



Refugee Council
of Australia

13 February 2019

Australians demand the humane treatment of people seeking asylum and refugees as historic vote passes Parliament

Today's historic vote on the urgent medical treatment bill delivered a decisive message to the government: Australians want an end to the abhorrent treatment of people in offshore detention that has been carried out in their name.

The ALP and key crossbench and independent MPs and Senators came together to vote the bill through, delivering a historic blow for the government on the eve of an election.

Phil Glendenning, President of the Refugee Council of Australia said, "We thank and congratulate all the Members of Parliament and Senators who came together and voted with their conscience on this long overdue legislation. This is a turning point for the people on Manus Island and Nauru, who for too long have suffered both mentally and physically without access to adequate medical facilities and the care they needed."

"This historic vote is indicative of a wider shift in public opinion; up and down the country, doctors, academics, and ordinary Australians from across the political spectrum are saying 'not in our name'."

The legislation comes in response to an acute medical crisis in Australia's offshore detention centre, which has seen 12 people die in the last five years and numerous incidents of suicide and self-harm, including from children as young as 7.

"Doctors have been ignored for too long. People have died as a result. Pregnant women with complications have had to wait dangerously long to receive the treatment they need. Rape survivors have had to have traumatic late term abortions due to government blocks. This bill changes the response to medical emergencies in offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru," Mr Glendenning said.

The bill changes the response to medical emergencies in offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru. Under the current system, the Minister of Immigration has the final decision on whether a medical transfer will take place. This has meant that people needing urgent medical assistance have severely deteriorated or even died as a result of delays and political stalling. Most notably, the inquiry into the death of Hamid Khazaei found that his death was a preventable result of clinical errors and delays.

This bill will save lives.

"With the last few children leaving Nauru and the provision of adequate medical care now in sight, we are hopefully witnessing an end to the race to the bottom on refugee policy," said Mr Glendenning.

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