

The **Academy of Child and Adolescent Health** calls for the **immediate release** of people seeking asylum from hotel detention in Melbourne into the community. We fully support the Australian Human Rights Commission’s repeated appeal to the Morrison Government for: “...people in Australian immigration detention facilities who do not pose a security risk to the community to be released to community detention.”

The health risks to the detainees and the general population of continued incarceration in these “vertical cruise ships” during a worsening and unpredictable pandemic have been highlighted by medical experts across the country and repeatedly demonstrated around the world. Evidence is indisputable that these people, for whom the Government is responsible, are at greater risk from the pandemic itself. They are also at risk from the fear that lack of freedom and agency bring to all, and most particularly to those who are already vulnerable.

Many of the detainees held in Melbourne and elsewhere arrived as adolescent asylum seekers from situations that threatened their safety or their lives. Some have spent over seven years incarcerated with no hopeful signs of freedom, or with hope repeatedly dashed.

The inability of this Government to humanely deal with these legitimate asylum seekers represents policy failure in the extreme. The response of Minister Tudge that they are “free” to return to PNG or Nauru or their country of origin is increasingly unrealistic and ignorant of the circumstances they risked so much to flee. The ongoing financial costs associated with this failed policy run into billions of dollars. The costs to Australia’s global human rights reputation are also significant. The greatest cost, however, is endured by those directly impacted by a “deterrent” policy that no longer has any shred of credibility when undocumented arrivals come not by boat but by plane.

The cumulative mental health ill effects of prolonged detention with no hopeful signs of freedom are also widely known and inescapable. This worsens when people are being held in facilities that increase the risk of cross infection during the world’s worst pandemic.

From a medical perspective, from a basic ethical perspective, these conditions – and the Government’s defence of them - are potentially disastrous for those most vulnerable people, supposedly in Australian government’s “care”.

It should also be noted that many in the Melbourne hotels, and held in detention facilities elsewhere, came to Australia with health challenges and in search of treatment to which they were entitled. That their health situation should be worsened as a consequence defies medical sense and best practice at any time, but most emphatically in this time of pandemic and global changes, increasing poverty and unpredictable unrest.

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Endorsed by the Australian Refugee Child Health Network