



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Media Release

Minister must release children from detention

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President of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Professor Nicholas Talley has called on the Federal Government to release every child held in immigration detention and urged the Government to immediately adopt all recommendations from the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention.

The Attorney General tabled the Inquiry in Parliament late last night.

Professor Talley said holding children in immigration detention is unacceptable due to the significant negative impact on their health and is clearly in breach of Australia's international human rights obligations.

"Detention itself is damaging. Even after the Government's recent decision to move 94 children off Christmas Island, 330¹ children remain locked in detention facilities on Nauru or in mainland facilities."

"Locking children in detention is inhumane and has a devastating and long lasting impact on their mental and physical health," Professor Talley said.

Paediatrician, Associate Professor Karen Zwi is one of several RACP Fellows who visited immigration detention centres as part of the inquiry. She said children in immigration detention live in harsh conditions with inadequate access to health services.

"This inquiry details the appalling conditions in which children are being forced to live, and the Government cannot simply ignore it any more.

"The Minister must act now and move all children along with their other family members from offshore detention into the community," Associate Professor Zwi said.

In her evidence to the inquiry, Associate Professor Zwi said many children she saw in detention centres displayed symptoms consistent with major depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or generalised anxiety disorders.

"Children were displaying signs of distress, such as refusing to speak or eat, crying through the night unable to sleep, bed wetting and developmental regression. This environment is very damaging to children, even by the government's own admission, and some children may never recover," Associate Professor Zwi said.

The RACP made 25 recommendations to the Federal Government as part of its [submission](#) to the AHRC inquiry. The submission also highlighted the conflict of interest where the Minister for Immigration, as the legal guardian for unaccompanied children, is responsible both for placing children in detention and for acting in their best interests.

"The Minister's first obligation must be to protect these children from the significant and long term harm being caused to them by the policies of his Government," Professor Talley said.

¹ As of January 31 2015, based on figures from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection: <http://www.immi.gov.au/About/Documents/detention/immigration-detention-statistics-jan2015.pdf>

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