

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Prime Minister,

Re Removal of Children & Families from Immigration Detention on Nauru

On behalf of our member hospitals, we call for a bipartisan approach to transfer all asylum seeker and refugee children and their families off Nauru as a matter of urgency.

Children's Healthcare Australasia (CHA) represents approximately 80 paediatric services across Australia and New Zealand, including all of the Children's Hospitals as well as paediatric units within General Hospitals, large and small. Each year, CHA members provide care for more than 60% of total Australian public paediatric inpatients between the ages of 0-16 years.

Our hospitals and paediatric staff have worked with the children transferred from Nauru for medical care, we are currently providing receiving care for a number of this cohort. In recent weeks Australian Children's Hospital Executives have collaborated to streamline medical transfers and ensure beds are available when required.

Our members have witnessed the health and developmental impact of offshore processing for children and for their families. These children have been seriously unwell - we have seen children who have shut down completely, children who have engaged in prolonged food and fluid refusal, and children with psychotic depression. The nature and severity of their suicidal ideation reflects their age and development, but in no way should be underestimated - we cannot overstate how abnormal it is to see this pathology in children. One child required intubation and ventilation for mental health concerns. Many children have now been admitted after lengthy food and fluid refusal, with unstable observations and abnormal blood tests.

Clinical presentations have been driven by the children's circumstances on Nauru, by the involuntary and indefinite nature of their placement, the impact on parents and parenting, and through the lack of future prospects. These children have all missed school, older children have clear evidence of education deficits, younger children invariably have developmental delays, and many have attachment issues. Mental healthcare and supports in Nauru have been fragmented, and all children have had gaps in their health screening and vaccinations, despite assurances of quality primary care.

Many of these children have required lengthy admissions at Australian paediatric hospitals; all of them have required long-term outpatient care, and the complexity of

their presentations has required the full range of skills and expertise within our tertiary healthcare system. Staff distress at the circumstances and condition of these children has been a real and ongoing concern.

These children have been harmed by the impact of Australian policy and the conditions and circumstances of their placement on Nauru. Most have been in Nauru for 5 years – for some, this time traverses all their early childhood, for others, this time is most of their primary or high school years. We ask that you consider this duration and what it means for a child and family. It is insufficient to provide reactive healthcare in the advent of emergencies. We urge you to act quickly to prevent further harm through transferring these children to Australia or New Zealand for medical care, and by ensuring durable settlement for them and their families.

Sincerely,



Dr Barbara Vernon
Chief Executive Officer
Children's Healthcare Australasia

31 October 2018

