

8 April 2026

The Honourable Tony Burke MP  
Minister for Home Affairs, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you as doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals concerned about the lack of access to healthcare for many people who seek asylum in Australia.

We are proud to work in a healthcare system that prioritises patient access over profit, built on the principle of universality. Yet, despite the intention for Medicare to be universal, our system is failing some of the most vulnerable people in Australia today.

Many people seeking asylum lose access to Medicare while lawfully engaging with Australia's formal refugee recognition processes. People who come to Australia fleeing war and persecution can even be stripped of their Medicare access as a result of departmental delays in processing their bridging visas, meaning they cannot get the medical treatment they need through no fault of their own. The Asylum Seekers Centre in Sydney now estimates that at least one in three of the people it supports do not have access to Medicare.

The consequences are severe. Treatable physical and mental health conditions worsen, often resulting in increased reliance on emergency departments and other high-cost health services down the line. The Asylum Seekers Centre has supported people repeatedly denied medical access solely because of their visa status, including people diagnosed with stage four cancer, people who have presented in critical medical conditions at Emergency Departments, or people who have presented at dental clinics with severe pain.

If our system of healthcare is to be truly universal, humanitarian, and rights-respecting, access must be based on medical need - not visa status.

Australia is bound by its human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which recognises the "right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" and the Convention on the Rights of the Child which calls on state parties to "strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services". However, for families exercising their full legal rights in the course of a protection claim, many are unable to access such services.

In 2024, the Australian Medical Association published a statement calling for greater access to medical care for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia. The statement affirms that "equitable, accessible, and appropriate health care must be provided to all those who

seek asylum in Australia, at all stages during their asylum-seeking journey.”<sup>1</sup> As many thousands of people seeking asylum fall through the cracks of our Medicare system on account of their visa status, we reaffirm our commitment to this statement.

We welcome the Government’s expansion of Australia’s humanitarian intake and efforts to create a fairer asylum system, but urgent steps are needed to ensure that all people seeking safety in Australia can receive the timely medical attention they need.

We thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Emily Cumming, Health Manager, Asylum Seekers Centre (Sydney)

Daniel McHugh, Registered Nurse

Olivia Adams, Registered Nurse

Mark Harris, Medical Practitioner

Dan Brettell, Ophthalmologist

Mecayla McLewis, Phlebotomist

Victoria Lee, Physiotherapist

Gemma Hartmann, Nurse

Muntaser Mahmud, Doctor

Ameera Alsaady, Doctor

Helen Peric, Doctor

Irene Xiao, Physiotherapist

Fiona Millington, Registered Nurse

Margo Hoekstra, Health Navigator Volunteer

Sarah Rusnak, Doctor

Mark Murphy, Registered Nurse

Nelson Wilson-Coffey, Registered Nurse

Sarah Ellyard, Registered Nurse

Zoe-Anne Guinea, Registered Nurse

Paz Roman, Refugee Torture and Trauma Worker (Counsellor)

Dr Teja Kodali, Doctor

Hannah Walters, Registered Nurse

Fatma Agar, Registered Nurse

Patrice Pengilley, Practice Manager

Kate Kostyrka, Paediatrician

Hassan Saleh, Counsellor

Daniel He, Clinical Psychologist

Nola Scilinato, Nurse

Emilie Werrin, Consultant

Alex Wilson, Assessment Officer and Registered Nurse

Laura Eutick, Project Officer at RACP

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee and Asylum Seeker Health and Wellbeing Position Statement, Australian Medical Association, 6 February 2024, <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-health-and-wellbeing-position-statement>

Hannah Marchant, Registered Nurse  
Danilo Pavlović, Health Support Services Administrator  
Lyn Bearlin, Retired Health Manager  
Grace Tunesi, Nurse  
Mailin Suchting, Research Manager and Former Healthcare Worker  
Sejal Vaghani, GP  
Jack Lawrence, Registered Nurse  
Aimee Keep, Nurse  
Angeleca Khuth, Registered Nurse  
Bronwyn Leece, Retired Health Care Worker  
Patricia Alcyone Emerson Pearse, Retired Medical Practitioner  
Elizabeth Thompson, Physiotherapist  
Christine Kerr, Counsellor  
Dr Marianne Jauncey, Public Health Physician  
Robyn Wansbrough, Retired Nurse  
Lawrence Chan, GP  
Margaret Beavis, GP and Academic  
Emma Denton, Dietetics Student  
Sarah Cooper, GP  
Louise Maher, Health Education Officer  
Michael Cecilio, Public Health Project Manager and Consultant  
Julie Smith, Retired Occupational Therapist  
Rob Way, GP  
Zoe Fernance, Medical Professional  
Jane Louise Scott, Administration  
Stephen R Leeder, Retired Medical Academic  
Kate Simpson, Receptionist  
Phoebe Kiel, Paramedic  
Claire Helm, Emergency Medicine Doctor  
Kate Johnson, Neurologist  
Jennifer Moon, Paediatrician  
Dr Rebekah Ledingham, GP  
Shea Wilson, GP  
Dr Kate Wylie, GP  
Tarin Ward, Doctor  
Sarah Gonzalez, Speech Pathologist  
Claire Francis, GP  
Dr Sana Khalid Pathan, Psychiatrist  
Tabara Dione, Consultant Anaesthetist  
Nyrie Dodd, GP  
Dr Jo Crookes FRACGP, Remote GP ED Locum Dr.  
Cilla Haywood, Doctor  
Dr. Helena Niu, Psychiatry Registrar  
Luisa Butler, Psychiatrist  
Dr Zewlan Moor, Doctor  
Irene Lai, GP  
Daud Saeed, Psychiatrist  
YiZhong Zhuang, Neurologist

Dr. Paris Ramrakha, Doctor  
Lai Heng Foong, Emergency Physician  
Erin Longbottom, Registered Nurse  
Jonathon Aspey, Mental Health Nurse  
Brenda De La Piedra, Nurse  
Belinda Lockwood, Registered Nurse  
Sree Kumar Satram, Registered Nurse and Pharmacist  
Patrick Tibballs, Paramedic  
Finley Penrose, Clinical Support Officer  
Catherine Haswell, Registered Nurse/Health Service Manager  
Yi dan Lin, Infectious Disease Physician  
Jath Palasubramaniam, Doctor  
Dr. Chaitra Jose MBBS FRANZCP, Psychiatrist  
Josephine Gray, Registered Nurse  
Mariam Tokhi, GP  
Charles Austin-Woods, Doctor  
Alejandro Vasquez Hernandez, Clinical Research Coordinator  
Melinda Joseph, GP  
Oscar He, Nurse  
Philip Leung, Physio  
John Guy, Retired Physician  
Dr Bianca Webb-Pullman, GP  
Helen Zscharnagk, Nurse  
Frances Bowick, Counsellor  
MJ Lyttleton , Healthcare Professional  
Deborah Correll, Registered Nurse  
Heidi Robinson, Registered Nurse  
Belinda Haah, Medical Receptionist  
Melissa Halliday, Palliative Care Volunteer  
Jennifer Derricott, Retired Psychologist,  
Annie Ploughman, Clinical Psychologist  
Naba Alfayadh, GP  
Jorien Vercruyssen, Obstetrician  
Emma Barnett, Registered Nurse

cc - Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Ageing