MEDIA STATEMENT

ACMHN calls for action on mental health of refugee children in detention

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is calling for immediate action to protect the mental health of the approximately 119 children seeking asylum on Nauru.

“The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is categorical ‘that Nauru is an inappropriate place for children seeking asylum to live (either in detention or in the community’ and has a profoundly negative and lasting impact on child mental and emotional wellbeing and development’”, said ACMHN CEO Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan.

Ms Ryan said that reports of child self-harm, attempted suicide, and resignation syndrome are extremely disturbing and concerning to all mental health professionals in Australia.

The harm that is occurring to children as a result of being held indefinitely on Nauru is being compounded by poor access to health and social services and the prolonged sense of hopelessness and despair that arises from being unable to leave the Island and having little or no prospects for social and economic participation in the foreseeable future.

It is vital that asylum seekers and refugees be provided with safe, stable accommodation, food security, sanitation, education and health.

“A majority of children seeking asylum on Nauru will have already experienced primary trauma prior to arriving in Australian waters. Prolonged and indefinite detention subjects those children to secondary trauma and creates further barriers for them to live a full and contributing life in the long term”, said Ms Ryan.

“Mental health nurses stand with the Australian Medical Association, doctors for refugees and other health professional groups calling for the 119 children held in detention on Nauru to be brought to Australia or offered asylum in another country where they can receive the mental health support and treatment they need and live full and contributing lives.”

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Available for interview or comment ACMHN CEO Adjunct Professor Kim Ryan

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