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 Child 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.

- There is a direct link between traumatic experiences and conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, depression and behavioural problems.

- Furthermore, there is a strong association between immigration detention and poor child mental health.

- 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.

- Frequent relocation from centre to centre also exacerbates mental health problems in children.

- 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.

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.

---

Submission 187


