Children at risk in immigration detention centres says Nurses

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) and Maternal, Child and Family Health Nurses Australia (MCaFHNA) expressed their deep concerns regarding the health of children seeking asylum who are detained in offshore detention centres in their joint submission to the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention.

Both organisations agree that detention centres are inappropriate environments for children and that their experiences in the centres can have major detrimental effects on the children’s physical, social and mental wellbeing.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, ACN CEO says that detaining children in immigration facilities can have significant, long-lasting, negative consequences for their health and development.

“Childhood lays the foundation for future growth and well-being. Traumatic experiences and scarce access to health care during this time can result in learning difficulties, behavioural problems and physical and mental ill health. There is increasing evidence to show children placed in detention centres can experience high levels of distress, as well as a number of physical and mental health problems,” said Adjunct Professor Thoms.

Julian Grant, President of MCaFHNA agrees: “All children are at risk of harm in detention centres, and those with more complex health needs are particularly vulnerable.

“Currently all children who arrive as asylum seekers are placed in immigration detention centres, regardless of their individual, physical and mental health needs. Thorough health assessments must be undertaken so that children’s health needs are fully understood and appropriate care can be provided,” said Ms Grant.

Professor Thoms added that whilst current policies remain in place, a child’s right to safety, education, suitable living environments and appropriate health care must be protected without exception.

“It is essential that asylum seeking families have access to appropriate health care services and resources to address their needs. Australian detention centres are challenging environments for
clinicians and health services who deliver care. We support the staff in striving to maintain their professional and ethical responsibility to provide the highest standards of care for their patients, regardless of where they are located,” said Professor Thoms.

The full ACN and MCaFHNA’s joint submission to the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention can be viewed online at http://bit.ly/1ANRCGj

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