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MEDIA STATEMENT

‘Mental Health is a Human Right’ takes centre stage at the 44th International Mental Health Nursing Conference

All over the world, people experiencing mental ill-health are subject to a wide range of human rights violations, including stigma and discrimination, poorer physical health and life expectancy and interventions that prevent them from exercising agency over decisions that concern them.

On 24 to 26 October, 400 delegates will gather in Cairns to attend the ACMHN 44th International Mental Health Nursing Conference (ACMHN 2018) to discuss how the work of mental health nurses can promote and uphold the rights of people experiencing mental illness to access the care they rightfully deserve and maximise their potential to lead fully inclusive and contributing lives.

ACMHN 2018 Orator, Professor Tom Calma AO, Chancellor of the University of Canberra said, “one in five of us will experience a mental health episode in our lifetime”.

“Whether the episode is acute or chronic, we may be supported by a specialist mental health nurse who is trained to tend to us professionally and with compassion, where they will experience our burden with us”, said Professor Calma.

In anticipation of his Opening Address at ACMHN 2018, Queensland Mental Health Commissioner, Ivan Frkovic said that “mental health nurses have a vital role in delivering and safeguarding the human rights of people in their care and their role goes to a much deeper level - that of ensuring human dignity.”

ACMHN Chief Executive, Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan said that working collaboratively, we need to strive to provide every person with the best opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

“In Australia alone, while a lot of progress and investments have been made in the mental health sector over the recent years, the mental health of the community is not improving, and human rights infringements are still occurring”, said Ms Ryan.

The ACMHN has started a campaign with an Open Letter calling for Prime Minister Scott Morrison and all MPs in Federal Parliament to evacuate over 85 children and their families off Nauru and Manus Island.

“Prolonged and indefinite detention subjects the children to secondary trauma and creates further barriers for them to live a full and contributing life in the long term”, said Ms Ryan.

Ms Ryan said health professionals have increasingly grown concerned about the condition of people being held on Nauru and Manus Island, particularly children.

“Mental health nurses together with the broader nursing workforce, make up the biggest clinical health workforce in Australia, and therefore have an important role to play in upholding the rights of those who are not in a position to advocate for their health and wellbeing.”

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