

**The Australian College of Children and Young People's Nurses
Coordinated submission to the
National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014**

**Submitted by Ms Catherine Marron
Chair of BOD ACCYPN
29th May 2014**



The Australian College of Children and Young People's Nurses (ACCYPN) provides this submission on behalf of its members to the President of the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014.

The ACCYPN wishes to provide comment on the Terms of Reference that specifically address the impact of detention on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Impacts of detention on children's health and wellbeing

- Children seeking asylum are regarded by ACCYPN as a marginalised group that need particular attention and advocacy. ACCYPN upholds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Childⁱ and is concerned that the rights of children of families seeking asylum are upheld, and that potential impacts on the child's physical health and emotional wellbeing are addressed.
- Early childhood is a critical time of growth and development and predictive of the child's future potential. ACCYPN is concerned that detention may not enable and support families with young children to provide an appropriate environment and stimuli to help their children to reach their full potential.
- ACCYPN is concerned that children in immigration detention may experience prolonged discomfort and boredom, and an exacerbation of the anxiety and trauma from which the family are trying to escape.
- The impacts of detention on children and adolescent's mental health have been well documented. Children have often been exposed to violence and trauma in their country of origin and during their journey to Australia, including witnessing and/or experiencing sexual and physical violence.^{ii, iii}
- There is a direct link between traumatic experiences and conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, depression and behavioural problems.^{iv, v, vi}
- Furthermore, there is a strong association between immigration detention and poor child mental health.^{vi, vii}
- Being held in detention contributes to depression and impacts on children's development resulting in speech and language delay and regressive behaviours such as bedwetting, biting and head banging.^{viii, ix, x}
- Frequent relocation from centre to centre also exacerbates mental health problems in children.^{xi, xii}
- Additional stressors including family separation, parental hopelessness, depression and anxiety, uncertainty and exposure to traumatic events within detention are compounded by the lack of access to education and activities needed for healthy childhood development.^{iii, vii, xiii, xiv, xv}

Recommendations

- ACCYPN does not support children and young people being kept in detention centres, and would recommend they be in community detention arrangements until their status is reviewed.
- If children and young people are to be held in detention then:
 - Specialised healthcare, access to education and developmentally appropriate play, family support and a safe environment is required for the child to reach their full potential.
 - The location of the detention center should not create a further health risk to the child and young person through environmental hazards and communicable diseases.

ACCYPN recommends to the Commission of Inquiry to put the health needs of children in detention ahead to politically driven solutions, and to recommend that children of asylum seeking families have access to facilities, services and supports that meets the child and family's health, education and cultural & religious requirements in a community detention arrangement.

ⁱ United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577

ⁱⁱ Fazel M, Stein M (2002) The mental health of refugee children, *Arch Dis Childhood* 87:366–370. doi:10.1136/adc.87.5.366.

ⁱⁱⁱ Newman, L & Harris, A, Refugees and asylum seekers: supporting recovery from trauma, Trauma and Grief Network, accessed 9th April 2014 <http://tgn.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Refugee%20Tipsheet.pdf>

^{iv} Bronstein, I., & Montgomery, P. (2011). Psychological distress in refugee children: a systematic review. *Clinical Child And Family Psychology Review*, 14(1), 44-56

^v Hadgkiss, E, Lethborg, Asylum seeker health and wellbeing: scoping study, St Vincent's Health Australia, accessed 9th April 2014 <http://www.mhima.org.au/pdfs/asylum%20seeker%20health%20and%20wellbeing.pdf>

^{vi} Newman, L, Proctor, N & Dudley, M (2013) Seeking asylum in Australia: immigration detention, human rights and mental health care, *Australasian Psychiatry*, 21(4), 315-320

^{vii} Dudley, M., Steel, Z., Mares, S., & Newman, L. (2012). Children and young people in immigration detention. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*, 25(4), 285-292. doi: 10.1097/YCO.0b013e3283548676

^{viii} Hadgkiss, E, Lethborg, Asylum seeker health and wellbeing: scoping study, St Vincent's Health Australia, accessed 9th April 2014 <http://www.mhima.org.au/pdfs/asylum%20seeker%20health%20and%20wellbeing.pdf>

^{ix} Sanchez-Cao, E., Kramer, T., & Hodes, M (2013). Psychological distress and mental health service contact of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 39(5), 651-659

^x Australian Human Rights Commission (2014b) *Inquiry team visits distressed children on Christmas Island*, 24 March 2014, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/children-immigration-detention>

^{xi} Goosen, S., Stronks, K., & Kunst, A. E. (2014). Frequent relocations between asylum-seeker centres are associated with mental distress in asylum-seeking children: a longitudinal medical record study. *International Journal Of Epidemiology*, 43(1), 94-104.

^{xii} Laughland O. 2014. Asylum seekers fail in legal bid to stop transfer to Western Australia. The Guardian, April 2. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/02/asylum-seekers-fail-prevent-transfer>

^{xiii} Wieggersma, P. A., Stellinga-Boelen, A. A., & Reijneveld, S. A. (2011). Psychosocial problems in asylum seekers' children: the parent, child, and teacher perspective using the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 199(2), 85-90

^{xiv} Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) *Immigration detention on Christmas Island: Observations from visit to immigration detention facilities on Christmas Island*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Accessed 6th April 2014. <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/immigration-detention-christmas-island-observations-visit-immigration-detention>

^{xv} United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2013) *UNHCR monitoring visit to the Republic of Nauru 7 to 9 October 2013*, Accessed 24th March 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5294a6534.html>