MEDIA RELEASE

Expert advice on asylum seeker health is crucial

The Immigration Health Advisory Group (IHAG), a key group that provided advice to Government on the health of asylum seekers in detention has been disbanded.

Those who sat on the IHAG – nurses, psychologists, torture and trauma specialists, and GPs – received letters on Friday advising them that the group will no longer exist. It will be replaced with just one advisor, Dr Paul Alexander.

To the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN), the peak body for mental health nurses and an advocate for appropriate mental health provisions for all those under Australia’s care, this is unacceptable.

“Independent external advice is critical”, said Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, CEO of the ACMHN. “The specialist knowledge from members, expressed as advice, is vital to providing evidence based support and practice to those in immigration detention”.

“Disbanding the IHAG will impact significantly on the mental health of those in immigration detention”, Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan said. “While I’m sure Dr Alexander is knowledgeable in this area, one person will never hold the depth of knowledge of a group from a variety of backgrounds”.

“This is a humanitarian issue, not a political one, we have a responsibility to ensure good mental health and health care and to prevent further suffering” said Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan.

“We know people in immigration detention have significant mental health concerns, which are exacerbated by being confined indefinitely”, Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan said.

“Getting rid of the group that provides independent clinical, evidence-based advice on mental health concerns is an outrage”, said Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan.

The ACMHN is calling upon the Government to rethink its decision to disband the IHAG, and make addressing the mental health of those in immigration detention a priority.

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