



REFUGEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING INDEPENDENT HEALTH ADVISORY PANEL

An expert panel to monitor the health of refugees in offshore detention

The old parties are risking the health and wellbeing of thousands of refugees, including children, by dumping them in appalling conditions in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. A caring nation looks after people fleeing persecution and their physical and mental health.

In the rush to set up cruel detention camps and slum cities, there is no plan for independent oversight of refugees' health and care. The old parties are committed to dumping all refugees who come by boat out-of-sight, out-of-mind in the poorest nations in our region, with no safeguards for their medical and mental health needs.

Reports from whistle-blowers and the UNHCR already tell us that conditions in the camps are harsh and dangerously inadequate, but there is no transparency about what is happening in Australia's name.

> SAFEGUARDING THE HEALTH OF PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA'S CARE

The Australian Greens want to put a stop to offshore detention altogether. But while it is in place, Australia remains responsible for looking after the health and wellbeing of refugees we send to detention camps. There must be special oversight of the impacts of indefinite detention on these already traumatised people.

The Greens will establish an independent panel of medical and mental health experts to provide transparent public oversight and rigorously monitor the needs and wellbeing of vulnerable people sent by Australia to Nauru and PNG.

The Independent Health Advisory Panel would:

- be selected from a pool of experts nominated by Australia's peak medical, psychiatric and psychological bodies;
- be self-directed in the nature of their investigations;
- have access to all offshore facilities and personnel;
- be independent of the Minister and report directly to the Parliament every 6 months.

The Panel would be tasked with reporting on the health conditions inside detention camps, investigating deficiencies in care, and making recommendations for improving the medical and mental health care that refugees sent offshore can access.

> FAILING REFUGEES' WELLBEING IS FAILING OUR DUTY OF CARE

The boat voyage that brings refugees to our shores seeking sanctuary is the last stage in a long and often dangerous journey. After traumatic experiences and long periods in unsafe conditions, the physical and mental health needs of refugees and asylum seekers can be complex. This means that refugees in detention need access to comprehensive, modern health care facilities and expert help.

We have already seen numerous reports of the damage caused to adults and children by detention in Nauru, Manus Island, Christmas Island and the Australian mainland. Each report is more worrying than the last, highlighting serious problems with the physical and mental health of asylum seekers in detention.ⁱ The history of personal trauma, the hot and steamy conditions, the limited resources including limited fresh water, the risk of disease, the remoteness and the high levels of distress about the future, all add up to a dangerously difficult environment for maintaining the good health and wellbeing of refugees.

Australia is raiding our foreign aid budget to spend over \$8 billion on offshore asylum seeker management, and is outsourcing basic medical care to commercial contractors.ⁱⁱ Given the horror stories emerging from the detention camps, this arrangement is unacceptable and the full transparency and oversight of the Independent Health Advisory Panel is urgently needed. Now that Labor is committed to dumping hundreds of children and unaccompanied minors in Nauru, rigorous health oversight are essential.



Australia recognises that people have a right to health care. We have a duty to look after the basic health needs of people under our protection. In sending vulnerable people offshore, the first step should have been to establish an expert advisory committee to review and oversee the protections conditions as recommended by the Houston Panel.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite public promises by the Government that a degree of health oversight would be provided, there has been no review and oversight of offshore detention so far.^{iv} The Greens are not willing to leave refugee health and well-being to chance.

> PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE TO CARE FOR REFUGEES

The Independent Health Advisory Panel would be composed of experts nominated by professional bodies for their expertise in relevant medical and psychological fields. This ensures only the most highly-qualified experts will be on the panel.

By restricting the panel to people who are nominated for their expertise by medical bodies concerned only with the health of patients, we ensure true independence. The experts have professional and ethical obligations entirely separate from the political and bureaucratic priorities of the Department and the Minister.

> INDEPENDENT AND TRUSTWORTHY EXPERT OVERSIGHT

The Independent Health Advisory Panel will report to Parliament every 6 months on the conditions in detention facilities and the challenges to delivering sound health care.

The Australian Parliament, and the public, will see the report at the same time as the Immigration Minister, ensuring there is no opportunity for political interference in the contents of the report. The Government's response to these reports would then be made in full public view of the realities of the situation on the ground - not a redacted report from a government contractor.

The Greens have already introduced a bill into the Parliament to implement this policy, so there is no reason why this important oversight measure should be delayed.

The Greens will provide an initial \$2 million over the forward estimates to resource the work of the Panel.

The Independent Health Advisory Panel is supported by the Australian Human Rights Commission,^v the Australian Medical Association and other health experts.^{vi}

> BETTER ALTERNATIVES

The old parties' cruel policies of dumping refugees in indefinite detention and inadequate 'resettlement' in our region's poorest nations will inevitably lead to further trauma and harm. There have already been terrible disclosures of self-harm, mental ill-health and even alleged sexual abuse which shows that the current level of care and oversight is not adequate.

The Greens would offer people safer pathways than boats by increasing our humanitarian intake, particularly from Indonesia, and house all asylum seekers in the Australian community after security and medical checks have been conducted. The evidence is clear that this approach is more humane, billions of dollars cheaper, and leads to better outcomes for all involved.

Until the Greens' humane and effective refugee policy is adopted, the Australian government must put in place health and wellbeing safeguards for all refugees sent offshore through establishing an Independent Health Advisory Panel.

ⁱ Joint Select Committee on Australia's Immigration Detention Network, Final Report 2012;

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/12/united-nations-report-manus-island?guni=Article:in%20body%20link>; Report of the UNHCR Monitoring Visit to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea 11-13 June 2013

ⁱⁱ Economic Statement, released by Treasurer the Hon Chris Bowen MP, August 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Report of the Expert Panel into Asylum Seekers*, para 3.59.

^{iv} <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/15/manus-island-committee-never-met>

^v <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/inquiry-migration-amendment-health-care-asylum-seekers-bill-2012-2012>

^{vi} <http://ama.com.au/ausmed/node/3798>