

## Position Statement:

### *Young People in Immigration Detention*

- ❖ The AAAH calls for the immediate resettlement or transfer to Australia of young people (and their families) who are refugees or asylum seekers being held or living on Nauru, Manus Island or Christmas Island.
- ❖ The AAAH commends workers who have spoken publicly about harmful conditions for young people living in the above locations.
- ❖ The AAAH opposes any held detention, either onshore or offshore, of young people, children and their families who are seeking asylum in Australia.

### *Rationale*

Prolonged (> 30 days) immigration detention of young asylum seekers is harmful to their health and development. Young people who arrive in offshore detention centres have almost inevitably faced significant and cumulative trauma, such as witnessing violence due to war, deaths of relatives or other community members, fear of persecution, distress and mental health problems among parents, dangerous conditions during their passage towards Australia and/ or physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Unaccompanied minors are even more vulnerable as they arrive in detention centres without parents, relatives or carers.

Young people in immigration detention have high rates of mental health problems and self-harm.<sup>1</sup> Since early 2014, at least three young people (under 26 years) have died who were held in, or recently released from, offshore Immigration Detention centres<sup>2,3,4</sup> and there have been many reports of sexual assaults including of young women.<sup>5</sup>

Adolescence is a unique and critical time of life when physical, cognitive, emotional and social capabilities rapidly develop. The environment in which young people mature through adolescence has a profound impact on their health and wellbeing at the time, and into the future.

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As such Australia has an obligation to not only to protect young people from harm, but to afford them their rights to freedom, health, education and full participation in the community.

**Endorsed by the [AAAH Board of Directors](#) 21 October 2016**

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<sup>1</sup> The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in immigration detention (2014). Australian Human Rights Commission.

<sup>2</sup> The Senate: Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee. [Incident at the Manus Island Detention Centre from 16 February to 18 February 2014](#). Commonwealth of Australia 2014 ISBN 978-1-76010-103-9

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-10/inquest-into-asylum-seeker-hamid-khazaei's-death/7500322>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-29/nauru-refugee-who-set-himself-on-fire-dies/7371112>

<sup>5</sup> Select Committee on the recent allegations relating to conditions and circumstances at the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru. [Taking responsibility: conditions and circumstances at Australia's Regional Processing Centre in Nauru](#). Commonwealth of Australia 2015 ISBN 978-1-76010-288-3