



**THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS**

**RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT HEALTH ADVICE PANEL
FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT (2 - 31 MARCH 2019)**

I refer to the summary of the Independent Health Advice Panel (the Panel) report tabled in Parliament on 4 July 2019. The summary report outlines the membership, role and functions of the Panel and the operations of the Panel for the first quarter, being the period from 2 March 2019 (commencement of the Panel) until 31 March 2019 (the end of the first quarter). As it is the Panel's first report, the Panel has also provided an assessment of the physical and mental health conditions of transitory persons in regional processing countries and the standards of health services provided to transitory persons in regional processing countries.

In August and September 2012, the Labor Government established regional processing centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG) under memorandum of understanding with respective governments. Under these arrangements the Australian Government supports the governments of Nauru and PNG to provide services to transferees under regional processing arrangements.

As a consequence of the Labor Government's failure to halt the criminal people smugglers syndicates, the population at regional processing countries peaked at 1,353 in PNG and 1,285 in Nauru. I am pleased that due to the Coalition's strong and consistent approach to border protection, under Operation Sovereign Borders, the population at regional processing countries has reduced to 493 on PNG and 319 on Nauru. In addition, the Coalition Government has successfully removed all the children from both PNG and Nauru.

Medical investment in regional processing countries

Since being elected in September 2013, the Coalition Government has provided significant support to the Governments of Nauru and PNG to ensure transferees are provided with a range of health, welfare and support service arrangements. This has included assisting those Governments to significantly bolster health care in their countries.

Australia continues to support the delivery of health services to transferees under regional processing arrangements through contracted health service providers.

- The Pacific International Hospital (PIH) provides healthcare to transferees in PNG under a Letter of Intent with the Department of Home Affairs (the Department).
- International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) is contracted by the Department to provide healthcare to transferees in Nauru.

Up until 28 February 2019, the Department has spent \$455.5m between 2012-13 and 2018-19, in support of the delivery of health services in Nauru and PNG. This includes the following:

\$359.1m for the provision of health services under contract with IHMS, Aspen Medical Services and PIH.

- \$44.5m for the establishment and expansion/redevelopment of the Manus Regional Processing Clinic. This includes:
 - An initial investment of \$41.9m for the development and establishment of the clinic.
 - Further investment of \$2.6m for expansion and redevelopment.
 - This expenditure incurred by the Department has been capitalised in line with Australian Accounting Standards. \$51.9m for the following upgrades in Nauru:
 - The medical clinic at the RPC.
 - A portable medical centre.
 - Upgrades at the Republic of Nauru Hospital including:
 - construction of a surgical facility and related facilities including a six-bed inpatient ward, primary and mental health consultation rooms, a new x-ray building, temporary clinic and pathology buildings
 - new pathology and paediatrics buildings, and a new services compound containing a back-up power supply, a waste water treatment plant and water supply tanks.

Nauru

Health services in Nauru include primary healthcare and mental healthcare services. Health services are provided by a range of healthcare professionals including general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, dentists, radiographers, pharmacists, mental health nurses and specialists who provide clinical assessment and treatment.

There is also after-hours medical staffing to respond to after-hours medical emergencies. As such, healthcare is available on a 24/7 basis, including emergency care.

Appropriate health specialist can be arranged under the visiting specialist program on a fly-in-fly-out basis.

In addition to the IHMS Clinic at the regional processing centre, and the IHMS run Nauru Settlement Health Clinic, transferees can access health services through the Republic of Nauru Hospital.

As at 30 June 2019, there are 57 contracted health professionals, including 24 mental health professionals providing services to the transferees in Nauru. This is a ratio of approximately one health care professional to every six (6) transferees.

Mental healthcare in Nauru

Mental health care is delivered in a multidisciplinary manner by mental health nurses, clinical team leaders, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors including counsellors with torture and trauma counselling expertise.

Limited in-patient mental health services are available at the IHMS Clinic, with facilities designated for the provision of such services under Nauruan legislation.

Additional support for mental health care in Nauru may be provided through separate services requests, where necessary.

Torture and Trauma counselling services in Nauru

IHMS provides torture and trauma counselling services in Nauru, through a subcontract with Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma.

Notwithstanding that the Australian Government has removed all children from Nauru; there is capability to provide specific child and adolescent mental health services through a team of professionals with child and adolescent expertise, if required.

Obstetric and Neonatal Services in Nauru

IHMS medical professionals, including a full-time obstetrician and a midwife, provide healthcare to pregnant transferees to support the Republic of Nauru Hospital.

Pregnant women in the community receive primary care at the Nauru Settlement Health Clinic, including obstetric and midwifery services.

The Republic of Nauru Hospital routinely provides birthing services. Obstetric and neonatal care is provided through obstetric and midwifery services with support from the Republic of Nauru Hospital.

IHMS operates an anatomical ultrasound machine at the regional processing centre clinic to conduct morphological scans.

Specialist health services in Nauru

The visiting specialist program in Nauru provides for additional specialist services to be delivered by physiotherapists, optometrists, ophthalmologists, cardiologist/internal physician, speech and language therapists, gastroenterologists, neurologists, Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons and infectious disease physicians as clinically indicated.

I note that the IHAP believes that there are reasonable quality primary and secondary care services available in Nauru which are supplemented on a periodic basis by the availability of specialist services namely physiotherapists, optometrists, ophthalmologists, cardiologist/internal physicians, speech and language therapists, gastroenterologist, neurologists, ENT surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons and infectious disease physicians.

The Australian Government works closely with the Government of Nauru to ensure transferees continue to be provided with a range of health, welfare and support services, including extensive physical and mental healthcare provisions, free accommodation and utilities, allowances and employment services.

Individuals receive primary and mental health care, including specialised torture and trauma counselling services, through the Settlement Health Clinic. Emergency, secondary and tertiary health care is available at the Republic of Nauru Hospital.

I note IHAP's concurrence with the Government that where inpatient psychiatric care is required transferees should be transferred to a hospital with appropriate inpatient psychiatric care.

Like many smaller Pacific nations, Nauru has an established process for referring patients overseas for medical care and treatment, when appropriate services are not available on the island. Under the Nauruan Overseas Medical Referral process.

Transferees needing medical treatment not available in Nauru may be transferred to a third country for assessment or treatment, including Papua New Guinea, Taiwan or Australia.

Papua New Guinea

Health services in PNG include primary healthcare and mental healthcare services. Health services are provided by a range of healthcare professionals including general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, dentists, radiographers, pharmacists, mental health nurses and specialists who provide clinical assessment and treatment.

Pacific International Hospital (PIH) provides contracted health services at the general practitioner-led clinic at the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre (ELRTC) for all transferees residing in Manus Province.

The ELRTC Clinic operates between 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, and 9.00 am to 1.00 pm on Saturday.

Health care in ELRTC is delivered by medical officers, primary care nurses, paramedic, laboratory technician, mental health nurses, psychiatrists, radiologist, general nurses and emergency trained medical officers.

After hours treatment is available at the Lorengau General Hospital.

The local pharmacy in Lorengau provides medications with support from the PIH.

Where transferees require treatment not available in Manus Province, the PIH may arrange a temporary medical transfer to Port Moresby for inpatient or outpatient care.

PIH maintain a 24-hour emergency medical evacuation capability.

The PIH provides a medical officer and nurse liaison service to support patients referred to Port Moresby from Manus Province for medical treatment, including specialist services.

The liaison service is available during business hours Monday to Saturday and is designed to manage and co-ordinate follow up appointments with specialists and hospitals in Port Moresby, including mental health specialist services. Residents can also be referred or self-refer to other hospitals in PNG.

Health services available at the Pacific International Hospital in Port Moresby include:

- 24 x 7 Emergency Services
- Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
- Dialysis
- General and Trauma Surgery
- Paediatrics
- Corneal as well as retinal Ophthalmology Surgery
- Digital X-ray, MRI, CT Scan, Ultrasound and Mammography
- Urology
- Internal Medicine
- Eye and ENT care
- Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- Orthopaedics
- Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory, with full time interventional cardiologist
- Critical Care with seven ICU beds and dedicated full time intensivist

- Neuro Surgery Theatre with all equipment and Operating Microscope (served by visiting surgeons)
- Cardiac Surgery facilities, including a Heart Lung machine (served by visiting surgeons)
- Psychiatric services including an inpatient Mental Health Unit.

On 30 June 2019 there were 29 contracted medical professionals in PNG, including eight (8) mental health professionals providing services to transferees. This is a ratio of one health care professional to every 17 transferees. The recent establishment of an acute care inpatient psychiatric unit at Pacific International Hospital supports mental health of transferees and refugees. This unit commenced accepting patients on 12 April 2019.

Mental healthcare in PNG

PIH provides mental healthcare services.

Mental healthcare services at the ELRTC clinic are provided by mental health nurses, a mental health team leader, a psychiatrist, a psychologist and counsellors.

Transferees who require additional mental health services may be referred to the local hospital or to Port Moresby.

On 30 January 2019, the Department approved PIH to implement an in-patient Mental Health Care Service in Port Moresby.

On 12 April 2019, the new inpatient mental health facility at PIH opened, providing for both voluntary and involuntary admissions. PIH has commenced accepting patients for treatment by the PIH clinical team.

The services being offered in the PNG Mental Health ward include treatment for mood disorders, including major depressive disorder; substance use disorders; post-traumatic stress disorder; conditions related to trauma and trauma related conditions; anxiety disorders such as panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and specific phobias; serious mental illness including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia related disorders, and other psychotic disorders.

The inpatient mental health facility comprises four double bedrooms (8 beds); one four bed bay (4 beds); three single bedrooms (3 beds); and an activity room.

The Acute inpatient facility contains: three single bedrooms; one seclusion room; one activity room; and a secured nursing station.

The following staff have been recruited and deployed:

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| • 1 x Chief Psychiatrist | 1 x Substitute Nurse |
| • 1 x Psychologist | 6 x Nurse Aids |
| • 1 x Counsellor | 2 x Social Workers |
| • 1 x Ward Manager/Nurse Supervisor | 1 x Occupational Therapist |
| • 6 x Mental Health Nurses | 1 x Ward Clerk |

Medication management

Self-agency is supported through the ongoing distribution of medications to transferees residing in Manus Province.

The Lorengau pharmacy, the Lorengau Hospital and the PIH in Port Moresby fill prescriptions at no cost.

I note the Panel's view that these services provide a reasonable range of primary care at the ELRTC and some secondary services at the Lorengau Hospital in Manus.

I note the Panel's recognition of the physical facilities, the range of medical and investigative services available, and the quality of cultural understanding of the two psychiatrists working at PIH in Port Moresby. The Panel's confidence that acute inpatient mental health treatment can be provided at PIH is welcome and recognises the significant investments made to ensuring a high standard of health services are provided in PNG.

Quarterly operations of the Panel during the reporting period (2 – 31 March 2019)

I note that during the quarterly reporting period of 2 – 31 March 2019, the Panel consisted of two members, Dr Parbodh Gogna (Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Home Affairs / Surgeon General of the Australian Border Force) and Professor Brendan Murphy (Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer).

I note that during this reporting period, the Panel did not make any recommendations under section 198F of the Act.

During this reporting period, the Department transferred five (5) persons from PNG and 11 transitory persons from Nauru on the recommendation of our contracted medical services providers under section 198B of the Act. In addition to this, nine (9) accompanying family members were temporarily transferred to Australia from Nauru.

PETER DUTTON