Re: Children on Nauru and their families

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) welcomes the news that the Morrison government has transferred some critically ill children to Australia for medical treatment. However, we remain extremely concerned about the health of these children once they return to Nauru, along with the health of all other children and their families in immigration detention.

The severe and long-lasting physical and mental health impacts of long-term indefinite detention are well established. Yet in recent weeks multiple health professionals and the Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) have been expelled from Nauru.

A public health emergency is now taking place on Nauru. People in detention are having to resort to High Court litigation in order to get medical treatment that they urgently require. Basic human rights are being violated. Recent asylum statistics document that there are over 1,300 people in detention in Nauru, Manus and Christmas Island. There have been 16 suicides in the detention centres and many attempted suicides including those of children.

The PHAA believes that urgent action is required to protect the health and wellbeing of all people in detention including children. The Australian Government, as a signatory to the Geneva Convention, has the power and responsibility to address this situation. The only effective solution is to remove the children and their families from Nauru to a place where safety and wellbeing can be assured.

The PHAA joins together with thousands of other health professionals and organisations and academics for refugees in Australia in urging the Government to value the lives of these children and their families and others in detention by taking immediate action. As a nation, we have the capacity to offer a more humane and compassionate solution to those seeking asylum especially by boat.

Many of the children suffering on Nauru today were not even born when the detention policy was implemented. There is no moral justification for their current treatment and their health continues to rapidly deteriorate.

Today, releasing children and their families from Nauru is a priority policy decision that will save lives.

Yours Sincerely,

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