



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **End detention of the mentally ill**

Major mental health groups have today called on the Gillard government and Department of Immigration to urgently review the treatment of vulnerable detainees within the immigration system, and to release all those with mental illness, and those at risk, into appropriate community care. This call comes after another death at Villawood detention housing, taking the total of deaths to six since September 2010.

Bodies, including the Australian Psychological Society, Public Health Association of Australia, the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses and senior psychiatrists, have responded to the alarming reports of increasing self-harm and mental illness in detention centres with a call for the establishment of an urgent independent mental health review process to assess, and make treatment and placement recommendations for these vulnerable detainees, such as those with mental disorders, torture and trauma survivors, children and adolescents.

It is broadly recognised that long term restrictive detention is correlated with increased rates of mental illness, suicide and self-harm.

Professor Louise Newman, Chair of the Detention Health Advisory group said: "There is no possibility, no matter what health infrastructure or health staffing are provided, that detention centres could become treatment facilities suitable for these severely ill detainees. There are grave concerns these people are at increased risk because they are being denied appropriate care."

"We are concerned that there is now a culture of mental breakdown in detention, with many needing treatment in hospitals. We need to act now to prevent more deaths," she said

Professor Newman added: "The system of prolonged mandatory detention in remote facilities with limited supports and mental health services is directly contributing to this epidemic of mental illness, self-harm and suicidal behaviour."

The professional mental health groups call for urgent review and placement of ill detainees into community care facilities, with an end to dangerous and inhumane practices.

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**For more information or to arrange an interview contact Karen Coghlan 03 8662 3638 or Rebecca Matthews 03 8662 3358 or the media mobile 0435 896 444.**

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*The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 20,000 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.*