

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 and Manus Island
- ❖ The AAAH commends workers who have spoken publicly about harmful conditions for young people of refugee backgrounds living in the above locations, and politicians and others who have called for an end to immigration detention of children and their families
- ❖ 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 immigration detention of young refugees is harmful to their health and development.¹ 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.² As of June 2018, 12 refugees have died while detained or living on Manus Island or Nauru, these include three young people (under 26 years) and nine people aged 26 – 34, half of all these from suicide.³ There have been many reports of sexual assaults including of young women.⁴ In recent weeks, there has been intensified advocacy nationally to remove all children from Nauru by Universal Children's Day on 20 November 2018.⁵ Further, the humanitarian aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF; Doctors Without Borders), strongly condemned the Australian Government's policy of offshore detention of refugees as well as the sudden decision by the Nauruan government to terminate MSF's provision of mental health services, which was available to those of refugee backgrounds.⁶

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 not only to protect young people from harm, but to afford them their rights to freedom, health, education and full participation in the community. The uncertainty of prolonged and indefinite off-shore detention, and lack of resettlement opportunities for those who have gained refugee status, does not fulfil these obligations.

Endorsed by the [AAAH Board of Directors](#) 5 November 2018

¹ Zwi K, Mares S, Nathanson D, Kuwei Tay A, Silove D (2017). The impact of detention on the social-emotional wellbeing of children seeking asylum: a comparison with community-based children. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*.

² *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in immigration detention* (2014). Australian Human Rights Commission.

³ Doherty B, Evershed N, Ball A. [Deaths in offshore detention: the faces of the people who have died in Australia's care](#). *The Guardian*, 20 June 2018.

⁴ 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

⁵ www.kidsoffnauru.com

⁶ Médecins Sans Frontières. [Refugees lives in danger with MSF forced to end mental health care activities](#). Press Release, 11 October 2018.