

The **Academy of Child and Adolescent Health (ACAHA)** calls for Minister Andrews to reunite Tharnicaa Murugappan with her sister and family as soon as possible and release them from held detention. The mental health sequelae of both siblings require paediatric specialist mental health care which is not available, and not sustainable, on Christmas Island, nor in any held detention environment.

Best practice and our established duty of care requires that discharge can only occur back to a place of safety and cultural security. There is now a considerable evidence base, much of which is from Australia, demonstrating the physical and psychological harms of held detention. ACAHA sees health through a holistic lens. The physical, psychological, educational, social and neurodevelopmental needs of every child must be taken into consideration with every decision. As health professionals, we have statutory responsibilities to protect all children and adolescents and, therefore, should not return children to an environment that is known to be detrimental and harmful.

**Key points:**

1. Australia is a signatory nation to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1990). The Australian Human Rights Commission states: “Both domestic and international human rights law are clear when it comes to the detention of children. The detention of a child must only be a measure of last resort. In fact, section 4AA of the Migration Act explicitly states that ‘a minor shall only be detained as a measure of last resort’.”
2. Held detention is inappropriate and specifically harmful for children. Prolonged detention is particularly unsafe and Tharnicaa has spent the majority of her life, and the critical neurodevelopmental years, in held detention. Children need safety, hope, a nurturing environment, friends and play for their physical, developmental, educational, and mental health. Held detention has and will continue to cause lasting harm for children. Ongoing detention is not appropriate.
3. Therapeutic mental health engagement and support cannot be adequately provided nor sustained for children (and their families) while they remain in held detention.
4. Separation of cohesive family units is detrimental to children’s mental health and development. Families should remain together and be reunified wherever possible without undue delays.

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Endorsed by the Australian  
Refugee Child Health Network