FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nurses hold grave concerns after the disbandment of IHAG

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is gravely concerned about the ramifications for the health needs of asylum seekers, immigration detainees and newly settled humanitarian entrants with the Government’s decision to disband the Immigration Health Advisory Group (IHAG) late last week.

ACN believes that the community and Government require the independent and expert advice provided by IHAG to address important health issues of new migrants; work of which nurses play a central role. ACN urges decision makers to immediately reinstate the group to maintain accountability in this growing area of public concern.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, ACN CEO, says without the IHAG there is no channel for a formal independent review of the standard of care provided in either onshore or offshore detention centres. These reviews ensure those detained receive sufficient physical and mental health care in accordance with international human rights.

“ACN is committed to the health and welfare of refugees, asylum seekers and immigration detainees in Australia. Our organisation is deeply disturbed that the current arrangements for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection exclude advice from expert nurses,” said Adjunct Professor Thoms.

Nurses are the predominant health professional group engaged in the delivery of health care to refugees and asylum seekers in the detention centre network, and through IHAG representative Sandy Eagar, ACN welcomed the opportunity to participate and offer knowledge, advice and support to this network of health professionals.

“In detention centres, nurses are at the forefront of health care, from front-line assessments on Christmas Island, through to the delivery of health maintenance programs such as vaccination and ongoing mental health assessments. A nurses’ role is crucial in maintaining the health systems in the immigration detention networks,” said Ms Eagar.

ACN is also severely disappointed that the achievements IHAG accomplished since its founding in
2006 were deemed ‘not very effectual’ by the Abbott Government. IHAG has been responsible for a raft of measures including (but not limited to) the recent review of the induction health assessment on Christmas Island (with identification of significant public health risks and consequent recommendations to reduce these risks), substantial input into the development of the Detention Health Standards and the creation of a new mental health screening process.

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