as engaging Australia's protection obligations under the Refugees Convention, to lodge an application for a Protection visa. Criteria for this visa that must be met include satisfying Public Interest Criteria (PIC) 4001 (which includes onshore police checks and offshore as relevant), 4002 (the applicant is not assessed to be directly or indirectly a risk to security), and 4003(A) (the applicant is not determined to be directly or indirectly associated with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). These Public Interest Criteria requirements also apply to Onshore unauthorised boat arrivals.

- (2) The health checks for protection and permanent visa applicants are the same. Protection visa applicants will not fail the health requirement if they have a specific health condition whereas a permanent visa applicant may fail the health requirement based on the grounds of public health risk, likely significant costs to the community or prejudice of access in terms of health care and community services. A Medical Officer of the Commonwealth will provide an opinion on whether a permanent visa applicant meets the health requirement. Protection visa applicants will not be refused a visa on health grounds.
- (3) Every Unauthorised Boat Arrival is offered a Mental Health Assessment as part of the HIA. This is an initial mental health screening process that is undertaken to determine if there are any conditions which may require treatment. This is completed by trained health professionals and any issues identified during this process are referred to the relevant mental health specialists or treated medically.