

9 November 2011

MEDIA RELEASE

DETENTION CENTRES ADMIT THEY CANNOT PROVIDE PROPER MENTAL HEALTH CARE - LEADING HEALTH ORGANISATIONS RENEW DEMAND IMMEDIATE ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH STANDARDS IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION

A report in today's Fairfax newspapers that the company paid to provide mental health services in detention centres has admitted "that prolonged detention of asylum seekers has created high demand for psychiatric services which its staff can't meet" is further evidence that the Government must urgently review the standards of mental health care in all immigration detention centres.

Over 30 of Australia's leading mental health and health organisations have renewed their demand that the Government immediately launch an independent investigation into the standards of mental health care in Australia's immigration detention centres.

This latest evidence reinforces the critical need for a pool of mental health professionals able to treat the complex range of mental health issues experienced by people in detention. Today's newspaper report about the International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) – which is funded to provide health services in immigration detention centres – shows that they are failing to provide the necessary health services. The newspaper report says:

"IHMS has only one psychiatrist on staff, used on a casual contract basis in the months of May, September and October. Although outside psychiatrists are used, detainees can wait up to six weeks for treatment ... IHMS also said detainees with complex mental health issues need to be in cities such as Sydney, Melbourne or Perth. According to immigration data, the remote Curtin desert centre and Northern detention centre, in Darwin, have the highest incidence of detainees diagnosed with a mental illness."

There are genuine concerns that the Government and its contracted service provider are not providing adequate mental health care to people in detention centres at a time when incidents of self-harm and suicide have increased, and riots, protests, and hunger strikes have become common.

It is clear that conditions inside immigration detention centres are unacceptable. The mental health crisis in the immigration detention system is rapidly worsening and these conditions cannot be allowed to continue.

The demand by Australia's leading organisations involved in mental health care for an immediate investigation into mental health services in detention centres has so far gone unanswered by the Federal Government.

Media contacts: Kim Ryan, CEO ACMHN 0417 289 189 or
Simon Tatz, Mental Health Council of Australia 0402 613 745

This statement is supported by:

- Australian College of Mental Health Nurses
- Australian Nursing Federation (ANF)
- Australian Medical Association (AMA)
- Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)
- Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA)
- Brain & Mind Research Institute (Prof Ian Hickie)
- Orygen Young Health (Prof Pat McGorry)
- National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum (NMHCCF)
- Australian Psychological Society (APS)
- ConNetica (Prof John Mendoza)
- SANE Australia
- Professor Louise Newman
- Royal College of Nursing Australia
- Lifeline Australia
- Australian College of Psychological Medicine
- Mental Health Research Institute
- Catholic Social Services Australia
- The Mental Health Association of Central Australia
- ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
- Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia
- Mental Illness Fellowship NQ
- Multicultural Mental Health Association of Australia
- GROW
- Crisis Support Services
- Neami Limited
- Norwood Association Inc
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia
- Queensland Voice for Mental Health
- Australian Association of Social Workers
- Reconnexion
- The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Carers Australia
- Suicide Prevention Australia